

We're going to do something a bit different today. When I'm preaching, I rarely teach on topics/themes. And there's a very good reason for that: By working our way through whole books of the Bible, and leaving nothing out, that stops me from just preaching on my 'hobby-horses', and so, we cover topics, just as often as what **God** brings them up...

- Some days we encounter Scriptures that make our spirit 'leap with joy';
- Other days, we hear some really tough stuff
- Some days, we'll hear teaching that we fully agree with;
- Other days, you'll hear stuff that, does not line up with what you've been taught before... ; And
- **Often**, we will encounter Scriptures, that do not line up with what Popular Western "Christian Culture" has adopted as an 'accepted truth'...

Now, our church (in St George [Bush Disciples]), we don't belong to a denomination, and so we're not tied to any Denominational Theological Framework. And I think that's why many people (a long way from St George) (and a long way from Bongeene), regularly tune in, and listen to the Podcast, because we **fearlessly teach** what The Bible says – not what:

- Any Social construct says; or
- Denomination says; or
- Theological framework says;
 - Calvinism;
 - Dispensationalism;
 - Pentecostalism;

- Catholicism;
- Reformation theology;
- Liberalism;
- Western Evangelicalism... ; And

we are **certainly** not teaching

- What the Popular Western Christian culture embraces...

We just teach the Bible... But we know, that when we do this, it's going to ruffle a few feathers,,, and it does...

And it's probably been a good fit here with Bongeem, because you're a 'Church of Christ'. And 'officially', the Church of Christ has, as a foundational principal "*No creed but Christ*". You're not tied to:

- any theological framework;
- any of the 'isms' that I mentioned before...

And I suspect most of you, are more interested in "What the Bible says about a matter", than what's become popular...

But you know what??? As we learn from the Scriptures, we cannot help but touch on some of the great theological debates – debates that in years/decades/centuries gone by, have split denominations because people disagreed.

I heard this story once:

*One man meets another, and in their conversation, one man asks the other man, if he was a Christian.
"Yes", he answered.*

“Me too. Catholic or Protestant?”

“Protestant”, he said.

“Me too. What denomination?”

“Baptist,” he answered.

“Me, too! Northern Baptist or Southern Baptist?”

“Northern Baptist.” he said.

“Me, too! Northern Conservative Baptist or Northern Liberal Baptist?”

“Northern Conservative Baptist.”, he said.

“Me, too! Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region, or Northern Conservative Baptist Eastern Region?”

“Great Lakes Region.”

“Me, too!” “Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Regions Council of 1879 or Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region Council of 1912?”

“Council of 1912.”

To which came the cry, “Die, heretic!”

Funny story, but it highlights something, doesn't it... The sad reality of a divided church – a division that is **often** a product of when we Christians pay more attention to a:

- Denominational understanding; or
- a particular theological framework; or
- **especially today**, to the prevailing Western Christian Cultural understanding

then what we do to what the Bible actually says...

And I'd **like** to say, that as I teach from the Scriptures, I don't care if you agree with me, or not (That's not true. I do care.) But my **main** hope, is that when we cover controversial topics, and when we study Scriptures that really challenge what you've been taught before, or really challenge what you've just accepted as being true,,, that you'd become someone who will dig into God's word, and hear what **God** has to say on a matter...

And especially, my hope is that you wouldn't **ever** use "the internet" or "popularity" in Western Christian Culture, as some kind of gauge as to whether you're on the right track or not... That's laziness... And it's also very dangerous. Jesus said: **For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many.** The narrow, hard road of being a disciple of Jesus Christ, is never based on popularity...

And I **also** hope, that you **never** have the attitude, "Well Michael said it, so it must be right". That **also** is laziness, and it's a 'blind trust' that we should put in no man, and Popular opinion...

And so my main hope, is that you and I will be people whose theology (our understanding of God), is shaped by the Scriptures, rather than our understanding of Scripture, being shaped by 'theology'.

Righto, so, that's a way of introducing, what I'm going to be talking about today...

Your executive told me that one of the messages I gave recently, raised a few questions, and they asked if we could talk about it... And I'm very happy to do that.

It was when we were towards the end of Galatians 1, and the topic was about the "Pure Gospel". And the message was about concentrating on the Pure Gospel (as revealed in the Scriptures), and not getting diverted to popular understandings, that actually don't have much evidence in Scripture.

And I gave an example, which was a very personal example for me:

I used to have a sticker on the glovebox of my ute (right in front of the passenger seat), that said:

"Passengers ride in this vehicle at their own risk, as the driver could disappear at any moment." ...

And of course, that was referring to a "pre-tribulation rapture".

I then went on to say that I used to believe in that, and that, in the Western Christian Culture, it was the popular belief, and it still is... But I don't believe it any more, because when I study God's word, that's not what most naturally comes out of it. And I discovered, it's not what the Christian church has believed (up until a couple of hundred years ago)...

Now, some of you (at this point), have a fair idea of what I'm talking about, and some of you have no idea what "Blah blah blah" (pre/post/tribulation/rapture) is...

And that's OK, because I'm going to explain it shortly.

But before I do, I really need to say this:

What you and I believe (and possibly disagree on), with regards to pre-tribulation/post-tribulation Rapture, isn't critical to our faith... Alright, it's not an issue about whether we're saved or not – it's about our understanding of the order that things are going to happen before (or as) Jesus returns.

And so, this isn't something to get 'hot-under-the-collar' about...

Righto. The 'rapture' refers to the event at the end of time, when the disciples of Jesus, (whether they're alive, or whether they're dead), are "caught up together", to meet with Jesus (in the air).

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 (ESV)

¹³ But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. ¹⁴ For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so,

through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁵ For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.

1 Corinthians 15:50-58 (ESV)

⁵⁰ I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹ Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. ⁵³ For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. ⁵⁴ When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

"Death is swallowed up in victory."

⁵⁵ "O death, where is your victory?
O death, where is your sting?"

⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁵⁸ Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labour is not in vain.

And isn't this wonderful. I'm actually quite sad that within the church, there is such controversy over such a wonderful event – the return of Jesus....

So, the word "rapture" comes from the Latin Vulgate. Goodness, what on earth is that???

The Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew. The New Testament was originally written in Greek. One of the earliest translations, was a translation into Latin. And this is the Latin Vulgate (Jerome of Stridon 382AD). And it became the official version of the Bible for the Roman Catholic church until 1979.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:17, the Greek word ἁρπαγησόμεθα (harpagēsometha) ἁρπάζω (harpazō) was translated in the Latin Vulgate to *rapiō*, which means to seize, or to snatch away,, hence the term “The Rapture”...

Now, ever since the church began (up until a couple of hundred years ago), **this** has been what the Christian Church has believed. BTW, most Christians in the world today believe it (although it’s not the most popular teaching coming out of the US).

The most exciting time for us Christians, is going to be when Jesus returns... Yes??? It is, without a doubt, the highlight, isn’t it...

But imagine, that you were in the first generation of Christians, and you were expecting Jesus to come pretty soon, and some of your fellow Christians had gotten old, and had died... And imagine that you’re getting a bit ‘long-in-the-tooth’ too, and you probably haven’t got too many years left in the old carcass... Oh dear, what if I miss out on the return of Jesus.....

And Paul writes to this church in Thessalonica, and he says, “Don’t you worry about that... Even if you **do** die before Jesus returns, you’re not going to miss out....” Those who have died, it’s like they’re asleep – and they’re going to wake up. And even those who are still alive, the body you have, it isn’t going to cut it – it’s not built for eternity. To be part of eternity, you’re going to need a new body...

- And so, the dead will rise first (so they're not going to miss out).
- And the disciples of Jesus who are still alive – we will be snatched up off this earth, given our new bodies. (Just as those who have been raised from the dead have a new spiritual body, so will we)
- And we shall all be changed, ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye

And don't be afraid you're going to miss out on this... This is going to be a very noisy and a very noticeable event...

- cry of a command;
- voice of an archangel;
- heavenly trumpets blasting...

It's going to be loud enough to wake the dead,,, and it will....

And we meet together with The Lord, in the air, and we'll be together with Him, at His coming...

So, that's what the "Rapture" is:

- Christians being taken out of the world;
- together with the dead being raised;
- All disciples of Jesus being equipped with our new Spiritual bodies
- ready to come back with Jesus...

What's the tribulation???

The tribulation/great tribulation, is the big trouble...

Jesus told us that Christians, (while we are in this world), will have tribulation (great troubles)... Has anyone noticed that Jesus was right??? There is no room for any 'prosperity theology' in the teaching of Jesus, when it comes to tribulation...

When the Apostle John, received the Revelation of Jesus Christ, he acknowledged that he was **living** in the tribulation. Revelation 1:9 (ESV) ⁹ I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus.....

... And the churches he's writing to, he acknowledges that **they** are in tribulation. To the Church in Smyrna, Jesus said: Revelation 2: (ESV) ⁹ " **I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich)**

And yet, as we read further into the book of Revelation, it appears that as we get closer to the return of Jesus, the tribulations will increase...

BTW: Did you know that more Christians were martyred for the faith (in the 20th Century) than what were killed in the rest of history put together???

- *A Christian in Nth Korea knows very well, they're living in the tribulation;*
- *A Christian in Afghanistan, knows what it is to live in the tribulation;*
- *Countless Christians who were beheaded, and whose children were slaughtered (before their eyes) by the evil of ISIS, knew what Tribulation is about...*

- *And even in countries like Australia; Canada; US; and Finland, Christians are being prosecuted for daring to declare our Christian understanding of marriage...*

Tribulations are increasing...

Now, the difference between Post-tribulation Rapture and Pre-tribulation Rapture, is whether you believe Christians will be taken out of the world **before** the tribulation, or whether we'll be here during tribulation.

Why does that matter? Well, as a Disciple of Jesus, will I be ready to suffer through the tribulation, or do I fully expect that "I won't be here. I won't have to suffer."... Now, I know which sounds most appealing... But I also know that over and over and over again:

- through the Gospels and the teachings of Jesus; and
- through the letters of the apostles;
- through the Revelation of Jesus Christ (The Book of Revelation)

The 100% consistent message, is:

- be prepared for tribulation;
- I will be with you through tribulation;
- hold on to your faith through tribulation;
- be an overcomer through tribulation; and
- the reward follows tribulation...

That's why it matters. Am I ready for tribulation? Or am I not???

So, what I've described, is the Post-Tribulation Rapture...
Christians are in the world, during the tribulation.

The **Pre-Tribulation Rapture**, is the belief that before the big trouble begins, Jesus is going to secretly return, and Christians are 'secretly' going to be snatched out of the world, and everybody else is going to go, "What happened to them? Where'd they go???" There's going to be the biggest day of reporting of 'missing persons' that the world's ever seen...

Left Behind series (fictional)

So, the **pre-tribulation rapture** sees the **Rapture**, and the **return of Jesus**, as 2 separate events, (usually separated by 7 years), at which time, Jesus returns (visibly) to establish His 1000 year reign.

Whereas the **post-tribulation rapture** understands the **Rapture** and the **return of Jesus** occur simultaneously – they are the one event (at the end of the tribulation).

Now, where did the **pre-tribulation Rapture** teaching come from??? If it's only new, where did it come from?

A system of theology called "Dispensationalism", grew out of the Brethren denomination.

Alright, so if you are of a "Brethren background", almost without a doubt, you will have been taught from a theological framework of "Dispensationalism".

“Dispensationalism” divides history up into 7 distinct periods, where God relates differently to manⁱ. Some of the notable themes of “Dispensationalism” can be clearly seen in a lot of the popular teachings coming out of the US at the moment.

- A clear commitment that all Old Testament prophecies have to be fulfilled literally and physically;
- You will hear a very strong distinction between “Israel” and “the church”;
- You will hear a very strong concern that the Nation of Israel has to be properly re-established (& sometimes the 3rd temple built);
- And of course, a pre-tribulation Rapture, where all of the Christians are taken out of the world, and that’s then, going to be a time of the saving of Israel...

While most Christians in the world understand that these Old Testament prophecies have been (and will be) fulfilled in Christ, Dispensationalism insists, that it has to happen in the physical world, before Christ can return...

Now, that’s a very brief overview of “Dispensationalism” and my apologies that it’s so short, but that’s a hint on what it’s about.

Many **very** well-known, and high-profile Bible teachers, are dispensationalists. The likes of Chuck Missler; Charles Stanley; David Jeremiah; (I think) Chuck Swindollⁱⁱ, and numerous others, are dispensationalists... Some of the most popular bible colleges in the US, are Dispensational in their theology (Dallas Theological Seminary)...

Dispensationalism really only got going with the writings of John Nelson Darby (1800's). It was then Popularised in the United States by evangelists and bible teachers of the day...

So, why is “dispensationalism” and the “pre-trib Rapture”, so much more popular in the United States, than what it is in the rest of the world? The influence that Dispensational theology has had on the evangelical church community, has been immense.

In 1909, what was probably the world's first study bible, called “the Scofield Reference Bible” was published. And for the first time, ordinary old Jo Blo, who hadn't done a lot of Bible study, could all of a sudden, understand even very complex and unclear bits of scripture – because the notes down the bottom, told him exactly what it meant.

“Sam Storms” says this:

One cannot underestimate the influence of the Scofield Bible on the rank and file of average Christians throughout the country (USA). With the aid of the famous "Scofield Notes," the Bible suddenly became accessible to the average, moderately educated, Christian citizen. It became difficult for many to differentiate between the inspired text of Scripture and the interpretive notes at the bottom of the page.

And guess what Scofield taught in his reference bible....

- Dispensational theology
- Pretribulation rapture
- The premillennial coming of Christ

And the influence on a nation, has been enormous.

And because we now live in the age of celebrity preachers, and with technology (radio, television, internet), preaching from the United States, is being consumed daily (even here in Australia). And most of these 'big-name' preachers, are teaching "pre-trib Rapture".

And as I said, "I used to accept that it was true", until I realised that it doesn't line up with my Bible.

1.

The first thing I noticed, was the way that so much of the New Testament is teaching us how important it is for us to remain faithful to Christ through the Tribulation.

Matthew 10: (ESV) ²¹ Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, ²² and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

2.

The second thing I noticed, is a pre-trib rapture relies on Jesus returning twice, and my Bible only tells me that He's coming once.

3.

Thirdly, a pre-trib rapture **relies** on a secret coming, whereas Jesus said, “Like lightning from the east to the west, the whole world’s going to see it.”

As I said before, It’s going to be loud enough to wake the dead, and it will.

The Greek word for the “coming” or “appearing” of Christ, is the “*parousia*”. And every other time that that word “*parousia*” is used, it’s talking about the visible and very public return of Jesus.

4.

Fourthly, what’s described in 1 Thessalonians as “a snatching away”, and has become known as “the Rapture” is really a reference to the bodily resurrection of the saints (that’s the topic that Paul is addressing). And nowhere in the Scripture, is the bodily resurrection of the saints, explicitly taught as a 2-stage process.

Whereas a pre-trib rapture requires 2 resurrections of the righteous – those who are raised before the tribulation, and then those who have become Christians during the tribulation have to be raised...

5.

Fifthly, in Mark 13 & Matthew 24, Jesus explicitly teaches us that believers are going to go through the great tribulation and will be gathered to Him when He returns.

Mark 13:24-27 (ESV)

24 "But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, **25** and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. **26** And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. **27** And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

6.

Sixthly, in the Book of Revelation itself, throughout the Tribulation, Christians are still there. There's the 2 witnesses (chapter 11), and in chapter 12:17, the dragon (representing Satan), makes war on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

In Chapter 13, the Beast is ⁷... allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them.

and then it says: Revelation 13: (ESV)

10 If anyone is to be taken captive,
to captivity he goes;
if anyone is to be slain with the sword,
with the sword must he be slain.

Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.

7.

And finally, I've often heard it quoted **Matthew 24:40-41** (ESV)

⁴⁰ Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left.

And that gets given as the example of the Rapture, where the good people are going to be taken out of the world. But it's not the good people who are taken – it's the bad people who are taken. Within this very example that Jesus gives, He says, "It's going to be just like the days of Noah", where people were going about their business, enjoying life, and then the flood happened, and they were swept away.... And Jesus says

⁴⁰ Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left.

And so, this is pretty obvious, this is talking about a great separation at the time of judgment.

Alright, so that's just a few quick reasons, why I used to believe the **popular** view, but as I studied the Scriptures, it doesn't line up with what the Scriptures most clearly say,, And historically, it's different to what the church believed for the first 1800 years... And it's mainly the Western Evangelical church, who believe this.

And for those who are living in the tribulation now, it doesn't have a whole lot of traction.

So, why does it matter???

In Revelation 7, we get a picture of the great tribulation, and the faithful are coming out of it – it is a present reality. They didn't come out before it began.

And do you know how are they coming out? Well, the imagery that's being used, I think they're being killed. They're being martyred. They are faithful witnesses to Jesus, and they are being killed because of it....

In the great tribulation, they've undergone terrible suffering, but:

They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

15 "Therefore they are before the throne of God,
and serve him day and night in his temple;
and he who sits on the throne will shelter them
with his presence.

16 They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore;
the sun shall not strike them,
nor any scorching heat.

17 For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd,
and he will guide them to springs of living water,
and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

What a beautiful image... You see, when we're baptised into Christ, we're baptised into eternal life, but we're also baptised into His sufferings. But no matter how bad things get on Earth, the most important thing is, we've been made pure and Holy by the blood of The Lamb...

And even if we lose our lives because we've been loyal to Jesus,

17 the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be [our] shepherd,
and he will guide [us] to springs of living water,
and God will wipe away every tear from [our] eyes."

We're not in this alone. The Lord's with us, every step of the way, and we know the end of the story. Do you know what happens at the end??? Spoiler alert!!! – God wins...

So, that's a long way of saying, what I tried to say a few weeks ago... Don't just take the popular teaching, and assume it's right. And don't just take what I've said, and

assume that it's right. Read your Bible, and pray that the Lord would reveal truth in His word...

But the best bit is, Jesus is coming. Is anyone excited about that...

Questions???

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- ⁱ (1) innocence – before the fall (Gen 1:1-3:7);
(2) conscience – (Gen 3:8-8:22);
(3) human government – (Gen 9:1-11:32);
(4) promise – (Gen 12:1-19:25);
(5) law (Exodus 20:1-Acts 2:4);
(6) grace (Acts 2:4-Rev 20:3); and
(7) kingdom (Rev 20:4-6).

ⁱⁱ <http://www.samstorms.com/all-articles/post/the-dispensational-premillennial-view-of-the-kingdom-of-god>