

Stage Right

My wife loves to see plays but I'm only a ho-hum fan of the theatre so you can probably count on one hand the stage productions we've seen (yeah, yeah, I know, what an uncultured slacker). However, when it comes to the heavenly drama that is playing out all around us, produced and directed by our Lord, I'm totally mesmerized – awestruck. And although the theatre is in general not the best illustration of God's work, He is definitely setting the right stage for the final act so to speak.

Now, there is no prophecy that at this point prevents the church from being snatched up in the Rapture. Some may argue that the gospel must first be preached to the whole world but this was never spoken as prerequisite to the rapture. Rather, it precedes Christ's second coming as the conquering King. For some 2000 years the church has delivered the gospel but I submit to you that it is only God Himself who can and does accomplish this fully. In Revelation 14:6,7, we find that during the tribulation period, the Lord's angelic messenger proclaims the gospel to the whole world. In addition, some 144,000 Jewish men appear to also have an evangelistic role during this time for just after their anointing or sealing in Revelation 7, we find innumerable multitudes of saints in heaven who have come out of the great tribulation.

"The promise of the Rapture added a new dimension to the disciples' expectations. Jesus was returning to heaven to prepare a place for them in the Father's house. He would return to receive them to Himself, taking them where He was in the Father's house. This was a promise of removal from earth and entrance into heaven. He mentioned no signs preceding and no tremendous prophecies that needed to be fulfilled first. It was to be an imminent hope, something that would

be the expectation of each day after He left them." (John F. Walvoord)

All this is to say that although we as Christians have the urgent and loving responsibility to the Great Commission, to share the gospel with everyone, that the Rapture of the church is not scripturally dependent upon the accomplishment of preaching it to the entire world.

Nor is it dependent upon 'the last soul being saved' for as I just pointed out, there will be huge numbers of believer born again during the incredibly difficult days of the tribulation.

Then how about something on the world scene? Nope.

How about something related to Jerusalem or the Jews? At this point, no.

So what is it dependent on?

Father God.

Indeed, it is purely His call – Jesus said so. (See Mat 24:36 and Mark 13:32) It is analogous to the old Jewish wedding practice in which after the bride's 'price' had been paid, the bridegroom would return to his father's house to prepare a place for his bride. And only the father could approve the final results – only he could say to the son, "OK, it's ready. Go get your bride."

So I'll suggest that pertaining to the Rapture, what we're waiting on is not some great human performance or grand ecclesiastical achievement but on the preparation going on in heaven – our eternal home. Jesus mentioned only one activity that He wants to accomplish in heaven before returning for us at the Rapture – it's in John 14:2,3 "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also." He is setting the stage so to speak for the holy celebration – His marriage to us, His bride.

Now perhaps, our earthly obedience effects that preparation somehow for we know that all the angels in heaven rejoice over the repentance of just one

sinful person. And we're told that as we sincerely look forward to the day of God, we actually hasten it (See 2 Pet 3:12).

But if you study all the parables Jesus gave pertaining to the Rapture, you'll see no mention of any earthly or human accomplishment as a prerequisite – rather we are admonished to be ready in heart, obedient in works and watching in anticipations – always.

And as the stage is being set in heaven so the earthly stage is also being set exactly as the Lord foretold. Center stage are the Jewish people, Jerusalem and the temple mount. Only our Father knows when the 'stage' is right in heaven and while the same goes for the stage on planet earth, He has given us advanced warning on what to expect here. The terrestrial stage of the last days is focused not primarily upon the church but upon preparing for the last act – the seven year long tribulation period that is called the time of Jacob's trouble.

You see, when the 'curtain goes up', so will we, the church – up to meet the Lord in the clouds and that will be the start of a whirlwind of final events on earth. "...if there are no signs for the Rapture itself, what are the legitimate grounds for believing that the Rapture could be especially near for this generation? The answer is not found in any prophetic events predicted before the Rapture but in understanding the events that will follow the Rapture. Just as history was prepared for Christ's first coming, in a similar way history is preparing for the events leading up to His Second Coming." (Walvoord)

So how is this stage being set? Matthew 24:4-26 describes for the tribulation period (not the church age primarily) as does Revelation chapters 6 – 19, Daniel 11:36 – 12:13 and several other passages. From these we expect to witness in the last days the following:

1. The means to propagate on a worldwide basis, great spiritual deception Rev 13:11-14, 2Tim 3:13, Mat 24:4,5.

2. A world wide 'Christian' led organization or myriad unified groups of the same which hold to religious form but not to true godliness Rev 13 and 2Tim 3:5
3. A dramatic increase in travel and knowledge Dan 12:4
4. The power to spread disease or to create wide spread conditions conducive to pestilence Mat 24:6,7
5. Technology capable of controlling globally individual consumer spending as well as sales Rev 13:16-18
6. The rebirth of the nation of Israel under one government Eze 37, Isa 66:8,9, Mat 24:32-35
7. The re-emergence of the old Roman Empire in a less cohesive form Dan 2:41-43
8. A worldwide attention upon and perplexity about the conflicts surrounding Jerusalem Zech 12:2-4
9. The ability to report rumors and news of warfare worldwide Mat 24:6, Mk 13:7
10. Plans and preparations for the construction of a new Jewish temple and the start of a Levitical worship system (note: for the Antichrist to place the "abomination of desolation" in the holy place, it must clearly be in existence.) Mk 13:14, Dan 11:31, Dan 12:9-13
11. Widespread and increasing immorality and violence Mat 24:37, Gen 6:11,12
12. Exaltation of youth and degradation of old age in society 2Tim 3:2
13. An emerging military coalition or the potential for one between Russian, Iran, Ethiopia, Libya, Turkey and many united nations against Israel Eze 38:1-8
14. A conflict between the reborn Israel and her immediate

- neighbors Isa 17:1-3, Eze 36:6,7, Joel 3:19, Isa 11:11-15
15. The potential to create large scale geological and environmental disasters Mat 24:6,7
 16. Jewish control over Jerusalem with European influence Dan 2:41-43
 17. The Jews looking for a man who, coming in his own name, will bring them a false security. Jhn 5:43, Dan 8:25, 1Thes 5:3
 18. Societies consumed with self-gratification 2Tim 3:1,2
 19. A rising and subsiding in intensity of the world situation resembling the contractions of birth. Rom 8:22, 1Thes 5:3
 20. A materialistically, 'here-and-now' minded church 2Tim 3:1,2,5, Rev 3:15-17

Look around. Do you notice any (or all) of these 'back drops' and 'stage props' being moved into place? Absolutely! "The world today is like a stage being set for a great drama. The major actors are already in the wings waiting for their moment in history. The main stage props are already in place. The prophetic play is about to begin." (Walvoord)

The stage is right and seems ready for the last act. How about you?