

The Rapture

Part 5 - God's way of escape

To try and squeeze a Rapture out of Scripture raises the question as to why it's become so important for Christians to be whisked off to heaven to escape suffering. The appeal is understandable, because who likes suffering? But Jesus made it clear in **John 15:18-20** that his disciples would be hated, persecuted and even killed, just as he was. And the history of the church through the centuries has been ample proof of that.

So things could get really tough for us too, but rather than rapture us out of it, Jesus prayed to his Father that we **wouldn't be "taken out of the world," John 17:15**, despite the "world hating us" (14). And Peter wrote that "To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps," **1 Peter 2:21**. Therefore "Dear friends," Peter went on to write, "do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering as if something strange is happening to you" (4:12).

But if the painful trials become unbearable - and 'The Rapture' is no longer a viable escape - does God have **his way of escape** for us instead?

Paul's answer to that would be a resounding "Yes," because when he and his companions "suffered hardships far beyond our ability to endure, to the point of utter despair in living," **2 Corinthians 1:8**, God delivered them (10) - not, though, by rapturing them **out** of their suffering, but by rapturing them **in** it. It was such a remarkable experience that Paul likened it to being "raised from the dead" (9), a very 'rapture-like' term.

And the reason for God rapturing Paul this way, was, in Paul's words, to "teach us not to rely on ourselves, but on God (9)," which they wouldn't have learned had God whisked them off to heaven. What they experienced instead was being powered out of their "deadly peril of despair" (10), to get them right back on the road again in full swing, ready for whatever God had in store for them, full of "hope that God would continue to deliver them" (10). They'd be raptured again and again, in other words, so that rapturing became **an ongoing experience** for them, rather than a one time rapture event in the future.

So rather than seek to be raptured **out** of suffering, Peter writes, “rejoice that you participate **in** the sufferings of Christ,” **1 Peter 4:13**, “so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed” - or, like Paul, be tremendously and wonderfully surprised when we experience **God’s way of escape** personally. No wonder Peter continues in **verse 14**, “you are blessed, **for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you**,” because he means “rest on us” now. We don’t need to be raptured off to heaven to experience his Spirit glory; we can experience it right here and now.

Which is good to know, because in our very human existence now there are times of utter despair we go through when life is beyond our coping as well. At those times a rapture can sound very appealing - the chance to leave this unending mess once and for all, and never have to think about it again. But Jesus comes to us secretly, doesn’t he, and somehow he manages to lift us up, keep us plodding on, day after day, as if we’re not really in this world, we’re on a different track.

Which, of course, we are, because Jesus has already raised us up with him into the heavenly realms to fill us up on his Spirit power whenever we need it. The only one-time ‘rapture’ we need to know about, then, is **when Jesus ascended to heaven**, because with his ascension he “gave gifts to us,” **Ephesians 4:8**, to “build us up” (12) - not to escape this world, therefore, but to power us up while we’re here.

“So then,” Peter writes in **1 Peter 4:19**, “those who suffer according to God’s will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.” And that was exactly the lesson Paul learnt from his unbearable suffering, that we can totally rely on our Creator to provide us with a way of escape out of our despair, so we can get right back on the road **continuing to do good**. Because isn’t that when life is at its best, when the clouds of despair and worry are swept away and we’re back to what we love best, doing good.

God’s way of escape is a remarkable experience, giving us ordinary people the chance to do extraordinary things in the here and now, powered by the Spirit’s love and wisdom to do some real good. And who would want to escape that, knowing too that it’s preparing us perfectly for when Jesus comes the second time and we can do good on a grand scale at last. And in the meanwhile, “our (raptured) Lord Jesus Christ will **keep us strong to the end**,” **1 Corinthians 1:8**.