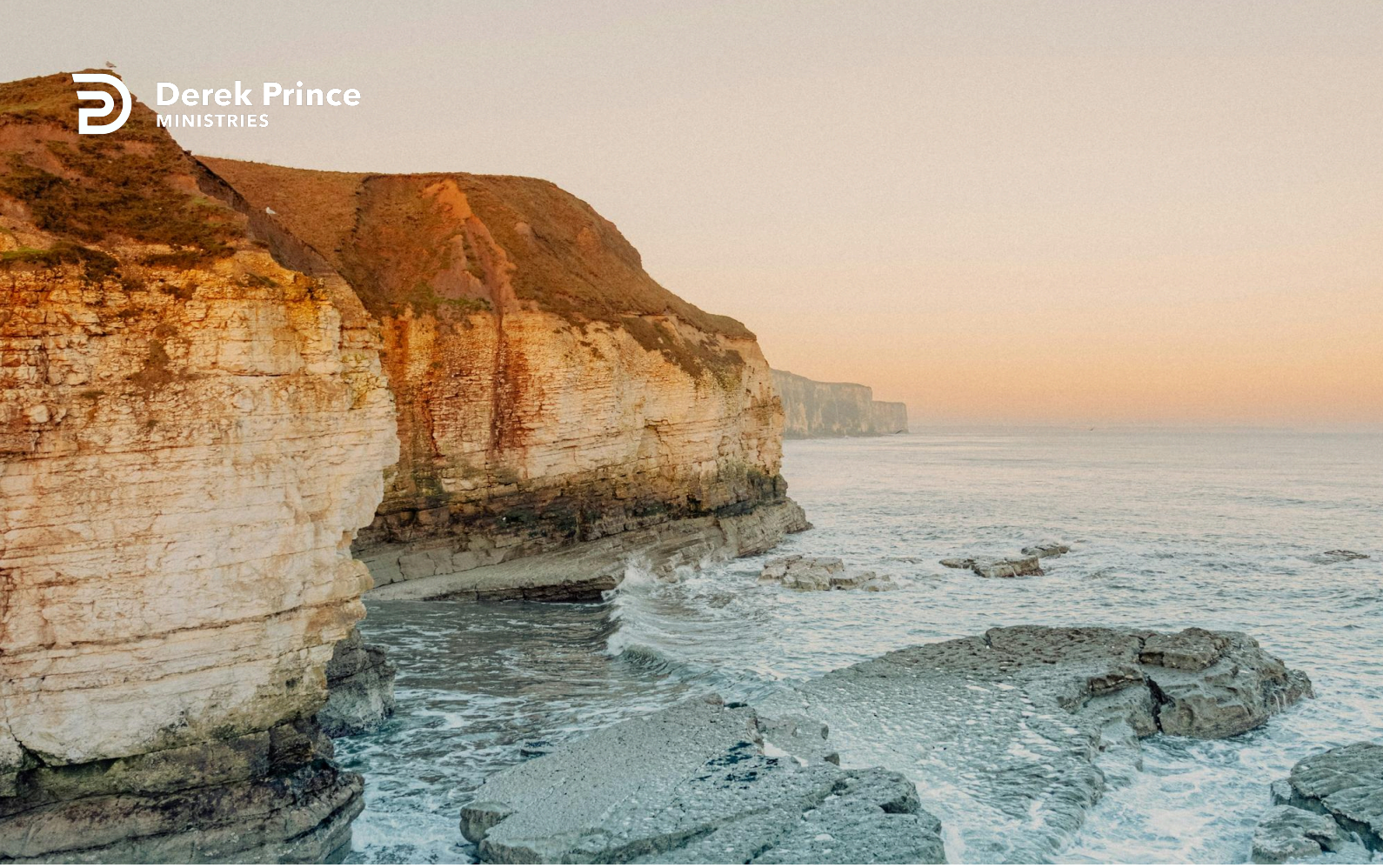


First The Dead, Then The Living Raptured



Foundations (Day 306)
by Derek Prince

Yesterday, we've read 1 Thess. 4:13-18. Paul describes how upon earth two great events will occur in swift succession. First, all true believers who have died in the faith will be resurrected. Second, all true believers alive on earth at that moment will undergo an instantaneous, supernatural change in their bodies.

Then both these companies of believers – those who were resurrected and those whose bodies were changed without dying – will together be swiftly raised by God's supernatural power from the earth up into the air. There they will be received into clouds, and within these clouds they will be reunited with their Lord and with each other. Thereafter the Lord and His redeemed believers will forever be united in unbroken harmony and fellowship.

There is special significance in two of the Greek words that Paul uses in this passage. Where he says "we shall be caught up," the Greek verb translated "to catch up" is harpazo. This denotes a sudden, swift, violent grab. It is used four times in the New Testament to describe people being caught up to heaven.

In addition, it is used in Acts 8:39, where we read that "the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away" from the Ethiopian eunuch. It is used by Jesus in John 10:12 to describe the wolf "catching" the sheep. It is used by Him also in Matthew 13:19 to describe the birds snatching away the seed sown by the wayside. It is used in Jude verse 23 to describe people being pulled out of the fire.

Traditionally, Bible commentators have rendered harpazo by the word rapture – either as a noun or as a verb. Rapture is derived from a Latin verb which means precisely the same as harpazo – "to seize, to snatch away." Throughout the rest of these studies, rapture will be used in this sense as the equivalent of harpazo.

Paul's use of harpazo is deliberately intended to give the impression of one single, swift, sudden, violent act. Indeed, it suggests particularly the act of a thief. In this respect it is in line with other scriptures which compare this aspect of

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Christ's coming to that of a thief.

> "Behold, I am coming as a thief." (Rev. 16:15)

> "Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into." (Matt. 24:42-43)

Notice the suggestion of violence in the statement that the house is to be "broken into."

We may say, therefore, that the coming of Christ for His Church at this point will be like that of a thief in the following respects. It will be sudden, unexpected, without warning; it will culminate in one single, violent act of snatching away. Furthermore, that which is to be snatched away will be earth's most valuable treasure – the true Christians. However, as we have already said, Christ's coming will differ from that of a thief in one extremely important respect: He will take away only that which is already His by right of redemption.

Devotional

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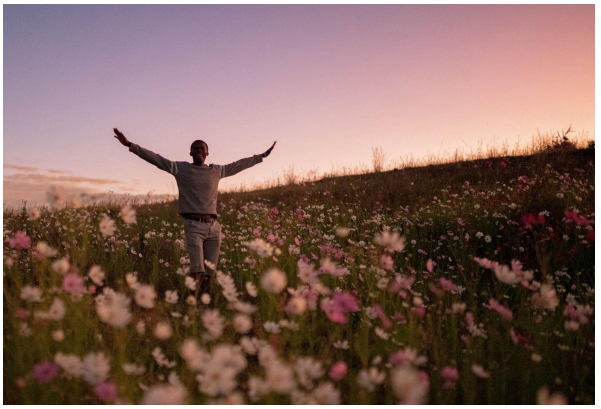


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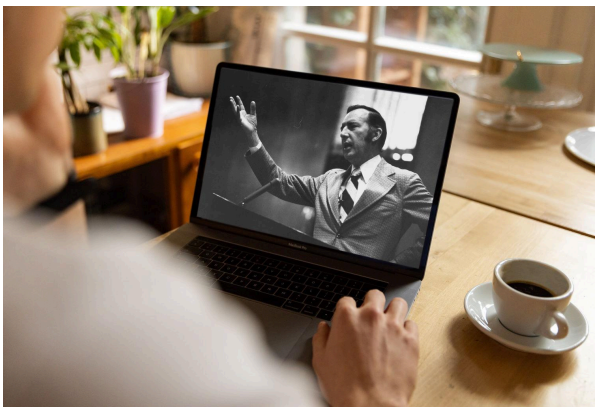
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