

Friday: *Who Was Called Out?*

Read: Matthew 2:13-15¹³ ... an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt...¹⁵ and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt I called my son."

Reflect:
A major part of Premillennial Dispensationalism is a strong distinction between Israel and The Church. They teach the church was not predicted in the OT. "The church therefore constitutes a kind of parenthesis in the plan of God, interrupting God's predicted plan for Israel" (John Walvoord, former professor at Dallas Theological Seminary and major Dispensationalist proponent). Interesting huh?

In verse 15 of today's passage Matthew quoted the OT book of Hosea. In Hosea 11 God is talking about the nation of Israel. Yet Matthew said the Scripture is fulfilled in Jesus. Is Matthew not taking the Bible "literally?" Did he get it wrong?

Let's see...Matthew was guided by the Holy Spirit in his writing and spent time, physically, with Jesus. Maybe we should allow him to mean what he meant (and we should read it naturally). I say this because by reading chapters two through four of Matthew (the whole gospel for that matter) it is clear he is saying Jesus is the new/true Israel. There is no Israel/Church distinction for God; nor should there be for us. Jesus redefined Israel (cf. Gal3:15-18; Eph2:11-22).

Respond:
I'm sure you know Jesus was baptized in the Jordan. Did not Israel pass through the Jordan as they entered the Promised Land? (Cf. 1Cor10:1-2 to understand "passed through.")

Israel wandered 40 years in the desert because of failure. Jesus was tested 40 days. Yet, what was that outcome (cf. Mt4)?

How has Jesus been faithful to you this week?

Pray: Pray for Prairie View Christian Camp; a mission New Life supports. Thank God for His work, throughout history, to bring people to know Him. Pray for Bob Griffin and Larry Hayes, New Life's elders. Pray for protection from sin and strength during times of testing.

Saturday: *Comfort*

Read: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Revelation 20:1-6

Reflect:
Revelation 20 is used by Premillennial Dispensationalists to say (among other things) that Jesus will reign on earth for a 1,000 years (but cf. Saturday of the 11/22 Devotional Guide). They also say 1 Thessalonians 4 teaches a secret rapture of the church. Yet look at the similarities between these two passages.

Original readers (hearers) of Revelation would have been comforted by verses four through six. They would have known loved ones ("in Christ") who were beheaded (Roman capital punishment) and had not bought into the lifestyle of the beast (cf. the mark in v4). So to read/hear these dead loved ones were reigning with Jesus would have brought them great comfort. Hmmm, that sounds a lot like 1 Thessalonians 4 (cf. Monday of 11/22 Devotional Guide).

We need to allow God's Word to say what it says. These two pastoral passages have been ripped out of their context and forced by a theological system to say what they were not intended to say. And Christians are the losers in all of this. Christmas is drawing near. You and I know loved ones who are missing loved ones who have died ("in Christ"). These passages speak to their (and our) comfort. Praise God for the beauty of His Word!!

Respond:
Who do you know that can use the comfort intended by these two passages?

How has your life been conformed to the Bible?

For whom have you been praying to come to know Jesus as their Lord and Savior?

Pray: Pray for the National Missionary Convention; a mission New Life supports. Pray for Ed Asbury, Keith Krause, and Mike Haag – deacons at New Life. Pray our worship tomorrow; the bulk of it will be the children's Christmas program. Thank God for the comfort we can receive from His marvelous Word. Pray for all worship services today and tomorrow around the world – pray God is glorified in them.

We Want to Be...Left Behind

December 6 – 12

For the majority of Christians, in America, it is likely the title of this week's Devotional Guide is tantamount to heresy. Yet before we allow anyone to throw around such a heavy word (i.e., *heresy*) we should continue to consider a variety of things.

First of all, many Christians in America believe (by default) in a portion of a comprehensive Theological System; i.e., the "secret rapture" of Premillennial Dispensationalism. However, it seems the majority of the many do not know much about the whole system.

Therefore, parts of the whole system were looked at in the November 22 – 28 Devotional Guide and coinciding sermon (on November 22nd).

- Literal (i.e., Literalistic) interpretation of the Bible; Strong distinction between Israel and the Church; Pre-Tribulation Rapture and two 2nd Comings of Jesus; Tribulation; Millennial Kingdom of Christ

This week's sermon and Devotional Guide are part two (of what in reality should be many more parts) of what was started on November 22nd.

I trust those who used the Devotional Guide that week saw some major problems with Premillennial Dispensationalism (copies are online at www.nlccoe.com under the "Devotional Guides For Sermons" tab of the "Resources" page).

Yet since this Theological System is unbiblical (which I realize is a strong, although accurate statement), how did it get so popular? Honestly, that question should be rephrased as "How did it get so popular in America?" I plan to cover this in the sermon, so I will only list some names here and perhaps seeing them will jog your memory of what I said. Margaret MacDonald, John Nelson Darby, The Civil War, C.I. Scofield, Dwight L. Moody, and Billy Graham (I may have also mentioned Lewis Chafer, Dallas Theological Seminary, Tim LaHaye, etc.). [These details are in a variety of books.]

Yet for all of the valid critiquing I am doing of this system, I do want to commend them for something. Their intention is to take God's Word seriously. Premillennial Dispensationalists "stepped up" with good intentions when the authority of God's Word was being undermined by "liberal scholarship." Unfortunately their hermeneutic is flawed – i.e., neither good nor consistent (cf. November 22-28 Devotional Guide).

On the days which follow you will notice I make reference to the Scofield Study Bible. I do this because it played a large role in propagating the theology of Premillennial Dispensationalism in America. So as we look at what the Bible says about being "Left Behind," I think it is fitting to see what the Scofield Bible taught. You can judge for yourself about whether or not it is accurate. I do not think it is a secret where I stand (cf. the titles of the sermon and this Devotional Guide).

One last thing; I hope you can tell I am approaching all of this with humility. I know I am not flawless in my interpretation of God's Word. Yet I also know my interpretations fall in line with many others. I simply want us to honor God's Word well by properly understanding It...and may our understanding fuel our living It faithfully. Enjoy – and may God grant us all grace as we humbly look at His Word.

Monday: Which Generation?

Read: Matthew 24:32-35 ³² “From the fig tree learn its lesson...³⁴ Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. ³⁵ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

<p>Reflect: This is a text which created a lot of hubbub when Israel became a geographic nation in 1948. A scholarly consensus is “generation” in the Bible means 40 years. So, 1948 + 40 years = 1988 = Jesus must come back before then. This also meant the “secret rapture” had to happen before 1988. In a sense, Israel becoming a geographic country again somehow kicked God’s “eschatological time clock” into gear (in the minds of many).</p> <p>Well, it is 2009 (i.e., 21 years after the fact) and Jesus is not (physically) here. Did He lie? Or was He merely confused? Conveniently some Dispensationalists now say a generation can be up to 100 years. I say “conveniently” because they (i.e., those making the predictions) will be dead by the time 2088 comes around (if Jesus has yet to return that is).</p> <p>So what is the big deal? Setting a date for Jesus’ return, which by default means getting it wrong (cf. Mt24:36) makes a mockery of Christianity. E.g., it gives people hostile to Christianity ammunition – “If they cannot get His 2nd Coming right, why should we believe anything about His 1st Coming.” Interestingly, if you look at the usage of “this generation” in Matthew, Jesus clearly means those alive in His day.</p>	<p>Respond: Read for yourself how this generation is used in Matthew (cf. Mt11:16; 12:41-42; 23:36; 24:34).</p> <p>The year 2012 is another year many believe will be “the end.” How should we respond to this thinking?</p> <p>Should “date setters” be held accountable in some way?</p>
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Pray: Continue to pray for Ryan Nelson, the newest “church planter” hired by the CEA. Pray for “our generation” to be faithful to God in all we do. Thank God for His faithfulness. Continue to pray for workers in God’s Kingdom (Mt9:36-38).

Tuesday: You or Ya’ll?

Read: Revelation 4:1 ¹ After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.”

<p>Reflect: Many who teach a “secret rapture” of the church say this is one of the shortest, yet clearest pictures of the rapture. However, if we had a “southern translation” of the Bible it would not say “ya’ll come up here.” Confused? Allow me to explain...</p> <p>The “come up here” is a second person singular verb (the “you” is singular as well). In other words, this is directed to John, not “the church” (which would require a plural verb and a plural “you”...hence the non-existent southern ya’ll).</p> <p>The Scofield Reference Bible says this call seems clearly to indicate the fulfillment of 1Thess4:14-16, the word church does not occur in the Revelation until all is fulfilled. Granted, the comment on the word “church” is accurate; after 3:22 it does not appear until 22:16 in Revelation. However, “rapturists” claim “The Church” comes back with Jesus in Revelation 19. Hmm...how can that be? (Maybe they are wrong about the secret rapture.)</p>	<p>Respond: Note how John was “in the Spirit” in Rev4:2 (cf. Rev1:10; 17:3; 21:10). In other words, it seems his body never left Patmos.</p> <p>“<i>Hagios</i>” is a Greek word, when plural (<i>hagioi</i>), for “saints” in the NT (e.g., Rom1:7; 2Cor1:1). <i>Hagios</i> is used 23 times between Rev3:22 and Rev22:16. It is plural 13 of those times, which means it is “saints.” This means “the church” is not absent from Revelation 3:32-22:15 after all.</p>
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Pray: Pray for God to be at work at LCS, MCC, and OCC; missions we support. Pray for some “saints” of New Life; pray we are rooted in God’s Word. Pray for those who teach classes during the 9am Community Group time at New Life on Sunday. Continue to pray for God’s people to have boldness to speak for Him (Acts4:29).

Wednesday: Who is Taken Away?

Read: Matthew 24:36-41 ³⁶ “But concerning that day and hour no one knows...³⁷ For as were the days of Noah...³⁸ For as in those days before the flood they were...until the day when Noah entered the ark, ³⁹ & they were unaware until the flood came & swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ⁴⁰ Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken & one left..

<p>Reflect: This has been a favorite passage to show the biblical “evidence” for a secret rapture. I.e., the righteous will be taken away and the evil/wicked will be “Left Behind.” Yet what does the text say?</p> <p>Clearly verses 40-41 state people are “taken” away. However, it is fascinating how Jesus used the OT account of Noah to introduce this concept of being taken. The implication is obvious – who were the ones “swept away” in Noah’s day (cf. v39)? Yep, the evil were taken away (i.e., judged). Noah and his family (i.e., the righteous) was “Left Behind” on the ark.</p> <p>There is also a social aspect to what Jesus said in verses 40-41. In His day being taken away was horrible news. It meant the authorities (i.e., Rome) came and physically seized someone. So what may sound like an escape to our ears would have made Jesus’ audience tremble at the thought of a reality they knew all too well.</p>	<p>Respond: Is there any way to deny the evil were taken away in Noah’s day?</p> <p>On November 28, two pastors in China were arrested, without cause, and sentenced to 3 and 7 years in prison. Just one of many modern examples for “taken” away in a context similar to Jesus’ (not ours).</p> <p>What does this passage indicate life will be like on earth when Jesus returns?</p>
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Pray: Pray for Shiloh Home of Hope and Emporia Christian Schools. Pray for all of God’s people to be humble as we interpret His Word. Pray for a neighbor or coworker who needs to know Jesus. Continue to pray for God’s Word to spread rapidly (2Thess3:1).

Thursday: What is Gathered First?

Read: Matthew 13:24-30 ²⁴ He put another parable before them...²⁸... ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ ²⁹ But he said, ‘No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. ³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.’ ”

<p>Reflect: This is another passage of biblical “evidence” to support the secret rapture of Premillennial Dispensationalism. In fact, the Scofield Reference Bible says (p1016), “at the end of the age the tares are set apart for burning, but first the wheat is gathered into the barn” (1Thess4:14-17). Is that a different translation than mine?</p> <p>Granted, some parables can be difficult to understand (which is a bit unsettling – but we will cover that later); yet Jesus interprets this one for us. He is clear, gather the weeds first. Furthermore, only one harvest is mentioned. In other words, when Jesus returns (i.e., the harvest in vs30,39) that is it. There is no previous return (i.e., “secret rapture”) for the wheat!</p> <p>So, what we have here are crystal clear words of Jesus. Yet those who claim to take the Bible “literally” distort the clear meaning by saying the wheat was gathered first into the barn!! Who are the “liberal” ones? Jesus meant what He said – one return with one harvest; again the evil (i.e., weeds) are taken away.</p>	<p>Respond: The Scofield Reference Bible was the Bible of choice for decades. Do you know anyone who had one?</p> <p>Why would people want to blatantly deny the A.I.M. of a passage?</p> <p>Read Mt24:41-43 carefully. Again, the “wheat” is “Left Behind” (we will use the earth, but it will be “new”).</p>
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Pray: Pray for the ministry of Cookson Hills (a Christian Children’s home and mission New Life supports). Thank God for His desire for people to know Him. Pray for Brent McCrory, the preaching minister at New Life Christian Church, pray for his discernment and study of the Bible. Continue to pray for open doors to share God’s Word (Col4:2-6) and the boldness to do so.