

## ARE YOU READY?

*“Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming in which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth.”*

—John 5:28, 29

**I**MAGINE A TYPICAL AUTUMN DAY. The sun is shining and people are going about their lives: They are working at jobs; studying at school; shopping, or enjoying a meal with friends. Some are taking a walk in the park when, suddenly, the birds stop singing.

An eerie silence settles in as some unusual-looking clouds assemble overhead. At first few take notice, but soon crowds of awestruck onlookers are gathering and pointing upward at what appears to be a portal, or doorway, developing in the now churning, roiling sky: expanding, contracting, letting forth glimmers and bursts of never-before-seen colors and some dazzling, other-worldly light.

A brilliant flash lights up the sky—then another. Then all at once the portal expands, rolling back the clouds like a curtain, and something—or rather *SOMEONE*—begins to emerge.

Before anyone can comprehend what he is seeing, the dream-like quality of the scene is shattered by an unearthly sound: ominous and majestic; terrifying yet beautiful; penetrating to the core of every creature. Though none has heard such a sound, all instinctively recognize what it is. It is God’s Trumpet!

The earth begins to reel like a ship tossed at sea as the sky becomes filled with hundreds, then thousands, then countless points of “living light,” rocketing upward as if being summoned by that glorious trumpeting from above.

As the stunned and horrified onlookers watch the last few lights vanish into the clouds, those who understand what has just happened scramble for shelter—and some begin to pray.<sup>1</sup>

### **THE RAPTURE IS REAL: ARE YOU READY?**

While it may sound more like science fiction than reality, the Bible tells us that this day is coming. Whether we choose to believe it or not has no bearing on its inevitability. The time is already set; the date is circled on God’s calendar. On a pre-appointed day, in a pre-appointed year, and in an hour that only God knows, the “last trumpet” is going to sound.

At that moment, there will essentially be two kinds of people on earth: those who are prepared and those who are not; those who are taken and those who are left behind. Unfortunately, most will fall into the latter category. The Bible says that the Day of the Lord will come like a “snare” upon the world (Luke 21:34, 35); like a “thief in the night” (1 Thess. 5:2); or like the flood of Noah’s day (Matt. 24:38). In the days leading up to the Flood, people were utterly oblivious. They were going about their lives, doing all the things people do, “eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage,” right up until the time they found themselves swept up in the waters.<sup>2</sup>

### **NOT EVERYONE WHO SAYS, LORD, LORD!**

Because the Bible is so persistent in its warnings, most Christians understand that the Rapture will catch the world unawares. What many do not understand, however, is that it is not only “the world,” i.e., atheists, agnostics, and non-Christians who will be

surprised when the sky suddenly changes and the trumpet blast is heard. The disturbing truth is that up to half, some believe more, of those who self identify as “Christian” will be caught unprepared as well. This is not mere supposition on our part, it is taught in one of Jesus’ most famous parables.

## TEN VIRGINS

Matthew’s parable of the ten virgins is one of the most enigmatic and intriguing teachings in the Bible. It is also, because of what it teaches about Christians and the Rapture, one of the most disturbing. Let’s take a moment to examine this famous parable, which likens the Rapture to the Jewish wedding tradition wherein the bridegroom comes to retrieve his bride at midnight:

“At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. “At midnight the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’ “Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.’ “‘No,’ they replied, ‘there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.’” “But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. “Later the others also came. ‘Lord, Lord,’ they said, ‘open the door for us!’ “But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I don’t know you.’” (Matthew 25:1-12)

The parable ends with some of the virgins, the foolish ones, being locked out of the wedding. What has led to this? Let's break the parable down to find out.

The first thing we are made aware of in this passage is that *all* of the virgins, both the wise and the foolish, are Christians. This is evident in their awareness of the Bridegroom's (Jesus') coming, and their initial going out to meet Him (v. 1).

The second thing we notice is that all ten of these virgins, or Christians, have "lamps." In the Bible, the lamp, or candle, is a picture of the spirit of a person (Prov. 20:27). Thus the lamp, as a vessel, represents the soul.

In the next couple of lines we find out what makes half of these Christians wise and the other half foolish. Notice that the wise virgins take along extra oil in jars while the foolish virgins do not. This is critical because in the Bible oil symbolizes the anointing presence of the Holy Spirit within the believer, which denotes an active relationship with God (Lev. 8:10, 12; Isa. 61:1). A full lamp, therefore, represents a spirit-filled person—one who is "alight with the flame of God's presence." Conversely, an empty lamp represents a person who has no real relationship with the Lord.

That the foolish virgins fail to stock up on oil is not necessarily a life or death issue at first—their lamps are burning just fine. Later, however, we see how their shortsightedness comes back to haunt them. Because the bridegroom is a long time coming, all ten of the virgins become drowsy and fall asleep. Then one evening, as the clock strikes midnight, a cry rings out: "Here comes the bridegroom!" At this, all ten virgins awaken to light their lamps, but the foolish virgins find themselves out of oil (they have no relationship with the Lord). In a panic, they seek to borrow some from the wise, but there is none extra to be had.

Because the foolish virgins know that they cannot meet the Bridegroom without their lamps burning, they rush out to get some oil, but in the brief time they are out, He comes to retrieve those who are ready, leaving the rest behind.<sup>3</sup>

## THE LESSON

The lesson of the parable is straightforward: To enter into the wedding (in heaven) one's lamp (or soul) must be filled with oil and burning when the Bridegroom comes. One must be filled with the Spirit—he must know the Bridegroom—to be taken in the Rapture.

How does one get to know the Bridegroom? Simple: Get a Bible and begin reading it a little every day. This is how God speaks to us and how we get to know *Him*. The Scriptures say that no one can come to the Lord without faith and that faith comes from hearing the Word of God (Heb. 11:6; Rom. 10:17). It is by reading or listening to God's word that we "fill our lamp with oil."

Are we saying that simply reading the Bible a little every day guarantees one's inclusion in the Rapture? Unfortunately, it is not quite *that* simple. We suspect that many who have read the Bible and even go to church every week will not be going up on that day. Let's flesh out the notion of who will be included in the Rapture a little further by addressing a frequently asked question.

## WHAT MAKES ONE A TRUE FOLLOWER OF CHRIST?

In the simplest terms, to be a "true Christian" means, as just stated, that one has God's Spirit: "If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ" (Rom. 8:9). To be a true Christian *also* means, however, that one seeks to do God's *will*: "For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (Matt. 12:50).

Being filled with God's Spirit is, again, simply a matter of getting to know the Lord by (1) inviting Him into our heart; (2) learning about Him (via His Word); and (3) seeking Him in prayer. Once we have God's Spirit (the oil) within us, it will be manifest in the way we live our lives and treat others: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness" (Gal. 5:22, 23).

The other part of being a Christian (doing God's will) begins with learning what God's will is. This also goes back to opening the Bible. If one does not understand that God's Word says stealing is sinful, one cannot repent of it. If one is not aware that the Bible says using the Lord's name in vain is wrong, one cannot repent of it. The word "repent" simply means to change, to turn around—to stop going the direction one is going. It does not mean that one achieves perfection over night or that one never stumbles. It does mean, though, that when one stumbles he is regretful and has genuine sorrow over his desire to do what he knows is wrong.

Doing the above, in our understanding, is what makes one a true Christian. Notice that nowhere did we say that a true Christian is perfect, or sinless. They are just as flawed as anyone else. What separates them from the rest is their desire to know God and their *honest effort* to do His will. When they fall short they will ask forgiveness and keep trying (Phil. 3:12). These are the people, as we understand it, who will be taken in the Rapture: "*Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth*" (Rev. 3:10). Those who are not doing these things, however, who are not truly seeking God, even though they may call themselves "Christian," are at serious risk of being left behind to face the Tribulation. Perry Stone has summed it up like this: "The Rapture is not a blessing for saying that you're Christian, the Rapture is a blessing for faithfulness to God's word." Faithfulness to God's word means we are doing His will. God's will is that we are filled with His Spirit and that it is manifest in our actions and deeds.

### **THE FATE OF THE FOOLISH VIRGINS**

Knowing that the foolish virgins will be left behind at the Rapture to face the Tribulation, the question of their ultimate fate arises. We know that they will have to face trials and terror along with

those who hate and have rejected God, but are they forever doomed with them as well? The good news is, not necessarily. If those left behind repent and call out to the Lord, they will be saved and written into the “Book of Life” (Acts 2:21). God is ever merciful. But the question we would ask is, why tempt fate? The far more preferable course is to avoid the Tribulation altogether—and here comes the really good news: Assuming that the trumpet has not yet blown, each and every person on earth still has the opportunity to escape the coming wrath of God. Whether one is merely a foolish virgin or an outright non-believer, there is time, though precious little, for one to affect his own fate on that day—to ensure that he is counted among the wise and gathered up to the incredible reunion and celebration in God’s heavenly paradise. There, the Lord has prepared a place for us to stay until we return to earth with Him after the Tribulation, a place so wonderful it defies human comprehension: “No human mind has conceived the things God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Cor. 2:9). Consider what this verse is saying. However wonderful you may imagine paradise to be—the sights, the sounds, the smells, the activities and pursuits, the relationships, the dwellings, the animals and scenery—your wildest imaginings do not even begin to approach the magnificent reality of what this place is actually like! There is no human being in his right mind who would give up a chance to be there.

How can you ensure that you get to see what God has prepared on the day that the trumpet sounds? It begins with getting to know the Bridegroom. Our relationship with God is our boarding pass to the Rapture. We find this boarding pass in the Bible.

## **SUMMARY AND FINAL THOUGHTS**

In Review, the most important things to keep in mind about the Rapture are:

- It is going to happen soon.
- It will be a surprise, catching the “world” (non-believers) and many lukewarm Christians (foolish virgins) unawares.
- Simply professing to be a Christian or going through the motions to give an outward appearance does not get one included in the Rapture. The Rapture is a blessing for those who are filled with God’s Spirit and are in an active, obedient relationship with the Lord.

Regarding the horror that will unfold on earth following the Rapture, Jesus says, “Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man” (Luke 21:36).

Now is the time pray and to be “on the watch.” As John Hagee recently put it, “If you’re not watching for Jesus, he’s not coming for you.”