

LEFT BEHIND

RISE OF THE
ANTICHRIST

SERMON

BASED ON A TRUE STORY

THAT HASN'T HAPPENED — YET.



SERMON

Left Behind: The Rise of the Antichrist

Note: A Sermon prepared by Pastor Joe Bowles, Plant City, Florida to preach in January prior to the new "Left Behind" movie is released across the Nation. It has been edited by the All Pro Pastors International team in places that are italicized to help with clarity regarding the movie applications. It is prepared with personal testimony and experience and with this said, anyone has permission to use or edit as needed to present it in their own language and style.

It is good to see everyone in God's house today. Go ahead and turn in your Bibles to our scripture that is found in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. Later we will look at additional scriptures that pertain to our message from 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 and from Matthew 24:36-42.

Today I want to share with you a message that we've titled "Left Behind: The Rise of the Antichrist." From the movie directed by and starring Kevin Sorbo with Neal McDonough, Corbin Bernsen, and Bailey Chase. *It is an updated version of the original movie starring Kirk Cameron and sequel to 2014's "Left Behind" which featured Nicholas Cage. This movie brings to our screens the reality of what people are thinking about today and can actually relate to.* And as you probably have surmised, it has to do with the rapture of the church and the events that usher in the Antichrist in the beginning of the tribulation period.

So, let's all stand as we read from 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 (KJV)

13 But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that you sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.

14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, Even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

15 For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.

16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with the shout, with the voice of the Archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

17 Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so, shall we ever be with the Lord.

18 Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

(Prayer - You may be seated.)

I have grown up in church all my life. Before the age of 17, I had listened to hundreds of sermons. I had been in Sunday School all of my life. But I cannot remember a single sermon on the Second Coming of Jesus and specifically on the Rapture of the church, the subsequent rise of the Antichrist, and the possibility that if Jesus were to come that I would be taken when He gathered his church and took them to heaven.

When I was 17, I heard the first message that I could recall about the Rapture of the church. And to be honest with you, it was frightening. During the Jesus Movement or as some called it the Jesus Revolution, there was a great emphasis on the imminent return of our Savior. Hal Lindsey wrote a book titled "The Late Great Planet Earth." We watched the movie, "A Thief in the Night." And Larry Norman wrote and sang the song "I Wish We'd All Been Ready." In the song, Norman repeatedly used the phrase "left behind" in his lyrics. And frankly, the emphasis given to the imminent return of Jesus caused me to take a hard look at what the scripture had to say about the Rapture and my relationship to Christ.

In today's world, once again, there seems to be a renewed interest in the return of Jesus. It may be prompted by the unrest in our world and the negative direction that our culture is headed. Many people have said to me, "I don't know how much worse it can get." Others have said with a wishful tone, "I'm ready for Jesus to come!"

Let me start off by sharing with you what prompted the Apostle Paul to pen the words that we read earlier from 1 Thessalonians. You see, Paul is addressing an issue that was confusing those in the church at Thessalonica. There was a false belief circulating that they may have missed the Rapture of the church. Undoubtedly, they were suffering such persecution at that time that they thought the Rapture had already occurred, they had missed it, and that they had moved into the latter part of the Tribulation period that Paul refers to as "The Day of the Lord."

They also wondered about those who had died in the past. And the question became, "If we will be raptured alive, what about those Christians who have already died? What will happen to them?"

And so, Paul reminded them of a truth that he had previously taught them, that it was impossible for them to be in the Tribulation because as believers they would be rescued from the Tribulation at the Rapture. Paul wanted them to know that the persecution that they were experiencing was nothing compared to the cataclysmic events that would occur after God's children were taken at the Rapture.

But as Paul addressed this issue, he also admonished every believer to watch and to anticipate the Rapture of the church with joy rather than fear.

In the past few decades, many have made bold predictions regarding the day of Jesus' return. In one regard, they have stirred up interest within the church, but their futile attempts at scheduling the Rapture was never in sync with God's schedule.

In the same manner that God planned the birth of Christ in Bethlehem, he has also set a time for the return of Christ, the revelation of the Antichrist, and the final return of Christ after the Tribulation. Only God the Father knows the day and the hour when Christ will appear invisibly in the sky and rapture His church.

Everything, however, is moving toward the return of our Lord. And an argument could be made that this future event may be the most important doctrine in God's Word because every other doctrine is dependent on the fulfillment of the prophecy that spells out our Lord's return. The Tribulation, the rise of the Antichrist, the final judgment of the world, the revelation of Jesus, the judgment Seat of Christ, the judgment of the ungodly, the establishment of His Millennial Kingdom, the destruction of the world as we know it and finally, the creation of the New Heaven and the New Earth where God's people will reside forever is dependent on the Rapture to complete God's story. Like all books, the end of the story is as important as the beginning, and it gives meaning to the entire plot.

And it's not like we have to wonder about what's going to happen, because the Bible very clearly spells out for us the events of the future. Paul was trying to relieve the church of worry and anxiety and fear because the final pages of God's incredible story have already been written but not yet played out. God is right on schedule... His schedule. And we are afforded the privilege of knowing God's outline and we will one day experience the wonderful and glorious appearing of our Lord and Savior when God is ready, not a minute before. Follow me carefully now because I want you to understand what is going to happen in the future. And today we're going to examine five aspects of the future that are of great importance to every individual today: The Promise, The Rapture, The Tribulation, The Antichrist, and The Exit Plan.

Now what I am going to do is give you the Biblical narrative that leads up to the events that we see acted out on the screen. Most people have no idea that the Bible lays everything out in great detail as to what is going to happen in the future. This movie gives a very frightening message to those who are not prepared.

So, let's get started...

THE PROMISE

On the night of our Lord's arrest and the night before His crucifixion, Jesus gathered his disciples together with Him in the upper room and poured out His heart to them. If we were in His position, we would likely have done the same. Jesus knew of His impending death, and it caused Him to choose His words carefully with the understanding that this would be His last conversation with His disciples.

It was His intention to give comfort to His followers and that night, Jesus shares His heart with them. But of all the truths that He shared, there was none that compared to the promise Jesus made that He would leave them to go prepare a place for them but that He would return to gather them together and take them to Heaven to live forever in the place that He had been preparing for them.

Of all the promises that Jesus gave them that evening, this was the promise that gave them the most hope. And ever since that intimate meeting with His disciples, His followers have been looking for His return to gather them home.

Now the Thessalonian believers knew about the return of Christ, and they wanted to believe that it would occur in their lifetime, but it did not. Since then, 2000 years have passed and no sign of His coming. And although He has not yet come, please don't think that He won't. He could come today before we finish this message because there is nothing standing in the way of His glorious appearing.

Now, I don't know when but logically I do know this; the return of Jesus is closer now than ever before, but also it is more likely in this generation than any previous generation in history.

And so, the next event on God's prophetic calendar is the Rapture of His Church followed by at least seven years of Tribulation, and then a thousand years of His promised kingdom on earth before the final creation of a New Heaven and a New Earth.

According to Matthew 24:44, "Of that day and hour knoweth no man." But when He does come, all of the events that we have spoken of so far will come to pass.

THE RAPTURE

The beginning of the end of man's existence is ignited by an event that I've already referred to and I assume that you're obviously aware of... the Rapture.

The word "rapture" means the "catching away" or the "snatching away." We might even say, "gathering together" as we look at it from our perspective here on the earth.

So here is what is going to happen; one day Jesus will come invisibly in the sky. Only those who are believers will be able to see and experience this coming. When He comes, He is going to "snatch away" all believers who are alive at that time, as well as the bodies of those who are already dead. The bodies of the dead will be raised up out of the grave first. Their spirit will be reunited with their body, and they will instantaneously receive their new glorified bodies.

In the next moment, all believers who are alive will vanish. "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye" they will vacate this planet, receive their glorified body and they will join Jesus and those who were previously raised in the air, and they will be ushered into Heaven. (*This is where our movie starts.*)

The scripture says that our Lord will come like "a thief in the night." He will come quickly and unannounced just like a thief does. It will be unexpected.

Those who are unbelievers will be left behind. And they will experience a life that will be drastically different than ever before. Please understand that every believer will be raptured, none will be left behind and they will be taken out of this world before the tribulation begins. Unbelievers, however, will be left behind because they have rejected the truth of the gospel.

Listen carefully, every child of God will vanish and those who are left behind will mourn the loss of their loved ones and friends, but they will quickly be fed a lie... a delusion, explaining the vast disappearance of all believers and they will embrace this explanation as the truth. And one can only imagine what the news media, our politicians, and our so-called experts will concoct to try to explain the disappearance of millions all over the earth. Unfortunately, the vast majority of those left behind will be duped into believing the rhetoric that will be spewed forth from the talking heads in leadership.

On the other hand, there will be those who will recognize this vanishing as the event the Bible calls the Rapture. You see, there are many who know and understand scripture but who have not surrendered to the God of scripture. Many of those will refuse to believe the truth but there will be some who will recognize this event for what it truly is. And they will be the evangelists and missionaries to the rest of the world and many of them, most of them, will pay for their courage with their lives.

In the movie we see where Ray and Chloe are left behind and this starts a roller coaster ride of fear, anxiety and anger. Nearly everyone left behind is confused and has no clue as to the truth! Questions, debates and all kinds of theories try to explain the vanishings away and no one wants to face or believe what just happened!

THE TRIBULATION

Following the Rapture and the disappearance of every child of God, there will come a time of severe judgment that we refer to as the Tribulation. The first 3 ½ years will be a time of peace but the last 3 ½ years will be a time of severe judgment. The Bible speaks of the last 3 ½ years as the “Great Tribulation” or “The Day of the Lord.”

God’s divine judgment will be poured out on the world because of their rejection of the truth and it will end human history as we know it. It will be a season of cataclysmic judgment. When millions of people disappear from the face of the earth without a secular explanation, it will provide a fertile ground for someone to assume leadership in a confused world... especially someone who can provide a legitimate and plausible explanation for the vanishing of a large portion of the world’s population.

(Fake news is used in the movie just like today to push the narrative they want people to believe. Buck is our truth seeking reporter and we can relate to his challenges today in real time. He doesn’t know the Lord or God’s word and his journalistic prowess is tested to the extreme!)

As one can imagine, when the world is thrown into the chaos created by the Rapture, the economic and the political systems of our world will become fragile. There are basically only two possible ways that a single person can take control of all the nations of the world. The first would be through military conquest and the second would be through economic conquest.

In the 1930s and 1940s, Adolf Hitler was thought to be the Antichrist in the viewpoint of many people including several prominent religious leaders. But we know that it was impossible for Hitler to be the Antichrist because there had not been the disappearance, or the vanishing, of God’s people due to the Rapture. Hitler met many of the characteristics of who the Antichrist would be, but he failed in his worldwide conquest militarily.

The easiest way for one person or one group to control the world would be through monetary control. Many times, officials, even in our own country, are elected based upon promises of economic benefits to their constituents. And so, it is quite possible that someone in a position of worldwide prominence could easily garner the confidence of millions of people who have been left behind, especially with the backing of other world political leaders.

THE ANTICHRIST

Before all this occurs, however, someone will come on the scene that will be able to unite all of the nations together due to the worldwide economic crisis and will more than likely develop a worldwide monetary system and the only access to participate in that system would be an identifying mark. The Bible calls this the "Mark of the Beast."

The Antichrist is given many different names in the Bible. He is called the Beast, man of lawlessness, the son of perdition and the man of sin, to name a few.

Listen to how the Bible describes the Antichrist from 2 Thessalonians chapter 2.

2 Thessalonians 2 (KJV)

- 1 Now we beseech you brethren by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him,**
- 2 That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand.**
- 3 Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition;**
- 4 Who opposeth and exalted himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; So that he, as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is god.**
- 5 Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?**
- 6 And now you know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time.**
- 7 For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.**
- 8 And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming:**
- 9 Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders,**
- 10 And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they receive not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.**
- 11 And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion that they should believe a lie:**
- 12 That they all might be damned who believe not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.**

As we mentioned earlier, the Mark of the Beast with its identifying number 666 will be the identification card, so to speak, that everyone will be forced to submit to. They will not be able to buy or sell without this identification. Those that refused to take it will be massacred unless they successfully avoid authorities and somehow survive until the end of the Tribulation.

The Antichrist will have an assistant who the Bible refers to as the False Prophet. The responsibility of the False Prophet will be to unite the world further under one religion that will deny the truth of the Bible.

In the book of Revelation, the False Prophet forces the whole world to worship the Antichrist as God. For 3 ½ years the world worships the Antichrist as God and anybody who refuses is executed. Believers who refuse to worship him and who refuse to take the Mark of the Beast, will be the subjects of mass executions.

In spite of what many believe, the Antichrist is not the incarnation of Satan. Instead, he is merely a man that is under the unholy influence of Satan. In fact, Satan, the Antichrist, and the False Prophet are often referred to as the Unholy Trinity.

In order for the Antichrist to be able to deceive the nations, he will employ the charm of this personality to do so. In the beginning, his influence is limited but through his association with world leaders, and through manipulation and deception, he rises to a position of prominence and respectability.

Quickly, let me share some characteristics and actions of the Antichrist that are described in scripture. Daniel 7:8 speaks of his intelligence. He is smart, clever and he is able to articulate his ideas with a command of speech and with persuasive words (Daniel 7:8-10).

He is a deceiver (2 Thessalonians 2:11-12). He has a number: 666 (Revelation 13:16-18). He will perform miracles by the power of Satan (2 Thessalonians 2:9-10). The Antichrist will make a covenant with Israel for 3 ½ years. He will rebuild the temple but later will halt all sacrifices. He then desecrates the temple (2 Thessalonians 2: 4). This desecration will occur in the middle of the tribulation, and it's known as the "Abomination of Desolation."

The Antichrist will appear to be mortally wounded and to then rise from the dead (Revelation 13:3). He will be a leader who will unite the nations together for 3 ½ years in peace but the last 3 ½ years there will be widespread dissension, strife, and destruction (Revelation 13:5). He will behead those who turn to Christ during the Tribulation (Revelation 20:4). He will rule the world (Revelation 13:7). He will become arrogant against God (Revelation 19:19). He will claim to be God and he will demand to be worshipped (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4). He will display miraculous powers (2 Thessalonians 2:9-12).

The most powerful man on the earth during the tribulation will be the Antichrist. He will be the most vile, evil, wicked, sadistic human who has ever lived. He will be the poster child of all false prophets, deceptive teachers, and phony Christs.

Even though the Antichrist has not yet been revealed, the spirit of antichrist is alive and well and flourishing in the world right now. It is my opinion that anyone who claims to be a follower of Christ today but has allowed the influence of Satan to lead them into a church to disrupt the fellowship has the spirit of antichrist. Any person who tries to destroy God's work or God's Word has the spirit of Antichrist. A person who denies that Jesus is the Christ has the spirit of antichrist.

Although the Antichrist is a man, the spirit of antichrist is malignant in the world today and this malignancy will pave the way for the advent of the Antichrist to become the dictator of the world. Those who are left behind will experience the cesspool of a world that will be led by a perditious madman controlled by Satan and will eventually subject themselves to constant surveillance, invaded privacy, confiscation of money and property, severe persecution, false imprisonment, torture, war, and beheadings, followed by God's judgment on the world in the final portion of the last 3 ½ years of the Tribulation period that is called the Great Tribulation... it is not great in awe but great in severity.

It is during the latter part of the Great Tribulation that the Antichrist and the False Prophets will experience the wrath of God as all Hell breaks loose on the earth as plague after plague will engulf this planet.

There is an addendum to this story that is glorious for every child of God but is dreadful and terrorizing beyond imagination for every Christ rejector. One day God will reclaim what is rightfully His and those who have pledged their love and faithfulness to Him will be rewarded but all Christ rejectors will receive their just recompense.

(In our movie the Antichrist is revealed and the horrendous evil he shows is just a glimpse of the reality that is yet to come. The movie brings us to the edge of our seats but we must remember this has all been foretold!)

THE EXIT PLAN

Listen, no one has to be left behind at the Rapture of the church, because everyone has been given an exit plan for the Rapture. No one has to and no one is compelled to stay and suffer through the atrocities of the Tribulation.

You see, every person can become a child of God. We serve a "whosoever will" kind of God. Every person who confesses that Jesus is the Christ, God in the flesh, and who turns from their sin and asks forgiveness and commits their heart and life to Christ can be saved today. Don't let anything in this world keep you from knowing Christ as your personal Savior.

Listen, if you become a Christian today, you will be spared from living under the tyranny of the Antichrist. You can become one of us. And you see, the Tribulation is not for us. We are not people of the darkness; we are children of the light. Our names are in the Lamb's Book of Life.

So, let me ask you; Do you know that you're going to heaven or do you hope you're going to heaven? There is a big difference between knowing and hoping.

The Bible says that one day at judgment, "Many will say to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and I'll say to them, 'Depart from Me, you workers of iniquity; I never knew you.'"

Do you know Him today?

Let me ask a few more questions. What if you knew that Jesus was coming back this afternoon to rapture every believer home, would it make a difference in your decisions today? If you are an unbeliever, would it prompt you to give your heart to Christ?

And if you're a believer, would it make a difference in how you acted or where you went or how you talked?

If you knew He was coming back in a week, I guarantee that it would change your life and it would alter every thought that you had.

Listen to what Matthew says...

Matthew 24 (KJV)

36 But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my father only.

40 Then shall two be in the field; The one shall be taken and the other left.

41 Two women shall be grinding at the mill; The one shall be taken, and the other left.

42 Watch therefore: for you know not what hour your Lord doth come.

That's how He wants us to live. He wants us to be watching... anticipating His return. Matthew tells us what our Lord said, "No one knows the day nor the hour."

So, we need to live in every moment as if He were coming in the next moment.

"He which testifieth these things saith Surely, I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come Lord Jesus." Revelation 22:20 (KJV)

(In our movie we see where Ray repented and accepted Jesus as his Lord and Savior. Not everyone will have this opportunity after the rapture. The final question is what about you? Are you ready? If Jesus came today would you be Left Behind? Are you ready to make the same commitment Ray did?)

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