



The Difference Between "Then" and "Now"

I saw one of his heads as if it had been slain, and his fatal wound was healed. And the whole earth was amazed and followed after the beast; they worshiped the dragon because he gave his authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?"

Revelation 3:3-4

Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God.

2 Thessalonians 2:3-4

"You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men.

Matthew 5:13

The number one reason at the top of my list as to why I believe we are living in the Last Days is because of the changes I've witnessed within the church during my lifetime. Yes, the return of Jews to Israel and events in the Mideast are a sign of the end. Yes, the rise of a global monetary system is a sign of the end. Yes, the efforts of the Catholic church to consolidate all religions is a sign of the end. I believe these and a great many more of the same kind of events are literally fulfilling God's Word in our lifetime, but they are not the number one reason I believe the return of Christ is more imminent than ever. The first and foremost reason I believe we've arrived at the eve of

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the Last Days is that the church is no longer the salt of the earth and has, literally, become tasteless.

Let's take a short trip back in time. Yes, I'm an old codger now who went to high school when Abe Lincoln was re-elected to a second term and the Dead Sea was only sick, but humor me, especially if you're under 40. There has been a dramatic change in my lifetime where the influence of Christianity is concerned.

The first thing to bear in mind is that the last, true spiritual revival of significant size in America ended in the early 70's. From the end of World War II until the end of that revival it could be argued that you could visibly see the influence of Christianity on Western society. There was no swearing on television, it mattered when a celebrity or politician indulged in sexual promiscuity, most businesses were closed on Sundays, although professional sports played on Sundays there were no children's leagues of any kind playing on Sundays, and moral standards were so strict that when married couples were shown in their bedrooms on television they were portrayed as sleeping in separate twin beds. It was actually OK to pray in public and at government meetings, and the ACLU had not yet barred high schools from sponsoring Baccalaureate programs. Christianity was influential enough that even the most secular institutions largely behaved within moral guidelines.

Now I'm not waxing nostalgic for the "good ol' days", and I'm certainly not saying everything was perfect, I'm just saying that you could see the ***influence*** of the church by such things. The number of mainstream Christians adhering to biblical principles was large enough for a very long time to influence the way society in general behaved. Even the most ardent secular captains of industry adjusted their business practices and media portrayals to account for the large, anticipated reaction of the majority of Americans who adhered to mainstream Evangelical principles.

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So what happened? How did we arrive at our present position where not only are Christian values universally ignored but often scorned and attacked? It began when the church no longer clung to God's Word and ways alone and instead began to live, act, and embrace the ways of the world.

Statistically speaking there is currently no discernible difference on almost any moral issue between those who claim the label "Christian" and those who don't. The divorce rate is the same, the abortion rate is the same, attitudes about homosexuality are no longer hugely different, and on and on and on. I know there are individual exceptions here and there – I'm speaking, however, about the overall picture. I believe we've reached the point where the church is no longer the salt of the earth as described in Matthew 5:13.

Now I've said all of this, believe it or not, in order to provide the framework for a greater observation having to do with the arrival of the Antichrist.

Back in the day when the church was still salt and a spiritual revival of such magnitude was taking place that even such publications like *Time Magazine* wrote about it, you could visit your local Christian bookstore and there were entire **AISLES** of books exclusively dedicated to the imminent return of Christ. (Note: Want to know the true state of Christianity at any given time, audit what is being sold at "Christian" bookstores.) They were right about a lot of things, wrong about a lot of things, and speculative about a lot of things. But one thing that often came up in the discussions about the End Times back then was the anticipated rise of the Antichrist. Authors and readers alike wondered how it would be possible to the Antichrist to arise and deceive so many.

Remember the context of the times in which these books were written and consumed. The church was still salt and light. Society wasn't perfect but there was a discernible influence by Evangelicals. It was

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hard to imagine how so many would be deceived when the majority of those living at the time were so grounded in their Christianity that they *couldn't* be deceived. It was very difficult to fully understand how this was going to take place. One of the most popular ways of explaining how it would happen was by connecting it to the Rapture.

Since it could not be conceived at a time of great spiritual revival how the Antichrist could rise to power and deceive so many, scholars and the laity alike assumed that this explained the underlying reasons for the Rapture. At the time it seemed logical that when millions, if not billions, of Christians were instantly removed from the planet, that it would be very easy for the Antichrist to rise up and deceive the unbelievers left behind. But this teaching is, in itself a deception because it did not take into account the full Word of God on the matter, and especially ignored the Apostle Paul's specific admonition, *"Let no one in any way deceive you, for **it will not come** unless the apostasy comes **first**..."* (1 Th. 2:3)

Yes, when the church is no longer salt and light, when it has forsaken the Word and ways of God's for the world's, when it has been rendered spiritually ineffective, **THEN** the stage is set for the rise of the Antichrist. It's not all the stubborn unbelievers who were "left behind" who are deceived, but everyone who does not exclusively adhere to Christ's ways alone. This is why I believe we are so close to His return, not because of Jews returning to Israel or other unmistakable prophetic fulfillments, but because the first and foremost event which must first take place is crystalizing before our very eyes: the great falling away of the church, not the world.

The way I often state it these days is that I believe in "**A**" Rapture, but not in "**THE**" Rapture. I have come to believe that one of the great, false teachings of our lifetime is that "**THE**" Rapture will come and beam up a couple billion Christians off the planet in one fell swoop. Many proponents of "**THE**" Rapture figure that anyone claiming to be a Christian is going to be included. But when I look throughout Scripture

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at the many examples of a Rapture – and there are quite a few – they are only experienced by a very small group who maintain the highest standards of personal faithfulness. I can't find a biblical example of a type of Rapture that deals with a majority of the people. They are very small and very specific.

Put into the context of our present time, how can the Rapture include billions if the Apostasy is in full-swing? Does it seem logical that everyone claiming the label "Christian" is going to be included when, by the biblical definition of the Apostasy, the majority are no longer spiritually faithful?

This is why I have come to believe in "**A**" Rapture. I absolutely believe there will be a Rapture, I just don't believe it's going to include the large numbers so many Christian books and movies predict. I think it will be like all the biblical types of Rapture which involve only the remnant of true believers far outnumbered by those who no longer actually practice their faith.

In the Olivet Discourse, Jesus' personal admonition concerning the Last Days is captured in Matthew 24 & 25. Never read one chapter without also reading the other as it is one, complete teaching. In the first half He warns of the signs which will come and repeatedly admonishes us not to be deceived. In the second half, it's interesting to note that He provides practical advice as to what to do with this information. The Parable of the Wise and Foolish virgins is a teaching to stay firmly grounded in God's Word and the Parable of the Talents is a teaching to faithfully put His Word into daily practice. In other words, we're supposed to do the very same thing on the eve of the Last Days as every other day of human history: live faithfully according to His Word. If we do that, everything else takes care of itself.

When God was explaining to Daniel what would be most important when it comes to understanding His plan for the Last Days, it's

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particularly telling that at the top of the list was enabling personal faithfulness:

“Those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.

Daniel 12:3

For those who continue to remain personally faithful, what needs to be at the top of our action list is to preach the Gospel to the unsaved, and lead the saved to righteousness. The priority is to get both groups to put the Gospel into practice, not merely acknowledge it.

In His Love,

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