

Th131 God's Plan

Lesson Th131-39 The Rapture

Every parent wants to have their children with them. When husbands and wives discover that they are pregnant, they wait with great anticipation for the child to be born. As the months of the pregnancy pass, the child grows and develops in the mother's womb. The umbilical cord ties the child to the mother. During these months the baby is in a small, confined, and safe environment. Slowly it grows from just a few cells and develops into a human that will look very much like its parents. While in the mother's womb the child cannot see. It is dark. It does not breathe or smell and what it feels is very limited. Muffled sounds make it to the baby.

Meanwhile, the parents wait with great expectation for the child's birth. It is the desire of the parents that the child be born into their presence. But the child knows nothing but its own limited world in the mother's womb. They cannot imagine what it will be like to be born. As the pregnancy comes to an end, the umbilical cord and placenta has aged and become worn out. At a certain point it begins to die. It is time for the child to be born. Then, in one traumatic moment, the child is pushed out of its small limited world into the presence of its parents. Nothing will ever be the same. Suddenly there are no limitations. The baby cannot reach out and touch the sides of its world anymore. There are sights and sounds that are crystal clear. The baby takes a breath and breathes in odors. Then the baby hears something it recognizes. It is the sound of its parents. But the sounds are now clear, no longer muffled and dim. And the child for the very first time looks into the face of its mother and father. The child is born. It is where it was meant to be from the very beginning.

And so it is with each human—all created in the image of God. It has been God's plan from the very beginning that we would be His children; children of love and relationship. It was God's plan from the very beginning that He would demonstrate and reveal His love towards us—His children—by having Jesus die for our sins. But the earth, such a small and limited place compared to the universe, is not where our Father and elder Brother live. They live in the spirit world. The Bible teaches us that God is spirit and those that worship Him must worship in spirit and truth. We also have a spirit. We have a spirit and soul that will live forever. Our body, like an umbilical cord, ties our spirit and soul to the earth. The earth can be thought of as the womb where the children's souls and spirits develop and grow until they are ready to be born into God's presence. This is the process through which the children of God come into being. We are conceived on this earth, but are born into God's presence in the spirit world upon the death of our body. The apostle Paul taught that upon the death of our bodies we are taken into the presence of God. We no longer descend into Paradise because Jesus has paid the price for our sins. At the death of our body, angels guide our souls and spirits into the presence of God. Suddenly, the entire spirit world opens before us.

But Jesus has been appointed the heir of not just the spirit world, but also of the physical universe. Our souls will need a physical body in order for us to partake of our inheritance. Jesus' body came back to life, was resurrected, and changed into a supernatural form that could travel

in both the spirit and physical worlds. In the same way, we will one day be resurrected from the dead with a similar body.

Jesus taught this to His disciples at the last supper before His betrayal and crucifixion. He was telling them that it was His time to depart from this world and return to His Father. They were all upset. He tried to comfort them with these words. "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am" (John 14:1-3).

The apostle Paul explained this in more detail to the church at Corinth. He wrote: "I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory.' 'Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?' The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body" (1Cor 15:50-57; 42-44).

Thus we live our lives upon this earth as children in the womb. We hear the voice of God's Spirit talking us. It is often muffled and hard to discern. Our bodies tie us to this world as our spirits and souls grow and are conformed to the image of Christ, our elder Brother. During our lives upon this earth we learn the most basic truths of how to use power and authority. Satan, although defeated, remains our adversary. He is to be the target upon which we practice our God-given power and authority. For almost 2000 years the children of God have been conceived upon this earth. This conception takes place when a person accepts Christ as Savior. In due time, their bodies die and release their spirits and souls into God's presence. All await the promised day when the trumpet will sound and all of the souls and spirits of God's children who have patiently awaited their resurrection will receive a new immortal body.

This promise is not just for the dead, but also for those who are alive at the trumpet's sound. The apostle Paul wrote to the church in Thessalonica and said: "Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are

left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever" (1Thess 4:13-17).

We call this event the Rapture. It will be the next major event on God's cosmic calendar. It is our hope and our promise. In view of this, Christians should dedicate themselves to learning how to use God's power and authority in evangelism. Only the Father knows when the Rapture will take place, so we want to win as many people as possible to the Lord. Only those who have accepted Christ as Savior will be ready to go in the Rapture.

This lesson is **important** because it shows that God is preparing us here on earth to soon receive us into heaven. While we wait we practice using the power and authority given us on Satan, to set those who are captives free.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that soon Jesus will return to take the dead in Christ and all believers who are still alive to heaven. This event will happen in an instant; it is called the Rapture of the church.

Let's **review** what you learned in this lesson.

1. Where do our spirit and soul go when our body dies? [Pause 5 seconds]
A. If you said that our spirits and souls ascend into God's presence, you are correct.
2. Why is it important that God's children be resurrected with an immortal body to house their immortal souls and spirits? [Pause]
A. If you said that the children of God will one day inherit not only the spirit world but also the physical world, then you answered correctly.
3. What two groups will meet Christ in the air when the last trumpet sounds? [Pause]
A. If you said, "First those who have died in Christ will be resurrected with new bodies, then the bodies of believers who are alive on the earth will be changed into immortal bodies, and they will meet Christ in the air," you are right.

This lesson helps us understand both the purpose of our time upon the earth and the promise of a future immortal body. Your **assignment** is to find a few fellow believers and discuss the Rapture. Ask yourselves, whether your neighbors and family members are ready to meet Jesus if the trumpet sounds today? Spend time rejoicing and praising God for your future in God's presence with a glorified and immortal resurrected body. Then intercede for those around you who need to accept Christ.