

What Saith the Scripture?

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We Were Hoping

Or, Why Didn't God Rapture Us When We Thought He Would?

"But we trusted [literally, we were hoping] that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, to day is the third day since these things were done"

(Luke 24:21).

by Tom Stewart
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Preface

As much as we seek to discover the timing of the Pre-Tribulational Rapture, we must always remember that God-- and not man-- sets the Appointed Times. "Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are His: And He changeth the times and the seasons: He removeth kings, and setteth up kings: He giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding" (Daniel 2:20-21). This is not to say that those who expected a Pentecost, May 31st 1998 Rapture have ceased to trust in the LORD. But, can the conversation of the Two on the Road to Emmaus with their Resurrected LORD shed light and perspective on "how should we then live" (Ezekiel 33:10) in these days following May 31st?

When Hope Dies

If hope dies in a Christian, then he ceases to walk in faith. "For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith" (Galatians 5:5). Because hope makes us "**not** ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us" (Romans 5:5), then we may heartily empathize with Job's testing and anguish, while rightly not approving his sense of hopelessness. "But Job answered and said, Oh that my grief were throughly weighed, and my calamity laid in the balances together! For now it would be heavier than the sand of the sea: therefore my words are swallowed up. For the arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison whereof drinketh up my spirit: the terrors of God do set themselves in array against me... What is my strength, that I should hope?... They were confounded because they had hoped; they came thither, and were ashamed" (Job 6:1-4,11,20).

Though I would now prefer to use the term "date discoverer" than "date setter" to emphasize that God sets the Appointed Times and that we only uncover or discover His timing, I am very aware of the Pitfall of Disappointment that is situated near the Prize of the Pre-Tribulational Rapture. "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling [literally, the Prize of the Upward Call] of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:14). Those who walk in faith may be disappointed in understanding, but never destroyed in hope. "Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed" (2Corinthians 4:9).

The Brick Wall of Disappointment is what a date discoverer may hit after an unsuccessful encounter

with Date Hopeful. "Wherefore also it is contained in the Scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a Chief Corner Stone, Elect, Precious: and he that believeth on Him shall not be confounded" (1Peter 2:6). Hope, by its very nature, is unseen. "For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?" (Romans 8:24). If left unprepared for the unexpected Brick Wall of Disappointment, we may find ourselves on our own Road to Emmaus attempting to understand what the Stranger is trying to tell us.

A Seven Mile Walk

About 7 miles, i.e., "And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about threescore furlongs" (Luke 24:13), is a long enough walk-- not to mention the burden of the events of the previous days. The LORD Jesus had been crucified, buried, and was even reported to be resurrected. "Yea, and certain women also of our company made us astonished, which were early at the sepulchre; And when they found not His body, they came, saying, that they had also seen a vision of angels, which said that He was alive. And certain of them which were with us went to the sepulchre, and found it even so as the women had said: but Him they saw not" (Luke 24:22-24).

In spite of the joyous news of the Angels that Jesus was alive, Cleopas and his fellow traveler were still sad, because as far as they were concerned, their LORD was still dead. After all, their physical eyes had not yet seen Him alive. "And certain of them which were with us went to the sepulchre, and found it even so as the women had said: but Him they saw not" (24:24). At that point, only the eyes of faith could rejoice, because only faith could believe the Angels' report of Jesus' resurrection.

Notice that the Two on the Road to Emmaus were sad because they had hoped that Jesus was the promised Messiah that would redeem and restore Israel. "But we trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, to day is the third day since these things were done" (Luke 24:21). In other words, they were still laboring under the assumption that the Messiah was going to establish His kingdom on Earth-- and right away. "And as they heard these things, He added and spake a parable, because He was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear" (Luke 19:11).

One week earlier, they had such high hopes that Jesus would overcome all His opposition and accept His position as their King. The Triumphal Entry of the LORD Jesus Christ at the beginning of the Passion Week was enough to confirm their belief that their Messiah would be an earthly King. Just listen to the crowds sing the praises of their King. "Saying, Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the LORD: peace in Heaven, and glory in the highest" (Luke 19:38).

Who could have assailed the logic of their interpretation of the Prophets? It was an "open and shut case", the LORD Jesus must sit upon the throne of David. Just listen to the prophet Jeremiah. "For thus saith the LORD; David shall never want a man to sit upon the Throne of the house of Israel... Thus saith the LORD; If ye can break My Covenant of the day, and My Covenant of the night, and that there should not be day and night in their season; Then may also My Covenant be broken with David My servant, that he should not have a Son to reign upon his Throne" (Jeremiah 33:17,19-21).

Unquestionably, Jeremiah was a true prophet of God, so Jesus had to assume the Throne of David, and right away. But, was there **more** to the prophecies than they understood?

O Fools, and Slow of Heart

Why did the Resurrected Stranger accuse Cleopas and his companion of being foolish and slow hearted? "Then He said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken" (Luke 24:25). Isn't a fool, one who acts out with his life what he believes in his heart, that there is no God? "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God" (Psalm 53:1). Foolishness must then be based on the **denial** of God and His Word; however slight or innocent it may sound. When we take the position of rejecting God's Word or His prophets, we take the position of fools.

Slowness of heart "to believe all that the prophets have spoken" (Luke 24:25), is a dullness that retards and impedes confidence in God. This is backwardness in the professed Body of Christ. "Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing. For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the Oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat" (Hebrews 5:11-12). This backwardness is a backslidden state of heart, that must be turned away from. "Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings. Behold, we **come** unto Thee; for Thou art the LORD our God" (Jeremiah 3:22).

It seems obvious to us now that the LORD Jesus had often told his disciples during the last year of His earthly ministry that He was to suffer, die, and rise from the dead. "From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto His disciples, how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day" (Matthew 16:21). But, the disciples already had a preconceived notion of their Messiah on the earthly Throne of David-- and soon. The Apostle Peter went so far as to rebuke the LORD for making, what appeared to him, that offensive statement. "Then Peter took Him, and began to rebuke Him, saying, Be it far from Thee, LORD: this shall not be unto Thee. But He turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind Me, Satan: thou art an offence unto Me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men" (16:22-23).

What is the remedy for slowness of heart? Only God can cure it-- if we let Him. The life giving, quickening Power of God will take away slowness of heart. "Let Thy hand be upon the man of Thy right hand, upon the son of man whom Thou madest strong for Thyself. So will not we go back from Thee: quicken us, and we will call upon Thy name. Turn us again, O LORD God of Hosts, cause Thy face to shine; and we shall be saved" (Psalm 80:17-19). If we allow His hand to be upon us, we will not turn back from Him. If we allow Him to quicken us by His Spirit through His Word, then we will continue to call upon His Name. When He does turn us from our slowness of heart, then we can again look into His face with renewed confidence, knowing that we are saved from our previous unbelief.

Several times does the Psalmist refer to the quickening power of God's Word. When we are at low ebb and ready to quit, cry out to God for His quickening-- then throw ourselves into His Word for the cure. "My soul cleaveth unto the dust: quicken Thou me according to Thy Word" (Psalm 119:25).

When we realize that we have been occupied with futile, vain, or empty pursuits, beg God to keep us from those pursuits-- then lunge for the oxygen mask of God's life giving Word. "Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in Thy Way" (119:37). When we have been afflicted of mind, body, or spirit, seize upon the quickening comfort of the Word of Truth. "This is my comfort in my affliction: for Thy Word hath quickened me" (Psalm 119:50).

Do not make the mistake that too much dependence upon the Word of God will draw us away from being led by the Spirit of God. The Sword of the Spirit **is the Word of God** (Ephesians 6:17), and the very life giving power of the Scriptures is due to the Holy Spirit's indwelling presence **in** His Word. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God [literally, God breathed]" (2Timothy 3:16). All, of those who are "led by the Spirit" (Romans 8:14) and shown by the Spirit, must ultimately pass the discerning gaze of Scripture. "For the Word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a Discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12).

Jesus Expounded the Scriptures

Our LORD is our teacher. "We know that Thou art a teacher come from God" (John 3:2). To correct their currently mistaken emphasis on an Earthly, Ruling Messiah and not a Suffering, Glorified Saviour, which was illustrated by Cleopas and his companion's sadness on the Road to Emmaus, the Stranger began to unfold to them the meaning of the Scriptures. "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself" (Luke 24:26-27).

They had heard, and yet it was as if they had never heard at all. They knew enough to have known better, but their ignorance prevailed when they gazed in sadness at their dead Master hanging upon the Cross. Why did God let this happen? "Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of Me this night: for it is written, I will smite the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad" (Matthew 26:31). The LORD Jesus had already prophesied their sadness and scattering, even while He told them of His coming death, burial, and resurrection.

Didn't the LORD allow this smiting of the Shepherd and the consequent scattering of the sheep, to confirm and refine His flock? The hope of so many that lined the way as the LORD Jesus triumphantly entered Jerusalem, was that He would now accept the Throne of David, i.e., "Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the LORD" (Luke 19:38). But, this turned to bitter disappointment when their hoped-for-king could not even keep Himself from being caught and crucified by His enemies. So, "they went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us" (1John 2:19). Isn't this what the prophet Zechariah foretold, that the LORD of Hosts would refine His flock, so that those who did remain would say, "The LORD is my God"? "Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd, and against the Man that is My Fellow, saith the LORD of Hosts: smite the Shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn Mine hand upon the little ones. And it shall come to pass, that in all the land, saith the LORD, two parts therein shall be cut off and die; but the third shall be left therein. And I will bring the third part through the fire,

and will **refine** them as silver is refined, and will **try** them as gold is tried: they shall call on My Name, and I will hear them: I will say, **It is My people**: and they shall say, **The LORD is my God**" (Zechariah 13:7-9).

"Two parts therein shall be cut off and die; but the third shall be left therein" (13:8) sounds dismal, at first glance; but, it is in keeping with our LORD's Words that "many are called, but few are chosen" (Matthew 22:14). Gideon's band of 300 chosen men (Judges 7:6) was cut down from a group of 32,000 potential soldiers, in order to keep Israel from stealing God's glory by boasting, "Mine own hand hath saved me" (7:2). God is inclined to work with the few and not the many, so that we may know that He did it. "Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the Word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the LORD of Hosts" (Zechariah 4:6).

God is not merely interested in separating the Faithful Wheat from the Unbelieving Chaff, but He also desires to make **further** refinements and improvements to those who continue in faith. "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ" (1Peter 1:7). Because we only submit to the LORD's process of refining, it is only to His "praise and honour and glory" (1:7), and not to our credit. Or, as Watchman Nee well said, "We are strongest when we are weakest." "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong" (2Corinthians 12:10).

Their Eyes Were Opened

The disciples were very familiar with their LORD's history of breaking bread with themselves and with the multitudes. "And He took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is My Body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of Me" (Luke 22:19). When our spiritual eyes are closed, we stumble around in unbelief. "And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind" (John 9:39). When the LORD Jesus blessed and divided the bread toward evening, their spiritual eyes were again opened to see the truth of the Angels' report that Jesus "is risen" (Luke 24:6). "And it came to pass, as He sat at meat with them, He took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them. And their eyes were opened, and they knew Him; and He vanished out of their sight" (Luke 24:30-31).

Why did the Scriptures come alive to the Two on the Road to Emmaus? Certainly the Divine Stranger had much to do with their new understanding. "And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while He talked with us by the way, and while He opened to us the Scriptures?" (24:32). But, was there also something to the timing of their tutorial? Could it have been that they were finally ready to hear the explanation? "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now" (John 16:12).

Likewise, we cannot be told many things by our LORD because we are not ready to hear them. "But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Hebrews 5:14). Until we have been Providentially placed in

a situation where we are looking for the explanation, we cannot be taught that particular truth. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Matthew 7:7).

Not until the disciples had gotten rid of the idea that the LORD Jesus had come back to restore the Throne of David at that very time, were they capable of being used by God to evangelize the world. "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 28:19). In the same way, Israel's salvation and restoration will not be possible until the "fulness of the Gentiles be come in" (Romans 11:25), as the blindness begins to be lifted from Israel at the Pre-Tribulational Rapture of the Church.

Conclusion

What is the purpose of the Pre-Tribulational Rapture? First, as a demonstration of His love, God will not permit His people more than we can bear, i.e., "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to ESCAPE, that ye may be able to bear it" (1Corinthians 10:13). And, "Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to ESCAPE ALL these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man" (Luke 21:36).

Second, the "consummation" (Daniel 9:27) of God's program to "finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in Everlasting Righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy" (9:24) requires an emphasis on final judgment and harvest, i.e., the self-judgment of those Pre-Tribulationally Raptured makes possible their missing of the judgments of the Tribulation Week-- "For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the LORD, that we should not be condemned with the world" (1Corinthians 11:31-32).

Third, not only would the Pre-Tribulational Rapture represent a kind of firstfruits Rapture, but it would prepare those who remain for future and final harvest, i.e., for the remaining Church, "to provoke unto love and to good works" (Hebrews 10:24), and for Israel, "to provoke them to jealousy" (Romans 11:11) and thereby-- salvation. Finally, though the LORD Jesus Christ is our "Exceeding Great Reward" (Genesis 15:1); still, He does reward Holy Spirit-inspired-obedience with the special promise of the Pre-Tribulational Rapture, i.e., "Because thou hast kept The Word Of My Patience, I also will keep thee from the Hour of Temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth" (Revelation 3:10).

The great wonder of these ensuing days since May 31st is not that we simply want to leave so much, but how much **more** the LORD desires a truly sanctified and holy people. "And the very God of peace sanctify you **wholly**; and I pray God your **whole** spirit and soul and body be preserved **blameless** unto the coming of our LORD Jesus Christ" (1Thessalonians 5:23). This small space of time will allow for additional people to be brought into the Body to respond to the LORD's Pre-Tribulational Rapture Call-- "Come Up Hither" (Revelation 4:1); but, more strangely-- I speak as a man-- it will probably sift and **reduce** the number who will still be ready. Thus, the Pre-Tribulational Rapture will take only

the "finest of the wheat" (Psalm 147:14). "Whose fan is in His hand, and He will **thoroughly purge** His floor, and gather His wheat into the Garner; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Matthew 3:12).

May we be found in Him, Faithful Wheat and not Unbelieving Chaff.

Amen, and Amen.