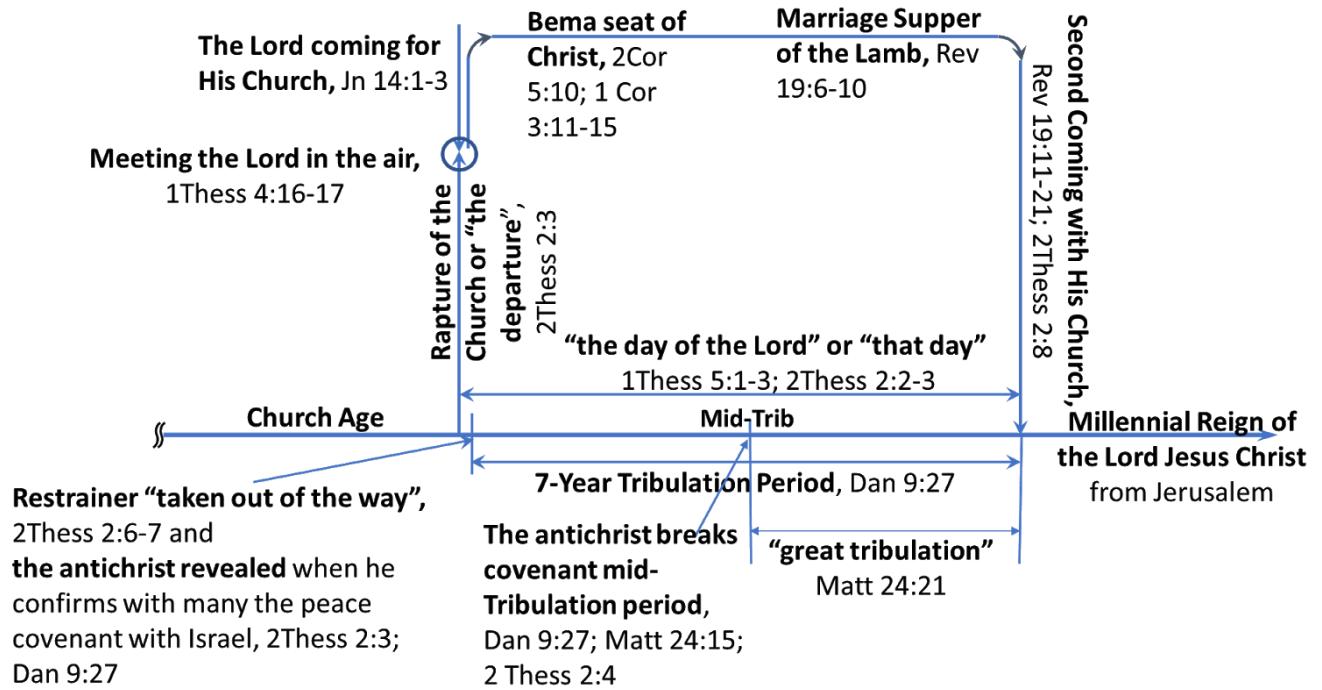


Desiring A Better Country (Hebrews 11:6)

Preface. Before proceeding to our topic for this Sunday, I would like to summarize our topic on Rapture or the term rendered in the KJV of the Bible as “falling away”, *apostasia* in Greek. The apostle Paul when talking about the departing from the faith, he used *aphistemi* and not *apostasia* which is usually transliterated to “apostasy” which in our present use means a falling away from the faith. Earlier Bible translation did not translate *apostasia* as “falling away” but translated it as “departure”. When Paul was talking about “departure”, he used the article “the” (H, or pronounced as he) which makes it specific and refers to a previous teaching of Paul about a departure. Linking the 1st and 2nd letter of Paul to the Thessalonians, Paul is here talking about the “rapture” or *harpazo* which would then mean, the departure of the church when the church is gathered together with the Lord Jesus in the air. To summarize the whole event is the diagram below:

SEQUENCE OF EVENTS IN THE LAST DAYS (First and Second Letter of Paul to the Thessalonians)



Now our our topic this Sunday: Title: Desiring A Better Country

Text: “But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.” (Hebrews 11:16)

A. The Departure

1. If the rapture is a departure, as discussed beforehand, the question is, “What are we departing **from?**” The Lord is saying to the Philadelphian church who have kept His word about patient endurance, “I also will keep thee **FROM** the hour of temptation (a time of trials and testings), which shall come upon **all the world**, to try them that dwell upon the

earth." (Revelation 3:10). This is the "great tribulation" which the Lord mentioned saying, "For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short." (Matthew 24:21-22). At the start of the tribulation period of 7 years, the antichrist will appear to be a man to solve the problems of the world and a man of peace to forge the elusive peace covenant with and for Israel with many nations . The world will think that finally world peace has been attained, but the antichrist will break the covenant in the middle of the supposed 7 years of peace with Israel (Daniel 9:27). The antichrist will rule the world with an iron hand forcing everyone to worship and pledge allegiance to him or die. 1 Thessalonians 5:3 pictures that very well, "For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape." This is the wrath the Lord is keeping us from, by rapturing all believers from this earth before the Tribulation. For the Bible says, "And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us FROM the wrath to come." (1 Thessalonians 1:10). 1 Thessalonians 5:9 confirms that the rapture saves us from the wrath to come, "For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ."

2. There is a wrath to come upon this world, a time of testing, a tribulation of the world that has rejected the Lord Jesus as the Messiah to save the world from judgment because of the whole world lies in wickedness and we know that the Son of God is come, but His own received Him not. The Father has sent Jesus, the Son of God and He has come to give us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life. (1 John 5:19-20) However, in 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12, the Bible says, "they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause, God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie and that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.
3. Though the Bible speaks of the Lord as being longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance, yet there is coming a time when the Lord gives up on those who are incorrigibly unrepentant and rebellious against the Lord. "Wherefore, God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves...For this cause, God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature...And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient." (Romans 1:24, 26, 28). "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God for the Lord saith, 'Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense.' " (Hebrews 10:31). In the context of Isaiah 61, "the day of vengeance of our God" is the Tribulation period.
4. So, the Lord is coming to keep His faithful ones FROM the hour of temptation or FROM the wrath to come or FROM the Tribulation period. This is what we are departing FROM. To keep us FROM the wrath to come, Jesus made this promise to His disciples when he talked to them on the night before He was arrested to be crucified the following day. Jesus said, "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will

come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." (John 14:2-3). This is also the prayer of the Lord to the Father for His disciples and for them also which shall believe on Him through their word. Jesus prayed, "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world." (John 17:24)

B. Our Destination-We're Going Home

1. This world we are in, is not our home.
 - a. Jesus said to His disciples, "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you." In praying for His disciples, Jesus said this about His disciples in His prayer to the Father, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." (John 17:16)
 - b. Paul wrote to the Philippians (3:20), "But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." That is the rapture. Paul also wrote to the Colossians, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. (Colossians 3:1-2)
 - c. The Letter to the Hebrews was traditionally attributed to the apostle Paul but now it is widely believed to be a letter of a Jewish Christian, perhaps one of Paul's associates. The author speaking about Abraham, that though he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. (Hebrews 11:9-10)...But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city. (Hebrews 11:16)... For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come. (Heb 13:14)

C. But If Planet Earth Is Not Our Home, Are We Really Homesick For The Place Prepared For Us By Jesus? Or Are You Homesick For The Earth?

1. To many of us, the truth is that we would be perfectly happy to live here on earth if the Lord just took away the sin of the world that makes living on earth so burdensome and painful. Some would rather have Eden restored here on earth than to spend eternity in the new heavens and new earth.
2. To those who are not too excited about attending church service, they worry that spending eternity in heaven would be like attending an unending worship service. What would they do if they got bored for the first million years of eternity? What would excite them in heaven unto eternity?
3. If heaven is truly believed to be a blissful eternal experience in the glorious presence of the Lord Jesus, why is it that many of us find it difficult to like being heaven-bound? or making death gainful (but for me to live is Christ and to die is gain) because to be with Christ is far better (Philippians 1:20-23). This is a comforting thought for us when we die or when a loved one dies. He/she has been promoted to a better place, yet many of us prefer to be in the body and to defer departing to be with Christ.
4. One reason why we would rather be in the body and defer departing for the Lord is that we have been trained that way through our educational system. From pre-school to post-graduate studies, we were trained to focus our activities for goals here on earth,

many of which feed our longing to satisfy our earthly desire to answer for earthly pleasures and try to attain "heaven on earth". However, earthly desires when fulfilled make us long for more; we are disappointed, leaving us more dissatisfied than before and longing for something else.

5. This is what Abraham was looking for a city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. He was desiring a better country, a heavenly country. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God: for He hath prepared for them a city.
6. The desire of Abraham of a better country reminds us that we are fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14) in the image of God. We are hardwired and designed that in our hearts is an eternity of space that no one and nothing in this world can fill, fulfill or satisfy. It is only the infinite and eternal God who can fit into that eternal longing of man. Just as King Solomon has written in the Book of Ecclesiastes 3:11 that God "has also set eternity in the hearts of men.

D. How Are You Preparing For Heaven?

1. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat (not for sin but for rewards) of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."(2 Corinthians 5:10). Also, 1 Corinthians 3:13-15 say, "Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire." Also 1 Corinthians 4:5 says, "Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God." From these verses, we understand that it is possible to be saved and enter the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, but if all his work in his body is burned, he suffers loss but he himself is saved but that would be a very miserable outcome of a Christian's life where he spends eternity without any commendation from the Lord.
2. The term judgement seat (Bema) of Christ. Judgment here is not for sin committed by the Christian because Jesus Christ has died and paid for his/her sins once for all (1 John 2:1-2;Hebrews 10:10). For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world but that the world might be saved through Him (John 3:17) so that there is now no condemnation to whosoever is in Christ Jesus who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit." (Romans 8:1). In the Bema seat of Christ, Paul is picturing the believer as a competitor in a spiritual contest. ("Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain it." [1 Corinthians 9:24]. " And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible." [1 Corinthians 9:25]). As the victorious Grecian athlete appeared before the Bema seat to receive his perishable award, so the Christian will appear before Christ's Bema to receive his imperishable award. The judge at the Bema seat conferred the victor's crown (stefanos - made of leaves woven into a crown).
3. Paul encouraged the Philippians to press on toward the goal for the prize or award of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:14). Paul also exhorted Timothy for him to "Fight the good fight of faith and lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also

called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses" (1 Timothy 6:12). and when Paul felt that the time of his departure is at hand, he finally wrote Timothy in his second letter to him, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." (2 Timothy 4:7-8)

4. To those who fight the good fight of faith, to those who finish the Christian race by looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, to those who have kept the faith, there are crowns laid up for the lives we have lived here on earth while waiting for the Lord's coming for His church. These are:
 - a. Crown of righteousness for those who have finished the Christian race with patience by looking unto Jesus, those who have kept the faith by fighting the good fight of faith. (2 Timothy 4:7-8)
 - b. Crown of life for those who remain steadfast suffering under trial (James 1:12) and those who suffer persecution as the church of Smyrna (Revelation 2:10). What is the motivation to withstand trials and persecution? It is their love for Jesus.
 - c. Crown of glory is for the elders and spiritual leaders who supervise and feed the Lord's flock not under compulsion but willingly and not for shameful gain, but eagerly. When the chief Shepherd shall appear, they shall receive that crown of glory that fadeth not away. (1 Peter 5:1-4)
 - d. Crown incorruptible for those who strove for excellence and mastery in Christian life by self-discipline and self-control. (1 Corinthians 9:25)
 - e. Crown of rejoicing is for those soul winners. This crown is available for every believer in Christ Jesus. (1 Thessalonians 2:19)

E. **In conclusion**

1. Each of us is a stranger and pilgrim here on earth, forgetting those things which are behind, and stretching forward to those things which are before, desiring a better country, that is heavenly, because Jesus has prepared a city for us in the Father's house because He is not ashamed to be called our God. This is a wonderful promise for those who desire the better country that God is not ashamed to be called their God. James 2:23 says, "And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God." If Abraham was a friend of God, then we too can be a friend of God. We can have the same promise given to Abraham that God is not ashamed to be our God. Why? Consider the statement of Jesus, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you." (John 15:13-15)
2. The reason why Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the other saints of Hebrews chapter 11 did not return to where they came from is that they have their minds and hearts fixed on something far greater than anything this world can offer them. Abraham had an unquenchable desire for a better country, that is, a heavenly. We all have the tendency to love this world. That is why John wrote, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in

him.” (1 John 2:15). Therefore, one of the things we have to do while we are here on earth is to loosen our grip on the world and the things of this world. We learn to say goodbye to people and things that we once loved dearly but kept us deeply rooted in the temporal grounds of this world.

3. Our greatest joy in this world does not come from this world but from the promise that God is not ashamed to be called our God. Jesus is our Friend because we do His commandments. He laid down His life for us. If you want Jesus to be a Friend who is not ashamed of you, obey His commandments and keep on desiring that better country pursuing the city which the Lord has prepared for you.
4. But if you are a citizen of this world and find your comfort here, then pay careful attention to this. The country that you delight in will one day be burned up. It is a land destined for destruction.
 - a. “And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands: They shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; And as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail.” (Hebrews 1:10-12)
 - b. Also, the apostle Peter wrote, “Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hastening unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.” (2 Peter 3:11-13)
5. Every citizen of this earth will suffer total loss, including the loss of his own soul. If this is where you find yourself today, if you are secretly living in sin while claiming to follow the Savior, then you must repent of your sins, cast off your hypocrisy and trust Jesus alone. If you do, you will find in Him a full, perfect and complete salvation. Your sins will be washed away. The love of God will give peace to your weary soul that is always longing for a better country when you commit your life to the Lord Jesus Christ as your God, Savior and Friend.