

Biblical Forensics ©

“What Did Jesus Christ Say About The Pre-Tribulation Rapture? Part 2

In Part 1, my focus addressed matters of logic, reasoning, inference, and the use of proper methodology to establish a case for communication through indirect means. Through the use of illustrated examples, we determined the proper criteria for establishing truth in patterns of phrases and sentences. I noted the fact that we often misunderstand the author’s meaning because of the difficulty that comes with communicating thoughts into words that mirror our own thinking.

How we read passages is not always clear, hence the establishment of an analysis of logical gymnastics was meant for a specific purpose, and in their intent and meaning we discover that the sense of the text can be misunderstood by the way in which a person reading the material has interpreted it.

The primary purpose of the examples in Part 1 was to broaden the reader’s ability to read a passage for its intended purpose, without any loss of deeper insight that might come from the reader’s internal reasoning process while reading. As pointed out, all reading is an active, reflective, problem-solving process. We do not simply read words; we read ideas and thoughts that spring from the relationships of various assertions. The notion of inference equations is particularly powerful in this regard. Readers can use the idea of inference equations to test whether or not their ingredients for given inferences are indeed present. I cannot stress the importance of using this tool to assist the reader in becoming aware and alert to every word in context as to how the author originally intended.

The importance of this issue can be illustrated in 1st Thessalonians 4:15.; Paul had a clear word from the Lord about this. Of course, everything he wrote about in his epistles was by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. But in this specific case Paul also had a definite “Word of the Lord”. Jesus himself, in giving Paul the gospel, made it clear that those who are alive and remain till the coming of the Lord will not precede, get ahead of, or have any advantage over those who died with their faith in Jesus. The fact is Paul used “we” in this verse does not mean he was sure he would be alive. He simply was referring to whoever was alive at Christ's return. I will return later to the 1st Thessalonians 4:15 passage as part of our exploration of the question what Jesus Christ said about the Rapture.

Much of what we understand – whether it be when listening or by reading – we understand indirectly through the process of inference. Listening involves complex combinations of hearing words, analyzing sentence structure, and attempting to find meaning within the context of the given situation.

Regardless of what translation they are reading, I constantly tell people that when they are reading the Bible, the words occasionally fail to adequately translate the meaning of the Hebrew or Greek text. That unnerves many because they want to believe what they are reading is accurate. Textual criticism is a theological discipline that most seminary students find troubling for the afore mentioned reason. Years before, when I was a civil engineering major at the University of Pittsburgh, part of my academic requirements included a couple of philosophy

courses. One of the two courses I took was a course in Logic. In Part 1, I drew upon my memory to illustrate the importance of analysis and how that helps frame our interpretation process with the use of inference, and then, on the basis of evidence and reasoning one can move from premises to reach correct conclusions.

When I was a seminary student, I took a semester course in each of the Gospels. In our weekly homework assignments we were required to outline the text in Greek for each class. When you were in elementary school, you might remember having to do sentence out-lining. I remember how frustrating that was in my 8th grade English class. In seminary, it did not get any easier, but I can't begin to tell you how valuable and useful that was for me when it came to translating and reading the Greek as well as the English version text. I really took the 'bull by the horns' as they say and committed myself to learning these principles. They are important tools for a pastor or Bible teacher to understand how to use them so that they could be replicated while teaching or sharing in a message before a congregation of believers. This way the Scripture text could be taught in the right context to achieve the proper understanding just as the authors intended.

When it comes to a proper hermeneutic [understanding] of the Bible, it has become relatively easy for me today. When one comes out of a theological world that follow a hopeless "allegorical or spiritualization" of Scripture compared to an "dispensational" hermeneutic, it's like coming out of a fog-covered highway. It's a breath of fresh air and things begin to come together with clarity and make clear sense in a way that does not exist through the "allegorical and spiritualization" of Scripture that most of the church is stuck on today.

By way of quick review, the point made in Part 1, we learned that Jesus Christ did have something to say about the Pre-Tribulation Rapture. The Lord Himself, stated: ***"For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be."*** -(Matthew 24:37-39). Keep this passage in your memory when someone tells you that Jesus never said anything about the Rapture, because, He did. It is not only true for this passage but for others as well. You will soon see that Jesus Christ used the mastery of the Word to communicate but, we find in the humanity of the Disciples they were not always the greatest students.

Bear with me because this is an important concept, perfect and exact template for determining the timing of the Rapture. We know that Jesus' statement can't be referring to the time of His Second Coming because the end portion of time relates to the Tribulation and is understood as an exceedingly devastating time. Whereas the passage likens the coming of the Son of Man to the days just prior to the flood when it explicitly states by indicating a time period which will be characterized by "business as usual" and the Tribulation, is anything but, "business as usual." So, this statement could only be referring to a time for the Rapture when there is a normal economy, food, drink, and social events.

The template Jesus gave us shows Noah was building his Ark in normal times. People were about to experience being locked out of their only escape when God

shut the door on the Ark. Only after the door is shut, the rain begins and the Ark floats up, above the destruction, later returning back to earth once the waters have receded, and the rains have ceased. It is at this specific time that a new dispensation begins. Jesus said the same situation (***“eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage”***) would exist on earth just prior to the Rapture (***“until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand until the flood came.”***) People will be living in normal times with plenty of food, drink, and social events. Then the Rapture occurs (God shuts the door - Jesus is the door). Jesus stated twice in John 10:7, 9, that ***“He was the door to life”***. That same imagery is noted in Paul’s writings -(1st Corinthians 16:9; 2nd Corinthians 2:12; Colossians 4:3) and Jesus repeats that point in the book of Revelation 3:20.

Looking closer at 1st Thessalonians 4:13-18, the Apostle Paul states something that can be easily missed if understanding is based on how one reads the passage. Paul makes a distinction between God the Father and Jesus the Son in the passage and he indicates that Jesus is the agency through which God will accomplish these things. Notice also that when he uses the term “Lord”, he is referring to Jesus. And more important, notice that he declares these things ***“...by the word of the Lord...”*** which is an inference that indicates Jesus had mentioned them specifically to his disciple. Paul is telling the reader that it was Jesus Himself that had told him about these things while he was here on earth.

That being the case, it would be reasonable for us to search the Gospels to see where any of the writers recorded words to the effect with the same general idea, that Jesus’ said more about the Rapture. Might we find obscure statements by the Lord Himself on this subject? As I read the Gospels, the evidence is more than circumstantial.

In his comments, one such passage where we find the Lord inferring by reference to the subject of the Rapture is found in John 5:25-29. It reads, ***“Very truly, I tell you, the hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself; and he has given him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man. Do not be astonished at this, for the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and will come out - those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.”***

The phrase ***“...the Father has life in himself...”*** doesn’t merely mean that God is alive; it means that God the Father has within Him the capacity and power to bestow life. Jesus then indicates that God the Father has given Jesus that power, along with the authority to decide who to give life to. In this passage, Jesus doesn’t go into as much explanation as Paul did in his letters, but we do have some of the elements identified by Paul;

- Jesus is the agent who will accomplish these things.
- The dead saints will be called out of their graves.
- The dead saints will be raised to life, not condemnation.

In the next chapter, John 6:39-40, we read that Jesus is speaking to a crowd along the shores of the Sea of Galilee. ***“And this is the will of him who sent me that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. This is indeed the will of my Father that all who see the son and believe in him may have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day.”*** What does this passage tell us? In this we find that:

- Jesus is the agency who will accomplish the feat.
- He will raise up (from the dead) those who believe in him.
- The raised up believers will have eternal life.

In both examples, we have some of the elements listed by Paul, but not all of them. Jesus talks about what He will do about believers who have died, but in each cases He doesn't talk about those who are still alive. But fortunately for us, He does talk about living elsewhere.

In John 11, we have the account of Lazarus, brother of Mary and Martha. On His way into town Jesus arrives in Bethany, Martha confronts Jesus with the news that Lazarus had died four days prior. In John 11:21-26, we read: ***“Martha said to Jesus, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Your brother will rise again’. Martha said to him, ‘I know that he will rise in the resurrection on the last day.’ Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?’”***

The phrase, ***“I am the resurrection and the life”*** is a mirror image of what Jesus said in John chapter 6. He is the agency through which the resurrection will be accomplished, and He has the capacity to bestow life. Close examination of the Greek text shows that Jesus was correcting Martha's misguided understanding of the concept. She makes a general belief in a resurrection, and Jesus, in effect says, “No, I am the one who will accomplish the resurrection.” He changes the concept from something which merely happens at the end, to something, which He will personally carry out.

The first half of the next sentence is rather straightforward; the dead who had believed in Him will be brought back to life. This also agrees with John chapter 6. However, the second half of that sentence, deserves a bit of analysis and explanation, because modern English does not always use verb tenses in the same way as the Greek. ***“...and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.”***

To the modern English speaker, at first glance this appears to say that all the people who became believers in Jesus would escape death. But that would contradict the first half of the sentence, which indicates that some will indeed die. It would also mean that people like Martin Luther, William Tyndale, Jonathan Edwards, and Dwight L. Moody would still be around, collecting Social Security, and perhaps still teaching at the seminary. But they are dead, you say. Believers have been dying for two millennia, so the sentence must mean something else? What might that be?

Since the word “lives” means the same thing in the present tense, continuing action as well as is in the aorist tense, implies a future meaning as well. Consider this re-stating the text:

“I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.” Or this way:

“I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who is still alive and believes in me will never die.”

What was cryptic becomes understandable. Jesus claims the capacity to grant life. Jesus says that He will accomplish the resurrection. Dead believers will be brought back to life. Believers who are still alive will live forever. Now, that can only mean the Rapture! Jesus may not have gone into as much detail as Paul did, but He said enough for us to recognize that they were talking about the same event. What Jesus said was a straight-forward promise of the Rapture!

What happened in Bethany that day was an astonishing sequence of events. Martha confronted Jesus and accused Him of letting Lazarus die instead of healing him.

In response, Jesus did the following:

- He claimed the power to grant life.
- He promised to raise dead believers back to life.
- He improved the promise to not just life, but eternal life.
- And He included believers who would still be alive at the time.
- Then He called a dead man back to life out of the grave to prove that He could do what He promised!

This is not to say that Jesus’ words in John would have been understood by Jesus’ friends, family, or associates, but in the larger context of the Scripture’s implication, by inference Jesus’ words could be viewed as alluding to the Rapture, or something comparable but not named as such. My point is that we do not find anything that would infer something other than a Rapture event in the conversation between Martha and Jesus.

Many would argue the point that Jesus never said a word about the Rapture, but I beg to differ with that view. The evidence offered in Part 1 and in this part suggests that Jesus did discuss the Rapture. Paul was commissioned by Jesus Christ Himself in Acts 26:16. Paul’s ministry was to witness what he had seen and what he would see in the future. Most Christians and denominations who do not believe in the Pre-Tribulation Rapture, likewise, discount the ministry of Paul. Inevitably they are in the camp that renders the Bible allegorically by spiritualizing the Scriptural meaning. They do not handle the Bible as a literal document, thus, consequently, their confusion over the issue of how Scripture should be interpreted becomes a stumbling block in proper understanding.

Scripture is like an onion, and as each layer is peeled back and away, incredible truths of a self-authenticating message is discovered. Unless one begins from a perspective of a literal and grammatical text, it's impossible to fully appreciate the wonder of God's Word.

When Paul wrote 1st Thessalonians 4:13-18, he was a firsthand student of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul wrote, ***"But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with them."*** Look close at the very next verse 15. Notice that he said he was speaking ***"by the word of the Lord."*** He is saying this teaching on the Rapture is a direct revelation from Jesus. Paul made a similar claim in Galatians 1:11-12). These examples clearly indicate that anyone claiming Jesus never said anything about the Rapture are standing on unstable ground.

Jesus proved that He can raise those who are dead and already buried when He raised Lazarus after he had been dead four days. -(John 11:42-43). He deliberately delayed his arrival by a day, as human flesh is considered in decay by the fourth day of death. Jesus had received word two days before and could have went to Lazarus in adequate time to heal Lazarus. The raising of Lazarus is the most amazing miracle of all those Jesus performed on a human body. Prior to this time, He had raised two others from the dead. The first was the widow's son at Nain -(Luke 7:11-15), and the daughter of Jarius -(Luke 8:41,42,49-50). But in each of these cases, Jesus raised them up the same day they died. John's Gospel is the only Gospel that records the miracle of the resurrection of Lazarus from the dead. More is said about this miracle than any other in the Gospels. For example, the name Lazarus is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Eleazar, meaning "God is his help". John's Gospel is the only one that reveals Lazarus is the brother of Mary and Martha. Bethany was a village about two miles east of Jerusalem. Jesus probably stayed at their home in Bethany when He attended the festivals in Jerusalem. Both the home and the village offered a tranquil place to spend the evenings away from the busy and hostile Jews in Jerusalem -(Mark 11:12).

"Mary" (Marias) and "Martha" (Greek, ***"Marthas"***) are each named eight times in this chapter. No other Martha is recorded in the New Testament, but three other persons are called "Mary" appear in the Gospels: Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary the wife of Cleopas, and Mary Magdalene.

Two reasons may account for the two-day delay of Jesus' arrival at Martha and Mary's home. First, perhaps His work in Peraea was not yet finished. Jesus could have waited 10 or even 20 days before He raised Lazarus from the grave. Doubtless He had been teaching and healing so that two days more were necessary for the manifestation of God's glory to be complete. Second, and is my contention, that Jesus wanted the sisters to realize His power was not limited to the sick and dying before they died, but that He had authority over the living and the dead. Read John 11:25.

The word ***"Anastasis"*** or "resurrection" occurs **42X** times in the New Testament and 4 times in John's Gospel -(5:29; 11:24-25). The word literally means "to stand up." Its usage refers to the final resurrection or Christ's resurrection. In

delaying his arrival, Jesus was able to build upon what Martha already believed and understood. She knew Lazarus would rise in the last day. Jesus stated that what he will be in the last day, He was already the same right there and then at that precise moment. The "I am" is a present tense continuous action verb. Jesus was saying, in effect, "What I was and what I shall be, I am now." He meant that His triumph over sin, Satan, and death did not need to wait for its final hour in order for the manifestation of its benefits. Every miracle He performed was another token of what He was, and shall be, already manifested in the present. They were extensions of His deity revealing and pointing to His essence, omnipresence, and eternity.

Though Lazarus' body was in a state of perishing, the one who believes in Jesus lives on as a person. Since God is the source and author of eternal life, death cannot bring the personality of the believer to a separation from life or God! John, verse 26 is a parallel with verse 25. For **"though he were dead"** applied to Lazarus, while **"whosoever liveth"** refers to those like Martha. In spite of physical death the one who is alive and believe continues to live spiritually even after they have died. He cannot enter eternity in the flesh; thus he discards his temporary dwelling to await a body suited for his eternal habitation. Such a glorious exchange can hardly be called death. I am always enthralled with the metamorphosis that occurs with the process that takes place within the tiny butterfly as example of this process.

The fact that Enoch was translated (raptured) without dying -(Genesis 5:24; Hebrews 11:5), and Elijah went up without dying -(2nd Kings 2:11), and Paul was called up into the third heaven -(2nd Corinthians 12:2-4) proves that God can do that. In fact, **"with God all things are possible"** -(Matthew 19:26).

In Part 3 we will focus upon other passages where Jesus' inferred the concept of the Rapture.

Pastor Bob