

"Left" Is Good!

Valley Center Seventh-day Adventist Church

April 19, 2008

This is a very special weekend for some people in Fresno, California. That is because it is the annual homecoming of Fresno Adventist Academy, and this is the 50th year reunion for the class of 1958, to which my brother-in-law belongs.

Because of budgetary constraints, though, it didn't look like it was going to be possible for him to attend, with traveling being as expensive as it is today, plus accommodations. He really wanted to be there, but wavered between planning to go and resigning to the unlikelihood of being able to afford it. This mental debate continued for a few weeks as the date approached, with my wife pitching in her "two cents worth" and encouraging him to make every effort to be there; it would, after all, be a once in a lifetime opportunity.

Then something pretty amazing took place. Imagine this! Out of the blue some kind and generous donor anonymously arranged for him to be able to make the trip. A train *ticket was purchased in his behalf and delivered to his house!* Someone will meet him at the Am-Track station there in Fresno and take him to a room secured for him. All meals will be provided. Pretty amazing, right! Someone must have really wanted him to be there. This morning when I took him to the train station he was very excited and very grateful also.

Now I suppose that he could have refused the generous offer. He could have declined when the ticket was delivered to his door. He could have said "no" to the kind benefactor. But what sense would that have made? The chance to see classmates from the past and renew friendships made a half-century ago; in the words of that commercial, "priceless."

When I heard about this development, my mind couldn't help but make an analogy to another great reunion soon to take place. As great as this weekend is for my brother-in-law, it's nothing compared to what's coming! I'm sure he's having a wonderful time right now in Fresno, but Fresno doesn't compare to what God has planned for us! A free ticket has been obtained and delivered personally to you for this grand reunion. Don't say "no"!

In this changing and uncertain world, I am sure of a few things. I am sure that there is a God in heaven. I am sure that the Bible is His Book that tells us what we need to know. It tells us how we came to be, how sin entered, how God devised a plan to save us, how Jesus came to this earth to die for our sins, and it tells us that He is coming back to take us home to heaven.

Everything in this Book has come true just as He said. God's Word cannot fail.

He said He would create the world, and He did!

He said that because of man's wickedness a flood would come, and it did!

He said His Son would be born and die for our transgressions, and He did!

Why can we put our faith in the Book? How do we know it's true? Besides the numerous prophecies that verify its reliability, there is the evidence that reading it and believing in the God Whom it reveals has brought changes into my life. I'm not the same person I used to be. For those reasons, I am willing to believe that those things that have been predicted but which haven't as yet happened will likewise come to pass.

So I believe that Christ will come back to this earth and fulfill every promise He's made. But I'm not the only one who believes this; I'm not the only one who's seen how history has confirmed the predictions of God, and therefore has confidence that He will return just as He said. The devil also believes this and is

preparing to seduce and mislead multitudes concerning this great event.

Deception has always been the favorite tool of Satan.

He deceived about a third of the angels in heaven into joining his rebellion against the throne of God.

He deceived Eve into thinking that it was okay to disobey God and that she would be experiencing an elevated state of life by eating from the tree.

He deceived the hosts in Noah's day into believing that just because it hadn't rained before there was no reason to believe that God would send a flood.

He deceived the priests of Jesus' day into believing that the humble Carpenter could not be the Messiah of prophecy and was therefore an imposter, worthy of death.

And he will work his special deceptions at the close of the great conflict between good and evil so that multitudes will be misled into rejecting Christ and accepting him, the devil, as their leader and worshiping and obeying him. Can this be possible? It's what the Book says!

Just after giving some of the signs that indicate His coming is near, Jesus said, "For false christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to deceive, if possible, even the very elect." Matthew 24:24. I'm glad Jesus added the phrase, "if possible." That means that the "elect" won't be deceived. In fact, they can't be deceived. Why? Because they have grounded their beliefs upon the sure foundation of God's Word and the truth that it contains. But if we are not so grounded, we will become easy prey for Satan's masquerades and deceptions.

What happens to a person who is not serious enough about his or her destiny to study the Bible, become acquainted with its teachings and follow its directions? Peter says, "account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are

some things hard to understand, which those who are untaught and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures." II Peter 3:15, 16.

I know some today don't want to hear about "doctrine," but the word doctrine simply means "teaching." And didn't Jesus specifically commission us to go and proclaim His teachings? "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **teaching them to observe all things** that I have commanded you." Matthew 28:19, 20. Taking into consideration the meaning of the word, Jesus could equally have said, "sharing with them the doctrines I have given you." Jude stated, "I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints." Jude 3. The New Testament is filled with warnings about false teachers and teachings.

For every truth that God has given us, Satan has engineered a counterfeit. Concerning the teaching of Jesus' return, he has put forth his special efforts to deceive those who are not learned in the Word. But there is no reason for us to be deceived! God has graciously given to us all that we need to know about His return so that we won't be unprepared and found on the wrong side.

The specific point I would like to turn our attention to today is that in God's Book there is but **one event which represents the final, climactic conclusion of the history of this world.** The coming of Jesus, which will be *visible and audible*, brings to an end all earthly kingdoms. There are not two separate events separated by seven years. When Jesus comes, that's it! It's over!

But Satan has cleverly misled minds into thinking that there will be a secret "rapture" which will remove from the earth a select few people who are ready at that time, and then another period will transpire, in which great evangelism will take place with the final "coming" a number of years after that. Notice how this teaching prepares the way for sub-conscious or unintentional

procrastination. A person might say to themselves, "When I see Aunt Judy, who I know is a Christian, suddenly leave, then I'll get serious about the Lord and give my life to Him." This is a great deception! There is **only one event** that the Bible describes as His coming, and there will be no opportunity for decisions to be made after that!

The concept that God's people are removed from the hour of trial is not supported by the Bible.

Noah and his family were not saved *from* the flood but *through* the flood

The Israelites in Egypt were *not removed before the plagues* but given God's protection while the plagues fell around them

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were not saved *from* the fiery furnace, but *through* it, Christ Himself protecting them

Daniel was not delivered *from* the den of lions, but *through* it

Psalm 91 is the charter of God's protective covenant, promising His people protection *during* the hour of trial, not *removal from it*

Where does the teaching of the "rapture" come from? Let's take a look at a few Bible references which might at first glance seem to support the teaching of the secret rapture. "Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken, and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and the other left." Matthew 24:40, 41. "Well," someone might say, "there you have it. One is taken to heaven, and the other is left behind."

Where, one might ask, does it say in that Scripture that the one "taken" is taken *to heaven*? And where, we inquire, does it say in that Scripture that the one "left" is left *behind*? I don't find those words in my Bible.

What did Jesus say immediately prior to the text quoted? "But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of

Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be." Matthew 24:37-39.

So, if Jesus had just spoken of the flood event and made a comparison between it and His coming, would it not be reasonable to interpret His words in a way that reflects that comparison? Who were the ones "taken" in the flood story? Were they the saved or the lost? Quite obviously they were the ones lost and not with Noah in the ark. If the "taken" were the lost in the flood story, and Jesus is making a comparison of that event with His coming, why would the "taken" suddenly become the saved? That is an interpretation that does injustice to words and grammar.

Luke also records this instruction of Jesus, but with a key addition. In Luke 17:26 he notes Jesus' comparison of His coming with the flood of Noah's day, and then follows with a comparison with the destruction of Sodom and the rescue of Lot. Then He said, "I tell you, in that night there will be two men in one bed: the one will be taken and the other will be left. Two women will be grinding together; the one will be taken and the other left. Two men will be in the field: the one will be taken and the other left." Luke 17:34-36.

If the conversation ended at that point, it would be very similar to Matthew's account. But notice carefully what Luke adds, which sheds a floodlight of illumination on the meaning of Jesus' words. "And they (the disciples) answered and said to Him, 'Where, Lord?'" Let's stop right there and analyze what we've just read. I propose to you that the reasonable interpretation of the question of the disciples applies to the ones "taken" and not the ones "left."

Let's suppose that we were in conversation and I spoke to you this sentence: "There were two cars in the church parking lot.

One was taken, and the other left." To this you replied, "Where?" Let me ask you, to which car would I reasonably infer that your question was directed? To the car left? No! That would not be a reasonable inference, because you would already know, by the words that I used, that it was still remaining in the parking lot.

If I made that statement ("There were two cars in the church parking lot. One was taken, and the other left."), and you said, "Where?" and I said, "Well, it's still in the parking lot," I'm sure you would say, "No, I'm not talking about *that* one!" You wouldn't be asking about it, because that information is already at hand. The question would most certainly be understood to refer the one "taken," because the location of that car would as yet be unknown. Fair enough?

Apply that analysis to the question of the disciples in Luke's narrative. When Jesus said, "'Two men will be in the field: the one will be taken and the other left.' And they answered and said to Him, 'Where, Lord,'" it's clear that the question relates directly to the ones "taken" and not the ones "left." Correct?

What is Jesus' response to that question? "Wherever the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together." Some translations say "vultures" will be gathered. What is He saying? What do those words mean? To understand the answer that He gave you need to keep in mind that throughout the Bible, this most unfortunate language is used to picture the destruction of the lost.

When David approached the Philistine Goliath he said, "This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you and take your head from you. And this day I will give the carcasses of the camp of the Philistines to the birds of the air and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel." I Samuel 17:46.
Disaster was predicted on the wicked house of Jeroboam. "The dogs shall eat whoever belongs to Jeroboam and dies in the city, and the birds of the air shall eat whoever dies in the field." I Kings 14:11.

Disaster was predicted on the wicked house of Baasha, king of Israel. "The dogs shall eat whoever belongs to Baasha and dies in the city, and the *birds of the air* shall eat whoever dies in the fields." I Kings 16:9.

This same fate was predicted concerning the wicked Queen Jezebel. I Kings 21:23, 24.

Jeremiah said that this would be the final end of many in Israel following the attack of Babylon. "They shall be consumed by sword and by famine, and their corpses shall be meat for the *birds of heaven* and for the beasts of the earth." Jeremiah 16:4, 19:7.

Ezekiel predicted that Israel's enemies would meet the same result. "You shall fall upon the mountains of Israel, you and all your troops and the peoples who are with you; I will give you to *birds of prey* of every sort and to the beasts of the field to be devoured." Ezekiel 39:4.

Revelation points forward to the end of the final conflict, when King Jesus rides in triumph with armies of heaven. "Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the *birds that fly* in the midst of heaven, 'Come and gather together for the supper of the great God.'" Revelation 19:17.

When Jesus answered the disciples' question, "Where, Lord?" referring to the ones "taken," His answer was, "Where the bodies are the eagles (or vultures, birds of prey) gather." This touches on one of the saddest descriptions in Scripture, the destruction of those who reject Christ. How it must grieve the heart of Jesus that though He paid for their "ticket" to the "reunion," many will reject His invitation! But He forces no one; everyone is free to choose.

Because Jesus is coming to take His people *to heaven*, and because those who turned their backs on Him will be destroyed by the "brightness of His coming" (II Thessalonians 2:8), the sad fact is that there will be no one left on this planet to bury the corpses of the lost. They will indeed be left as refuse on the earth, the food of birds of prey.

Are there any other scriptures which help us understand the "lost" as being the ones "taken"? Yes.

Isaiah wrote, "And many among them shall stumble; they shall fall and be broken, be snared and taken." Isaiah 8:15.

Ezekiel said, "He will bring their iniquity to remembrance, that they may be taken." Ezekiel 21:23

"But the wicked will be cut off from the earth, and the unfaithful will be uprooted ("plucked up" KJV, margin) from it." Proverbs 2:22.

Jesus' parables of the grain and the fishnet contribute to this understanding. "The enemy who sowed them (the tares) is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels. Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. Then Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." Matthew 13:39-43. It sounds to me like the ones "taken" in this parable are the lost, and the ones "left" are the righteous.

Explaining the fishnet parable He said, "So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire." Matthew 13:49, 50. Again, the ones "taken" are the wicked, and the ones who "remain" are the saved.

What is the implication of the word "left" in Matthew 24? To add the word "behind" paints the term in an entirely different color than what is intended. In the Bible, the concept of being "left" or "remaining" can be a very good thing. Another term for "that which remains" is the "remnant" which is a positive term. The grain that was "left" in Jesus' parable represents the saved.

Here's a very important truth. There is only one time when the word which is the root of our word "rapture" is used in conjunction with the Second Coming. "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord."

The phrase "caught up" is from the Greek *harpazo*, which is the root of our words "rapacious," "rape" and "rapture." When a stirring piece of music is being played, the comment "I was totally enraptured by the performance" would be appropriate. The person who would say that means that they were totally "caught up" in the melody.

This word is used occasionally in the New Testament, but this passage is the only time the word "rapture" is used in the context of the Second Advent. The word "rapture" is not a bad word; it just needs to be correctly applied. What do we see in this passage? If this is the only text that uses "rapture" in conjunction with His coming, shouldn't we let this passage guide our understanding of what it means? Is there anything secret about those "caught up" or "raptured" in these verses? Is there anything secret about the event at all? No! It is accompanied by the voice of the archangel and the trump of God! This "rapture," this "being caught up" is accompanied by the "trump of God," the "voice of the archangel," and is occurring amidst the great resurrection, when those who died in Christ will be coming from their graves! There will be nothing secret about that!

This event will be visible to all. "Every eye shall see Him." Revelation 1:7. "Our God shall come, and shall not keep silent; a fire shall devour before Him, and it shall be very tempestuous all around Him. He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that He may judge His people. Gather My saints together to Me, those who have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice. Let

the heavens declare His righteousness, for God Himself is Judge.”
Psalm 50:3-6.

Jesus’ counsel was, “See, I have told you beforehand. Therefore if they say to you, ‘Look, He is in the desert!’ do not go out; or ‘Look, He is in the inner rooms!’ do not believe it. For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.” Matthew 24:25-27. There are not two events, but one, which will bring all activity on this planet to an end.

What a day that will be, when we see the King in His beauty! Unworthy as we are, He has provided the “ticket” that will take us to that “reunion.” He *really* wants us there! He has made the way of salvation plain and open. Anyone who accepts Him, and has become a recipient of the Covenant, made by His sacrifice and complies with the conditions of grace can look forward to that day when we’ll say, “Behold, this is our God. We have waited for Him, and He will save us.” Isaiah 25:9.