

**Church in the Wild Devotional**  
**August 26, 2018**

It's been forty years since Chevy Chase pioneered Saturday Night Live's "Weekend Update." In a memorable line, the goofy news anchor declared: "World ends at 10pm...film report at 11!"

SNL's skit was a secular snicker after a tsunami of books and movies spawned hysteria that the end-times would soon yield the Anti-Christ, the Rapture, the Tribulation, the Millennium, and Armageddon—the final battle of good over evil. Forty years later, we're still here having to decide whether to see the latest "Left Behind" movie. What can we believe?

Last Sunday the apostles gave us our "Blessed Hope Briefing." **Refresh your memory by reading 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 before going further.**

As v. 13-14 indicates, the apostles gave this "briefing" because the Thessalonians were distressed that their brethren were dying before Jesus returned. In response they provided this *end-times clarity*:

1. Those who died are already resurrected, for "God will bring them with Jesus..."
2. Jesus will return as the conquering Christ to finish his work, as he predicted (Matt. 24:30-31).
3. Mortals will be "raptured" (Latin for "caught up") with Jesus and the already-resurrected.
4. Everyone in Christ "will be with the Lord forever," Be encouraged, no matter what you face!

This sequence reflects the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 24 and Paul in 1 Corinthians 15: "We will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet" (vs. 51b-52). Those on earth when Jesus returns will resurrected without death. Some traditions teach those who previously died "sleep" till Jesus returns to resurrect them. Many others (including me), disagree. The original Greek term and Jesus' promise to the thief on the cross ("Today you will be with me in paradise," Luke 23:43), suggests that the dead are raised as soon as they die. On earth they not seen till Jesus' returns.

Last Sunday I promised to address another issue, whether the transformation of mortals described as the Rapture comes at the end of time, or whether Jesus comes simply to snatch believers before the world's tribulation (as "Left Behind" movies claim). For 1800 years, the overwhelming majority of Bible interpreters believed that Christians would experience tribulation" and the "Millennium" (Revelation 24) before Jesus' returned to rapture the church and re-create the earth. This view (which I share) is called "Amillennialism," which envisions the Millennium as a symbol for the church's long wait.

But in the 1800s, John Nelson Darby popularized a radically different view of the Rapture. Called "Pre-Trib, Pre-Millennialism, Darby and the Scofield Reference Bible taught that Jesus will come to rescue believers from a doomed planet, in order to cause the world to get worse. Apocalyptic books and movies became an industry. Fears stoked by world wars, nuclear bombs, the Communist threat, and Middle East conflicts stoked these sensationalized speculations.

The basis for *Church in the Wild's* unity is the core essentials of the Gospel. Likely we have diverse views on "end-times." In faithfulness to our Lord, keep your mind open to hear what scripture teaches. Show respect towards those with differing perspectives. My concern is not to disprove other views, *it's simply to warn the flock to beware of two temptations inherent in "Left Behind" theology*:

- 1) Getting distracted; caring more about interpreting prophecies than on blessing people and making disciples in the power of the Spirit (Matt. 28:18-20, Acts 1:6-8);
- 2) Giving up on this world if you presume that Rapture will rescue you from tribulation.

Giving up on this world is the last thing Jesus had in mind. He left us here to be "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world" (Matt. 5:13, 14). Under severe tribulation (like 1960s Communist China), the church can discover it's power to triumph over evil. Nor should we give up on the environment. Pollution and global warming matter to God. Until Jesus returns, let's be stewards of the planet.

When Jesus returns to finish salvation, may he find us faithful, demonstrating God's reign and advancing His Kingdom. Our Lord will declare, "Well done, my good and faithful servants!" (Luke 19:17).