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The Pretrib Rapture Defended



When Shall These Things Be? - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg defends the pre-tribulation rapture doctrine, providing arguments in support of this view. Gregg states that pre-tribulation rapture perspective draws from interpreting the Book of Revelation, which describes that the church age ends before the tribulation. He also argues that the Second Coming of Christ is different from the rapture and that the church's necessity for imminency doctrine provides essential incentives to live right and evangelize others. He concludes by stating that there is a lack of evidence within New Testament passages that the church will face the tribulation.

Transcript

In the class previous to this, we discussed the question of the timing of the rapture and found that there are at least four opinions of when the rapture will occur with reference to an anticipated seven-year tribulation period. I say an anticipated one only to say that some people anticipate a seven-year tribulation, some do not. We will look at a later time at the scriptures relevant to that subject and see whether or not the scriptures actually teach that a seven-year tribulation awaits us in the future.

There are those who believe that the rapture will occur before the seven-year tribulation. Usually they are called pre-tribulation raptures. There are those who believe it will happen right in the middle, three and a half years into it.

Three and a half years from the end of it. They are called mid-tribulationists or mid-tribbers. There are the post-tribbers also who believe that the rapture comes at the end of the tribulation.

More recently has emerged a view called the pre-rapture of the church, which places the rapture at the three-quarter point through the tribulation. We will get three-quarters of the way through it before we are raptured on this view. I tried to point out last time that it seems to me the scripture teaches that the rapture occurs at the second coming of Christ.

That there is a single complex event at the coming of Christ, which involves a great

number of things. The resurrection of the dead, all the dead. The rapture, the catching up of the living saints.

The judgment upon the living wicked. The destruction of this heavens and earth. And the creation of new heavens and new earth.

All those things are in fact anticipated by all schools, I think. That is, the amillennialists, postmillennialists and premillennialists all pretty much expect those things to happen. The difference of opinion arises as to when these things happen, particularly in relation to each other.

The dispensational view does not agree that all these things happen in one event, but that these are a series of events separated by various periods of time. In particular, the dispensational view holds that the rapture of the church is a separate event from the judgment coming of Christ. And the way it would usually be put is that the second coming is a two-stage phenomenon.

At first, Christ comes for the saints in the rapture prior to the tribulation. Or he comes, or and he comes after the tribulation with the saints from heaven to the earth for judgment. So you've got two stages separated by seven years.

If you're mid-tribulational, then it's a separation of three and a half years. If you are pre-wrath, then it's a separation of these two events by 21 months. But the point that all these things have in common is that they all separate the rapture from the actual judgment coming of Christ by some period of time.

And the question that we looked at last time was whether or not there is a two-stage-ness to the second coming of Christ, or whether it's one event. And my conclusion from the scriptures we examined was that the Bible seems to teach only one event. And when people hear that I'm not pre-trib, they often say, well, what about the pre-wrath rapture of the church? Or some other alternative that they wonder about.

And I say there's one issue really with me. I don't care if the rapture is a different event than the second coming. I don't care if it comes pre-trib, mid-trib, or pre-wrath.

It doesn't make any difference to me. The whole issue is that none of those views can be true if the rapture is part of the second coming of Christ, which happens on the last day. One event at one time coming.

And so what I want to do in this session and the next one, and I expect it to be very enjoyable, is to examine the arguments for a two-stage coming of Christ. That is, for a separation of the rapture from the actual, what's usually called, the revelation of Christ. From the first stage of the coming to the second stage of the coming.

Now, last time I really only gave arguments for my view on this, which is that there are

not two stages. Or if there are, they both happen the same day when Jesus comes back. There's no separation chronologically of them by any significant period of time.

I did not tell you why there are people who believe the opposite. I told you who they are who believe the opposite. I told you when those views arose.

And I told you what the distinctives are of those views. But I didn't really tell you what the biblical case is for a pre-tribulation rapture, or one might argue a mid- or pre-wrath rapture. All of these really are sort of variations on the same theme.

Namely, there are certain things going to happen during the tribulation, which Christians just will not be here for. God will take the church out before these things. And whether it's the last 21 months, or the last 42 months, or the whole seven years, all these views have this in common, that there are some things that will happen during the tribulation period in the future, which the church simply will not be here for and should not be here for.

And therefore, a rapture of the church will occur prior to those events on earth happening. And I'm going to work with mainly pre-tribulation authors. But everything they say, in a sense, to support the pre-trib is also part of the whole argument and mentality of those who support a mid-trib or a pre-wrath rapture.

So I will tell you again that I was once a pre-tribulationist. And in fact, I was a pre-tribulationist at the time that I entered the ministry. I was a very active teacher.

Bible prophecy was of special interest of mine in those early days, in the early 70s. Late Great Planet Earth had just come out and was selling millions of copies. My own pastor specialized in teaching on Bible prophecy, drew huge crowds by doing so.

And I was very fascinated with the subject. Well, for one reason, we really believed that the Bible prophecies that we were studying pointed to our own times and that they suggested that the coming of Jesus was very near. And that was an exciting thought.

And by the way, Christians throughout history have enjoyed that excitement of thinking that too. But it is not because Jesus did not come as quickly as we hoped that my views changed. As a matter of fact, I still hope that he might come today or tomorrow or whenever.

I don't care when he comes, but it couldn't be too soon as far as I'm concerned. He could come before I'm finished with this lecture and I would be as pleased as punch. But the fact of the matter is, I still believe and hope for a soon coming of Christ, though I cannot say it is my conviction that he will come in my lifetime.

I cannot have this conviction based on Scripture. But I love his appearing, as Christians must if they're going to be ordinary Christians according to Scripture. But I no longer

believe that the Bible teaches a pre-tribulation rapture.

But I was so convinced of it for many years and taught it so much that I am able, and I'm going to demonstrate in this session that I am able, to defend the pre-tribulation rapture so thoroughly that I think there would be very few who could dispute it. I have given you some handouts in the packet. You might see, you'll have to pass a couple of pages, what I have actually here.

In the next handouts, beyond the ones that we used in our last session in your packet, there is a page that says, The Case for the Two-Stage Second Coming Biblically Examined. And what we have there is, under Roman numeral I, the arguments. And there's A, B, C, D. There's four categories of arguments for a pre-tribulation rapture.

All of them start with I. That was my own little innovation. I thought it would make it cute to have the alliteration there. The first category are arguments from interpretation of Revelation.

The second category are arguments from the inappropriateness of the rapture, of anything other than a pre-trib rapture. The third would be arguments based on the impossibility of our being here for the tribulation. And D, the fourth category of arguments are arguments from the imminency of the second coming.

That is the doctrine that Jesus must be, or that we must prepare for Jesus to come at any moment. That's what's called the imminency doctrine. Under each of these categories, there are several arguments.

As a matter of fact, under the arguments from the interpretation of Revelation, there are five separate arguments. Under arguments from the inappropriateness of the Christians being here for the tribulation, there are five separate arguments. Under the arguments of the impossibility of Christians being here for the tribulation, there are, again, five separate arguments that just happen that way.

And under arguments from the imminency of the teaching that Jesus could come at any time, there are four arguments. So, all together, there are 19 arguments. Now, when I was a pre-tribulationist, I was acquainted with most of these arguments.

There might be one or two, possibly, linked here, but I don't think there are. I think possibly I was aware of all of these arguments. If I was not, there might have been only one or two of them that I did not personally use.

And I argued for the pre-tribulation rapture very effectively, apparently, judging from the results. I convinced quite a few people of it. And I can still do so.

It's a shame I don't believe in it anymore. But the fact is, I can do that. Now, after that, Roman numeral two on the bottom of that page is the arguments cross-examined.

And I go through all the same arguments that are under Roman numeral one and cross-examine them and say why I do not find them convincing any longer. Now, if you'll turn past those two pages, you'll see a page. And if you'll look further on, there's actually four pages in a row that look like charts.

These are not really charts. It's more like a table that has two columns. And I have all these arguments for the pre-trib rapture in the left column and my responses that I intend to give them in the right column.

Now, I tried last time I prepared this handout to handle this all in one session. And it was just crazy. I mean, I just couldn't, I really couldn't get through all the materials.

It was just unreasonable to even suggest it. So, I have determined not even to try. I'm going to take two sessions.

And what I thought I would do is, in this session, just give the arguments for a pre-tribulation rapture. And for those who may listen to this by tape, I want to suggest that if you listen to this tape, please listen to the next one. Because in this session, I'm not going to tell you why these arguments are invalid.

I'm only going to tell you what they are. If a person listened only to this tape, they might well be convinced, and permanently so, of the pre-trib rapture. But in the next session, I plan to go over the same arguments and tell why I find them so singularly unconvincing from a biblical exegesis point of view.

Okay? So, for the remainder of our time here, I want to defend and prove the pre-tribulation rapture. And I do believe that in the course of this, we will leave no argument out. That is to say, once you have heard this tape, I do not believe that there will be any arguments for the pre-tribulation rapture that you will ever encounter beyond these.

And I not only have been aware of them for 25 years myself, but I have also, more recently, read quite a few books which have recently come out to defend the pre-trib rapture. Apparently, pre-trib rapture has fallen on hard times in the evangelical world. I haven't noticed, but the pre-tribulationists believe it has.

Apparently, they're aware that there is some defection from the faith of dispensationalism in the evangelical world. And so, there's been a rash of new books come out to re-defend the pre-trib rapture. And so, I felt it my duty to read them.

And what I found interesting is there was not one new argument in there. It's as if the writers did not realize that all the arguments they're giving have already been weighed and found wanting by those who are defecting from dispensationalism. And so, they restate the same arguments again as if that's, you know, this will get you.

And I've never really quite understood how it is that the dispensationalists have not

realized that they're going to have to come up with something better if they're going to convince a serious Bible student that their view is taught in the Bible. Remember, I have said that if a person simply read the Bible without dispensational commentary or notes, they would never reach dispensational assumptions from it. They would never become a pre-tribulation rapturous because, first of all, they'd never find a seven-year tribulation in the Bible.

Secondly, they'd never find any evidence in Scripture that the rapture occurs at a different time than the tribulation. Excuse me, than the revelation, the second coming of Christ and judgment. So, a person needs the arguments to be convinced.

They can't just read their Bible and get this. And I don't think anyone in history ever did just read their Bible and get this, unless it was Darby himself, and I'm not sure that he got it from the Bible either. Now, from this point on, for the rest of the session, I am a dispensationalist.

And I'm going to show you that the Bible teaches that there is a pre-tribulational rapture. And any other view is not only dangerous, but robs the Christian of his legitimate hope of salvation. Now, there are four categories of arguments I'd like to examine.

And when most people think of eschatology, perhaps the first thing that most people think of is the book of Revelation. And so we will look, first of all, at those arguments that are based upon the interpretation of the book of Revelation. There are five separate arguments relevant to the book of Revelation, which teach a pre-tribulational rapture when these arguments are presented.

And so, I would like to show you this. If you look at Revelation chapter 1 and verse 19, John, in the opening vision of Revelation, is told by Jesus, who appeared to him there on Patmos, Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this. Now, there's three parts of what John is told to write.

He is told to write the things he has seen. Well, presumably, this means what he has just described in the earlier verses of the same chapter. He's described having seen a vision of Christ.

And he's described what he saw. So there, he fulfills that mandate. He wrote what he had seen.

Then he is told to write secondarily, the things that are, which apparently refers to present things at the time that he was living, and then also the things that shall be, literally in the Greek, after these things. And therefore, there's three things he needs to write. The things he's already seen, these are told in chapter 1, when he describes the vision.

The things which are, are the things pertaining to the church age. And these things are

covered in chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation, because in those two chapters, we have seven letters that Jesus dictates and John writes down, which are addressed to the seven churches of Asia. And these are the things that pertain to what, the things that are, the things that are present, the church age.

But then at chapter 4, verse 1, it says, Because after these things, I looked and behold a door standing open in heaven, and the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, come up here and I will show you things which must take place, literally in the Greek, after these things. So it's interesting, chapter 4, verse 1 seems to introduce the third category, because the third thing that John was told to write about in Revelation 1, 19, was what things will happen after these things. And in Revelation 4, verse 1, he said, now I'm going to show you things that will happen after these things.

So we divide the book of Revelation into three parts. Chapter 1, John wrote the things which he had seen. Chapters 2 and 3, which contain the seven letters to the seven churches, he wrote the things which are, that is, the things relevant to the church age.

And in chapters 4 and following, he writes the things which are to be after these things. Now these things means the age of the church, the things of the church. So that chapters 4 and following refer to things after the church age is over, when the church is gone.

Now, how do we support this? Well, notice, for example, that if you would read carefully chapters 2 and 3, you'll find there are seven letters to seven churches. Now one might get the impression that these seven letters to seven churches are nothing more than actually seven letters to actually seven churches. But a careful reading and a knowledge of church history will demonstrate that each of these seven letters actually corresponds to a segment of the entire age of the church.

Where, if you would study church history, you can break it into seven pieces, although the last 2,000 years are divisible quite naturally into seven segments. And each of these letters corresponds to one of these segments of church history. And you will find that each letter describes a church and has some dominant characteristics of that church.

And you will find, if you would compare it with church history, that those characteristics which are predominant in each of these churches actually apply to the whole church during those particular eras. So that the Church of Ephesus represents the apostolic church until about 100 A.D. when the last of the apostles died. The Church of Smyrna persecuted.

It represents the church during the age of the imperial persecutions from about 200 to about 300 A.D. when the emperors were persecuting strongly the church. The third church, the Church of Pergamos, is the church under the protection of Constantine and

so forth. And then you have the Church of Thyatira, which would represent the Roman Catholic church, the papal church, the rise of the papacy in the environment of the protection of the Constantinian toleration of Christianity.

In the Church of Sardis we have the Reformation with Luther and Calvin and those guys. And then in the Church of Philadelphia we have a missionary church that arose up after the Reformation. Represented by the great missionary movements, it's the church that has promised an open door and there's an open door of ministry for the church during that period of time.

Probably beginning around maybe 18-something and going on until this present time. And then the Church of Laodicea is the church of the end times apostate, probably related to the liberal churches today, who in the end times are basically all but dead. Lukewarm.

Jesus says he's going to spew them out of his mouth. Though there's a few individuals that he says if they hear his voice and open the door he'll come in and sup with them. That's about the best that can be said for the church in the end times, is that it's apostate and only a few remnant people can really know Jesus.

And so this is how we understand the seven letters of the seven churches. It should not be thought that they are, as they claim to be, simply letters to seven churches, but they are in fact mystically related to seven periods of church history. And therefore, chapters 2 and 3 in Revelation encompass the entire church age.

So that when we find a rapture of a church in chapter 4, it's only sensible. The church age has already been explained in its entirety in chapters 2 and 3. Now it's time to get the church out of the picture and the tribulation can begin, beginning at chapter 4, verse 1. C.I. Schofield, in his reference Bible, on pages 1331 and 1332, speaking on this point, he said the messages to the seven churches present an exact foreview of the spiritual history of the church and in its precise order. So we see this established from an authority no less than Mr. Schofield.

Now, going on, let's look at a second argument here, and this is based on our understanding of chapter 4, verse 1. Having pointed out that the church age is encompassed in chapters 2 and 3, we have what we might expect to have at the end of the church age, the rapture. And that's at chapter 4, verse 1. After these things, John says, I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven, and the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after these things. Again, after these things means after the things of the church.

After the church age has run its course, there is the tribulation to follow. Now, that this is the rapture seems reasonably clear by, A, the fact that this description of John being

caught up into heaven, it comes at the end of the church age. It comes at the end of the description of the church age in chapters 2 and 3. Additionally, we see there is a trumpet and a voice in 1 Thessalonians and in 1 Corinthians.

When the rapture is described, it mentions the trump of God, or the last trumpet, respectively in those two passages. So, the trumpet is there. There is a voice like a trumpet here.

John is caught up into heaven. Isn't that what happens to the church at the rapture? I mean, one could hardly hope for more parallels between John's experience here and that of the church at the rapture. And therefore, we have in chapter 4, verse 1, an actual depiction of the rapture of the church.

Ray Stedman, a very well-known late pastor of Peninsula Bible Church in Palo Alto, California, in his book on Revelation said this, Many Bible scholars believe, and I agree, that John the Apostle, as he was summoned into heaven, represents the church which will be called out of the world and into heaven. He's talking about Revelation 4.1. Chuck Smith, in one of his books on the subject of the church and the tribulation, he said that Revelation 4.1 appears to be the rapture of the church in the book of Revelation. Now, these are just two samples of some eminent leading pastors of enormous churches, obviously very influential, who would confirm this view, that in Revelation 4.1 we have an actual depiction of the rapture of the church.

Now, here's another argument, very important to note. This is a third argument from the interpretation of Revelation, and that is this, that the word church and churches combined are found as many as 19 times in chapters 1 through 3. The church is mentioned 19 times, either in the singular or the plural, in the first three chapters. But the church is never mentioned on earth again after chapter 4, verse 1. Get a clue.

Put it together. What do you have? 19 references to the church in chapters 1 through 3, not a single reference to the church on earth after chapter 4, verse 1. Does this not tell us a great deal about where the church is after chapter 4, verse 1? They're not on earth, they're in heaven. We have this from Robert Gromacki in a book of his, actually it's not a book of his, but he contributed to a larger work called *When the Trumpet Sounds, Today's Foremost Authorities Speak Out on the End-Time Controversies*.

This book, by the way, was published just a couple of years ago in 1995, edited by Tommy Ice and Timothy Demme, or Demme, by Harvest House. It says, *Today's Foremost Authorities Speak Out on End-Time Controversies*. The book is indeed a who's who of pre-millennial dispensationalist writers, all of them writing to defend the pre-trib rapture.

And in that book, Robert Gromacki wrote a contribution to it, and in that contribution he made this very typical observation. Quote, The singular church and the plural churches

together occur 19 times in the first three chapters. However, there is a strange silence of the term in chapters 4 through 19.

Okay, so, I mean, how do you explain that? If you don't have a rapture at Revelation 4.1, why do we have the church thick as dandelions in a meadow in chapters 1 through 3 and not found at all after that? Okay, well, clearly this is one of the arguments that must be considered when we ask where is the rapture in Revelation. Okay, there's one other, no, a couple other arguments from this. Even though the church is not seen on earth after Revelation chapter 4, it is seen in heaven.

Because you have John, after chapter 4, verse 1, one of the first things he sees in heaven is the 24 elders. And although it's not 100% sure about this, most scholars, and this is not limited to pre-millennial scholars, most scholars believe that the 24 elders represent the church or the redeemed people of God. And where does John see them? After chapter 4, verse 1, he sees them in heaven, obviously having been raptured.

Furthermore, you've got saints seen in heaven throughout the book of Revelation. And therefore, you do not see the saints, the Christian, the church on earth, but you do see the church in heaven. Now, there are saints on earth during the tribulation, and in chapters 4 through 19 you will find occasional references to the saints.

For example, in chapter 13, the beast persecutes the saints. But you should not make the mistake of thinking that the saints are what we call Christians, or members of the church. The saints are what we would have to call tribulation saints, people who get saved after the rapture, and they are not properly part of the church.

They are rather joined with the remnant of Israel in a salvation that is not related to the church, but is related to God's redemption of Israel. And we have Robert Gromacki on this point also. He says, there is the mention of saints in the context, Revelation 13, 7 and 10.

These saints, however, are those who get saved during the seven years after the true church has been taken into heaven. John Walvoord, one of the leading dispensational scholars in the world today, in a book called *The Blessed Hope*. No, not there.

That's not his book. What is his book here? Oh, *The Rapture Question*. Sorry about that.

The Blessed Hope is written by a non-Christian person. But John Walvoord, in his book *The Rapture Question*, made this statement. He said, the godly remnant in the tribulation are pictured as Israelites, not members of the church.

So you find the church in heaven, but you only find Israelite saints on earth after Revelation 4.1. Clearly supporting the dispensational contention that the church has already gone to heaven and God is now working with Israel again on earth during the tribulation. One other argument from the book of Revelation comes from Revelation

3.10. This is, I must confess, one of the stronger arguments for the pre-tribulation rapture in the book of Revelation. In my opinion, it's stronger than the previous ones we've considered.

Revelation 3.10, Jesus is talking to the church of Philadelphia. Now this church, in terms of the seven church periods, represents the faithful church at the end of the age. Only the Laodicean church is around later, and that's because they missed the rapture.

But the Philadelphian church is the church at the end of the age who is faithful and goes in the rapture. And according to verse 10, Jesus says to the Philadelphian church, because you have kept my command to persevere, I'm more acquainted with the King James Version, which says, because you have kept the word of my patience. But that's not the most important part of the verse for our point.

Jesus promises, I also will keep you from the hour of trial, which shall come upon the whole world to test those who dwell on the earth. So Jesus said that he will keep this church from what? Well, what he calls the hour of trial. What hour of trial is he talking about? It's going to come on the whole world to test those who dwell on the earth.

Now, has there ever yet been a crisis that affected the whole world as we know it today? A global crisis? Well, there have been crises. There have even been world wars. But not everyone in the whole world was affected by these.

A large portion perhaps. But there has never yet been a crisis that could clearly and literally be called global in its effect, coming on the whole world. Therefore, this hour of trial of which Jesus speaks must be the great tribulation, which will be a worldwide global cataclysmic nightmare, with the Antichrist running rampant against God and horrible plagues on the earth, all these things.

That is certainly an hour of trial that will come on all the earth. And therefore, it must be what Jesus is talking about here. So, he tells the church he will keep them from that time, out of that time.

The word from is ek, out of, in the Greek. And therefore, Jesus says he's going to keep the church out of the hour of trial, which is coming to try those who dwell on the earth, on the whole world. So, there is a fairly clear promise that seems to apply to the pre-tribulation rapture of the church.

In fact, none less than Tim LaHaye, who has recently written an important book called No Fear of the Storm, where he has, that's actually a very modern book, has just come out back in 1992. No Fear of the Storm by Tim LaHaye, extensive defense of the pre-tribulation rapture. Tim LaHaye says, quote, One of the best promises guaranteeing the church's rapture before the tribulation appears in Revelation 3.10. The guarantee of rapture before tribulation could hardly be more powerful.

No wonder one writer has labeled it a cardinal scripture. Revelation 3.10 is called a cardinal scripture with reference to the pre-trib rapture, because it is just about, it is very nearly the most clear promise of a pre-tribulation rapture that one can find in the entire Bible. And so, we have these arguments from Revelation.

We've got the argument that the church age is entirely encompassed and fulfilled in chapters 2 and 3 by the seven letters representing seven periods of church history. We've got John caught up in chapter 4, verse 1 as a picture of the rapture of the church. We've got the term church occurring many times before chapter 4, verse 1, but not ever again afterwards.

We have the fact that the church is not seen on earth, but is seen in heaven after chapter 4, verse 1. And those who are seen on earth are the tribulation saints who are largely Israelite, they're Jewish. And, of course, finally on this particular category, we have Revelation 3.10, the promise of Jesus Christ to the faithful church that he will keep them from or out of the hour of trial, which is coming. And so, we could almost close the argument right there and have proved the pre-tribulation rapture, but we have far more than this.

Let's go on to the second category, arguments from inappropriateness. And by this I mean there are many indicators in the Bible that it would be entirely inappropriate for God to have his people here in the midst of the tribulation of the end times. There are several reasons for this.

There are five reasons that this is inappropriate. First of all, 1 Thessalonians 5.9, Paul says, For God has not appointed us, and he means the church, to wrath, but to obtain salvation in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God has not appointed us to wrath.

Now, if you read the book of Revelation, in chapters 4 through 19, the tribulation period certainly is depicted as a time of wrath. It is God's wrath on the rebellious world, and in particular, the last seven plagues are specifically called the bowls of God's wrath. Now, if God has not appointed us to wrath, it would be very inappropriate for us to be here experiencing God's wrath during the tribulation time.

So that is one reason that we could argue from the inappropriateness of us being here. Anything other than a pre-tribulation rapture would result in our being here to experience God's wrath, and Paul specifically says we have not been appointed to such. He says that in 1 Thessalonians 5.9. Tim LaHaye, in his book, No Fear of the Storm, said, The tribulation is the time of God's wrath on the world, not on the church.

John Walvoord, in his book, The Rapture Question, said, The church is not appointed to wrath. The church, therefore, cannot enter the great day of their wrath. Meaning God and the Lamb, which is mentioned in Revelation 6.17. The church can't be here during the day of God's wrath because the church has not been appointed to wrath.

Another argument that shows the inappropriateness of the church being here for the tribulation period is that the tribulation is called, in Jeremiah 30.7, It is called the time of Jacob's trouble. Now, who is Jacob? Jacob is a reference to Israel. Jacob, the man, later had his name changed to Israel, and forever afterward, the people who came from him were called alternately Israel or Jacob.

Throughout the scripture, they're called Jacob or Israel, as a people. And to say that the tribulation is the time of Jacob's trouble, it means it's Israel's trouble, not the church. It's not appropriate for us to be here while God is dealing with Israel.

Israel is the focus of God's attention in the tribulation period. And he can only focus all his attention on Israel if he is finished with the church on earth. If the church has come into glory, received her rewards, God's put away that part of his program, and now he can focus his attention on bringing judgment and hopefully correction and repentance to the nation of Israel.

Tim LaHaye says, It is the time of Jacob's trouble when Israel fulfills its 70th week, seven years, of Daniel. He says, Why drag the church through this dreadful time? John Walvoord in his book says, None of the New Testament passages on the tribulation mention the church. And he gives various scripture references on the tribulation.

And he says they don't mention the church there. Why? Because it's not the church's trouble, it's Jacob's trouble. It would be inappropriate for the church to be here for that.

A third argument of this category is that in Luke 21, which I'd like you to look at if you have the time to catch up with me here. In Luke 21, we have a command of Jesus that we should pray. In verse 36, Jesus said, and this is of course in the chapter of what we call the All of the Discourse, where he talks about wars and rumors of wars and all that stuff.

And at the end of that chapter, he says in verse 36, Watch therefore and pray always, that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man. Now, Jesus told us to pray that we would escape these things. Those who are post-tribulationists sometimes mock pre-tribulationists in saying that we want to escape from the worst things that God has in store for the world.

That we're wimps. That we cannot stomach it. Post-tribulationists are planning to be here through the tribulation.

They're going to tough it out. They're the Rambo Christians. They don't care how bad it gets.

They're going to be tough. And they think that anyone who wants to be raptured before that, they're just wimpy. They're just trying to escape.

Well, hey, Jesus said pray that you might escape. If this is wimpy, so be it. Nonetheless, if Jesus said pray that you may escape all these things, then is it wrong to anticipate such an escape when Jesus told us to pray for it? Chuck Smith, pastor of Calvary Chapel close to Mesa, has pointed out in one of his little books, he's written quite a few books on this subject, but this book is called *The Tribulation of the Church*, published 1980.

In that book, Chuck Smith said, Since post-tribulationists maintain that there is no escape in the Church, they make the prayer Christ encouraged us to pray in Luke 21.36 meaningless. So, if you think there is no escape for the Church, like the post-tribulationists say, then you make Jesus' prayer meaningless. Jesus wouldn't have said that for nothing.

I think we have to consider the weight of that argument. Okay? Now, another argument for the inappropriateness of the Church being here is that in Matthew 24, verses 44 through 41, and also in Luke 17, 34 through 36, these passages are very well-known to us. I mean, most people have heard them before.

Jesus says, Two will be sleeping in bed, one will be taken, and the other left. Two will be grinding at the mill, one will be taken, and the other will be left. Two men will be working out in the field, and one will be taken, and the other left.

He said this will happen at the coming of the Son of Man. Now, it seems that this is a picture of the rapture of the Church. We know that when Jesus comes back, the Church is going to be caught up, or taken, into Heaven with Jesus.

And so, we have this picture of Jesus, at His coming, taking away the Church. Taking one and leaving another behind. Now, the question here is, what is the other one left behind for? Well, apparently for the tribulation.

And therefore, we have a picture here of Jesus coming and taking some out, and leaving the others behind to endure whatever may come next. And so, we have the rapture of the saints here, and it's not associated here with a general resurrection of the lost as well. The lost are left behind.

There's more history to come. There's more to do. There's more to endure.

And those who are not taken are here to endure it. This is a common interpretation of these passages, and many people are familiar with Larry Norman's famous song, *I Wish We'd All Been Ready*, based upon this scripture. He says, a man and wife asleep in bed.

She hears a noise and turns her head. He's gone. I wish we'd all been ready.

Two in walking up a hill. One disappears, and one's left standing still. I wish we'd all been ready.

There's no time to change your mind. The sun has come, and you've been left behind. A very gripping image here that he gives.

And I can remember when I first heard that song, just getting goosebumps at the thought. I mean, being left behind when Jesus comes and raptures the church. What a terrifying thing that is.

And that song has been very popular because it states a common sentiment among Christians that to be left behind for the tribulation would be a terrible thing. To be one of those that is left when Jesus comes and takes one and leaves another is hardly anything more horrendous, it could be imagined, than to be left behind for the great tribulation. Okay, there's another argument of this category.

And that is that unless you have a pre-tribulation rapture, or at least a mid-tribulation or pre-wrath rapture, you have this absurd picture of Jesus coming back to the clouds, and we're caught up to meet Him, and then we just come right back. I mean, just up and down, just like that, just like a yo-yo. I mean, what's the point? I mean, it's obvious that Jesus calls us into the heavens for a reason.

There's something for us to be there for. But if the post-tribulation is correct, then we just kind of go up in the clouds and come right back down. Some people call that the elevator or yo-yo theory.

And obviously, I mean, it would be hard to explain why that would be something God would do. If He's coming down here anyway, why would He first rise us up and take us down again? In fact, that's the question suggested by Paul Feinberg in a book which compares three views of the rapture, all of them pre-millennial views. And it's called the rapture pre-, mid-, or post-tribulational.

And Paul Feinberg writes the chapter in there about the pre-trib rapture. And he says this in that book. He says, As a matter of fact, it seems fair to ask what purpose the rapture would serve in a scheme where the saints immediately accompany Christ to earth.

In other words, if we're not raptured until Jesus is already on His way down and He comes the rest of the way, what purpose would be served by us going up to meet Him in the air? Lahaye is a little more caustic about it than even that. In his book, No Fear of the Storm, he says, It becomes the great elevator escape. We zip up to the Father's house, take a quick peek, and zip right back down moments later with Christ in His glorious appearing.

Such a reading is ludicrous. Okay, so it is absolutely ludicrous to imagine that we would simply go up in the air, meet Jesus, and come right back down. What's the point? That's entirely inappropriate.

Okay, let's move on to the third category of arguments here. The third category of

arguments are the arguments from the impossibility. Now, it's not to say that it would be impossible in the sense that with God all things are possible, but it's not like it would be impossible for God to have the church go through the tribulation, but it would be impossible for this to be true in light of some scriptures.

Some scriptures could not possibly jive with that view, that the Christians would be here for the tribulation. One of the things is that if you look at the passages in the Bible about the rapture of the church, and you look at the passages in the Bible about the actual coming of Christ in judgment on the world, the events described are not identical. I mean, like, if you read about the rapture, you read about the trump of God sounding, you read of the voice of the archangel, you read of our transformation from mortal to immortal, you read of our being caught up in the air.

I mean, the rapture passages make no reference to God judging the wicked or any of that, or setting up his millennial kingdom, and therefore, since you have differences in detail in these passages, it seems they're describing different events. Passages about the rapture, such as John 14, 1-4, 1 Corinthians 15, 51-58, 1 Thessalonians 4, 13-18, do not contain the same details as do those about the judgment coming of Christ. For example, Zechariah 14, Revelation 19, Matthew 24, 29-31 in the parallels.

And so the two cannot be speaking of the same event. We actually have two classes of scriptures, those that describe the rapture, those that describe the judgment coming of Christ, and the details are not identical, so they must not be the same event. According to Tim LaHaye, he says, these two episodes, the rapture and the second coming, are so different that it is impossible to combine them.

Paul Feinberg, quoted a moment ago on another point, said, There is no clear, indisputable reference to the rapture in any Second Advent passage. John Walvoord says, No passage dealing with the resurrection of saints at the second coming in either testament ever mentions translation of living saints at the same time. So the argument here is that there is a profound difference in the actual character of the passages that describe the rapture, and the character and detail of the passages that describe the judgment coming of Christ, almost certainly a proof that they are not the same event.

It would be, as it were, impossible for those two passages to be conjoined to one event. That's why it's an argument for the impossibility. Here's another argument from the same category, and that is that in 1 Thessalonians 3.13, and by the way, a few other places in the scripture too, including some Old Testament passages, it is said that when Jesus comes, he comes with his saints, with ten thousands of his saints, with all his saints and so forth.

When Jesus comes back, in other words, he will not be coming alone. The saints, the church, will be with him. It says in 1 Thessalonians 3.13, So that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus

Christ with all his saints.

Now, here's a very important thing to notice. You might not be thinking clearly enough to notice this without being pointed out, but there is a coming of Jesus to earth with his saints. Now, is it not only logical to assume that if he is going to come back with his saints, they must have prior to this gone to be with him? Doesn't it follow that there must be a coming of Christ for the saints before there can be a coming of Christ with the saints? This coming of Christ for the saints is the rapture.

And this happens prior to the second coming by some distance. Pre-tribulations believe seven years. And so, seven years before Jesus comes back with his saints, he must have first come for the saints.

And it's just a matter of simple logic. He can't come with the saints unless they're with him first. He has to come for them so they can be with him, and he can then come back with them.

So, there must be two stages. There must be the stage of the second coming where he comes back for the saints and the stage where he comes back with the saints at a later time. Chuck Smith, again in his book, *The Church and the Tribulation*, he said, It is important to realize that the rapture of the church and the second coming of Jesus Christ are completely different.

At the rapture, Jesus is coming for his saints. At the second coming, the church will return with Jesus Christ. These prepositions you should pay close attention to because there's a difference between coming for the saints and coming with the saints.

All right? So, it would be impossible, in other words, for Jesus to come with the saints unless he first came for the saints. There's an argument of the impossibility of there being anything other than a preacher of rapture. Okay.

Or, by the way, a mid-tribulationist or pre-rapture person would possibly see the same thing, but they just believe that Jesus comes for the saints at some lesser interval than seven years from his coming with them. He comes for them maybe in the middle of the tribulation or before the wrath, but he comes back with them later on. Okay.

A third and very important argument. You know, if Revelation 3.10 was a cardinal passage on the preacher of rapture, this one is too. This one is of the same class in terms of its potency in proving the pre-tribulation rapture.

Would you look with me at 2 Thessalonians 2. 2 Thessalonians 2, the interest of Paul and his readers here is in the second coming of Christ. In verse 1 he says, Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to him, we ask you not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letters from us, as though the day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any

means, for that day will not come unless the falling away comes first and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God for all that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

This is a reference to the Antichrist coming up in the tribulation period, putting an image of himself in the Jewish temple, which the Jews will rebuild in preparation for the tribulation or perhaps in the tribulation probably. So the Antichrist will then put an image of himself in the temple, requiring everyone to worship him as God. And this is something that is very standard dispensational theology.

But Paul says in verse 5, Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? Now verses 6 through 8, very important, pay close attention. He says, And now you know what is restraining, that he, that is the man of sin, may be revealed in his own time. Something, Paul says, is restraining the man of sin from being revealed.

He says in verse 7, For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of his mouth and destroy with the brightness of his coming.

Now the Antichrist is going to rise during the tribulation, the seven year tribulation. And Paul says that he cannot rise at this present time because of what? Well there is something restraining him. There is something hindering.

The King James uses the older English word let, that which letteth will let. But the word let in English, old English, means the same thing as restrain in modern English. So these modern versions have made that clearer.

But what Paul is saying here is there is something, he does not identify it by name, but there is something restraining the rise of the man of sin. But he also says the time will come when that something will be removed. When that something will be taken out of the way, and the result will be that the man of sin rises to power.

Okay, now what do we do with this? Well, the church is no doubt, or the Holy Spirit in the church is no doubt, what hinders the rise of the Antichrist today. What other thing could do so? I mean the Antichrist is the embodiment of Satan himself. There is no power on earth, no earthly power, no human power, merely, or political, that could prevent his rise since Satan himself is incarnate in the man of sin.

And how could it be even thought for a moment that anything other than some supernatural agency could restrain him from rising. And yet Paul says there is such a supernatural agency, there is something restraining him, but that restraint will not always be here. That restraint will be taken away.

And when it is, then the man of sin can rise. Well, quite obviously, that which restrains him is the church, or the presence of the Holy Spirit in the church. You can see it either way.

After all, he calls the restrainer it, and he calls it he. He calls it that which restrains, and he calls it he when he is taken out of the way. So that could refer to the church, and he, a reference to the Holy Spirit who is in the church.

But the point is that the presence of the Holy Spirit embodied in the body of Christ is such a potent influence for righteousness in the world that the man of sin can never really come to full power, and never really manifest himself and deceive the whole world as long as the church is here. So Paul argues that the church must be removed before the man of sin can appear. Well, he appears during the tribulation.

Doesn't this demonstrate clearly that the church must go before the man of sin arises? In fact, it is impossible for the man of sin to rise while we are here, according to this scripture. And this is an argument for the pre-tribulation rapture, based on the impossibility of anything else being the case. You have to have the pre-trib rapture in order to satisfy the demands of this verse.

What's more, check this out. In verse 3, Paul says, Let no one deceive you, for that day will not come unless the falling away comes first. The word apostasia in the Greek, falling away, literally means a departure.

Now, departure? Of who? From where? To where? What departure does Paul have in mind? Well, there are many who believe that when Paul says this departure must occur first, he means nothing less than the rapture of the church, the departure of the church from the world. And so Paul says the man of sin cannot rise until the departure occurs, until that which is hindering is taken out of the way. I hope you can see how potent this argument is, and how this is truly a cardinal scripture in the defense of the pre-tribulation rapture.

I'd like to quote from John Waldward, if I could. He says, The Holy Spirit as the restrainer must be taken out of the world before the lawless one who dominates the tribulation period can be revealed. And he gives this scripture reference.

Continuing the quote, If the expression, except the falling away come first, be translated literally, except the departure come first, it would plainly show the necessity of the rapture taking place before the beginning of the tribulation. So this passage, very important passage. Okay, now there's another argument from this basic category of impossibility.

And this would be the impossibility of God actually sending the tribulation while we're still here. Jesus, in Luke 17, and maybe we should look there, because that would be an

important thing for us to see his actual words here. He likened the days of his coming to the days of Noah, and also to the days of Lot.

In Luke 17, verses 26 through 29, Jesus said, And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will also be in the days of the Son of Man. They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise, as it was also in the days of Lot.

They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built. But on the day that Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed.

Now, here we have the last days compared to the days of Noah and the days of Lot. In particular, there is reference to the deliverance of the righteous persons before God sent his wrath. Before the flood came, Noah and his family were safely taken into the ark.

Before God set fire and brimstone on Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot was safely taken out of that city. In fact, there is an interesting point additional to this. If we are thinking of the flood as a picture of the tribulation period, we do have Noah's family saved in the midst of the flood in the ark, but they represent the Jewish remnant who will be saved in the middle of the tribulation.

But there is another interesting fact. If you go back to Genesis chapter 5, before the flood there was a man named Enoch who walked with God and he did not die. He walked with God and was not, he was taken into heaven without death.

Isn't that very much like the rapture of the church? And so you find in Genesis, although Jesus does not bring up the point about Enoch, yet if we look at the general time likeness that Jesus makes to the days of Noah and so forth, we find that Enoch was, as it were, raptured before the flood as a picture of the church that will be raptured before the tribulation. Now Noah and his family then represent the Jewish remnant who are saved in the midst of the tribulation because they did not go to heaven before the flood, but they were saved nonetheless through it in the ark. And so also in the tribulation there will be saints who will be saved, although they won't be in the church, they will have missed the rapture, but they will nonetheless be saved.

And they are represented by Noah. Now Lot is another instance. And here is an interesting point about Lot, because Jesus indicated that the fire and brimstone came down on Sodom and Gomorrah the day that Lot left Sodom.

Lot got away. Lot escaped. He left the place that was under God's wrath, and as soon as he was out of there, the wrath fell.

Jesus said that's going to be similar to his own time of his coming, and therefore we can, I think, suggest that the church, like Lot, will be taken out of the world before the wrath

of God in the tribulation period is poured out on the world as God poured out wrath on Sodom and Gomorrah. Now what's more, if you would look at Genesis 19, which is actually the story of Lot and his escape from Sodom, there's something very interesting that God says in this connection. Lot is told he has to leave Sodom, and he's not in any hurry apparently, he's lingering, and the time is getting nearer and the danger is imminent, and so the angel of God, speaking for God, urges him to hurry up and get out of there.

And notice what God actually says to him in verses 21 and 22. Genesis 19, 21 and 22. The angel said to Lot, See, I have favored you concerning this thing also, in that I will not overthrow this city, the place that Lot would have escaped to, for which you have spoken.

Hurry, escape there, for I cannot do anything until you arrive there. Notice God could not judge Sodom. God could not do anything until Lot was in a place of safety.

Doesn't this prove that God cannot send the tribulation before the church has been taken to a place of safety? If Lot is a picture of the church, the destruction of Sodom or a picture of the wrath of God in the tribulation period, Jesus said it's going to be like that in the end times. These things seem to conspire together to prove the point, do they not? That the church must be raptured before the tribulation. I have quotes from eminent authorities on this.

John Walvoord says this, It is characteristic of divine dealing to deliver believers before a divine judgment, as illustrated in the deliverance of Noah, Lot, Rahab, etc. And of course, he goes on to make the point, Therefore, it's in keeping with the character of God generally to also deliver the church before the time of great judgment called the tribulation period. Another quote, this comes from Chuck Smith, and he says, In Luke 17, when Jesus makes reference to Lot's escape, Jesus clearly points out that in the same hour Lot was brought out of the city, the judgment of God fell.

And he goes on, of course, to point out how similar that is to the rapture before the tribulation. I sat, of course, for many years under Chuck Smith's teaching on this, and he might have mentioned this in his book, but I don't remember now, but I do remember very distinctly him pointing out that in Genesis 18, when God is talking to Abraham, before the angels come to Sodom, and tell Lot he has to get out of there, when God is speaking to Abraham, he's talking to him about the fact that he's going to go visit Sodom, and of course it's implied he's going to destroy Sodom. And Abraham is concerned because he knows there's some righteous people in Sodom.

And he says, Abraham argues with God about this, and in verse 25 of Genesis 18, Genesis 18, verse 25, Abraham says to God, Far be it from you to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked. Far be it from you, shall not the judge of all the earth do right? Now, the point here is that

even Abraham, in his unsophisticated days, without even a Bible to tell him, so he knew instinctively that God must be a just God. The judge of all the earth must do right.

And yet he also knew it would be quite wrong to make no distinction between the righteous and the unrighteous. It would be quite wrong to send a general destruction of judgment and wrath when there were people in the city who didn't deserve that. And, of course, what Abraham is implying is that God must either spare the city for the sake of the righteous, which is what Abraham went on to ask for, or at least to get the righteous out of there before the judgment falls, which is what God ended up doing.

But it's interesting that the post-tribulationists, who think that the church is going to be here during the tribulation to receive God's wrath and so forth, they impugned the justice of God. Even Abraham knew better than that, because the God who is the judge of all the earth must do right. He cannot punish and slay the righteous with the wicked and be just.

Therefore, this picture of Lot and Sodom and so forth is a wealthy source of images and statements that can help us appreciate the necessity of the pre-tribulation rapture. There is another argument on this matter of the impossibility of anything other than a pre-trib rapture happening. And this one, I used to hear Chuck say a lot, although I don't have a quote from him on this.

I have a quote from Tim LaHaye. But the idea is that in Titus 2 and verse 13, Paul said that we are looking for the blessed hope and the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. The blessed hope.

The rapture of the church is what we are looking forward to and Paul calls that the blessed hope. Now consider this for a moment. Either the rapture is going to help us escape from the tribulation, or else if the rapture comes too late, it will not allow us to escape the tribulation.

If the rapture comes at the end of the tribulation, then we have to go through that tribulation. Just think about it. Would that be very blessed? Paul says the rapture is the blessed hope.

But the only rapture doctrine that could be a blessed hope is the hope that it is before the tribulation. Because if our hope is that we are going to go through the tribulation and then be raptured, how can anyone call that a blessed hope? What could be blessed about the anticipation of going through the great tribulation? Therefore, the very fact that Paul calls it the blessed hope means that there is some blessing in it. There is some positive optimism about it.

That missing the tribulation is the only thing that could make it particularly a blessing. If we have to go through the tribulation, that would be no blessing at all. Many, many

dispensationalists have confirmed that this argument is valid.

One of them, Tim LaHaye, has put it in his words in his book, *No Fear of the Storm*. He said, quote, It would take a masochist to look forward to the tribulation as a time of blessing. If Christ does not rapture his church before the tribulation begins, much of the hope is destroyed, and thus it becomes a blasted hope, unquote.

Not a blessed hope. It's a blasted hope. Because, I mean, it would take a masochist, he says, to see the tribulation as a blessing.

Gosh, how could anyone disagree with that? Who would see great tribulation as a blessing? Only a masochist. I have to agree with Mr. LaHaye on that point. And I think any person who thinks reasonably would have to agree with the logic of his statement.

Okay, now let's go to the final page of these notes. And we have then four remaining arguments. We've gone through 15 already.

And we have four remaining arguments. And these we will call the arguments from imminency. And that is the doctrine that Jesus could come at any moment.

And, of course, if you don't think that Jesus could come at any moment, then you don't hold to the doctrine of imminency. The doctrine of imminency does not teach that Jesus will come now, or that his coming is necessarily immediate. But it does say that nothing necessarily has to happen between now and then, so that it could happen any moment.

This doctrine is central to our view of the second coming of Christ. And if you'll just pause for a moment to reflect on this, you'll see that only the pre-tribulation rapture really can preserve the doctrine of imminency. Why? Because if you believe in a mid-trib rapture, or a pre-wrath rapture, or a post-trib rapture, what have you got? You've got a rapture that comes after some other things which have not yet happened.

In other words, the tribulation hasn't even started yet. And if the rapture doesn't happen until the middle, or three-quarter point, or the end of the tribulation, that means the rapture can't happen right now. That Jesus can't come back at any moment.

There has to be first the events of at least the first part of the tribulation before Jesus could come back. Only if we suggest that the rapture comes before the tribulation can we maintain the doctrine that Jesus might yet come at any moment. You must have a pre-trib view.

Or else all these other views, mid-trib, pre-wrath, post-trib view, they all indicate that some other things must happen first. Part of the tribulation, or the entirety of the tribulation must happen first. And therefore you lose your doctrine of imminency.

So this is the concern. Here's an argument. The Bible says, and I give you in the notes

several passages about it to confirm this, the Bible says we're to be looking for, watching for, and waiting for the any moment return of Jesus.

Passages like 1 Thessalonians 1.10, or 1 Thessalonians 5.6, or Philippians 3.20, or Titus 2.13, or Hebrews 9.28. All of these things say that we are looking for, or waiting for, or watching for the coming of the Lord. Now the doctrine of the imminency of Christ's coming, that he might come at any moment, would be invalid if there were events like the tribulation that must occur before Christ returns. If you are looking for something, or waiting for something, does it not follow that you expect it at any moment? Well, John Walbert says on this point, the exhortation to look for the glorious period of Christ to his own, in Titus 2.13, loses significance.

If the tribulation must intervene first, the church is uniformly exhorted to look for the coming of the Lord, while believers in the tribulation are directed to look for signs. That is, the church is not to look for signs, but to look for the coming of the Lord immediately without further signs. But in the tribulation, people who become believers, they are to look for signs of the end of the tribulation, signs of the coming in judgment of the Lord, says John Walbert.

Chuck Smith, in his book, *The Tribulation of the Church*, says, to put any event before the coming of Christ for his church is, in essence, saying that the Lord will delay his coming until after that event has happened. Teaching this is very dangerous, and Jesus himself warns against it. What is he referring to? Look quickly with me, because we have very little time, but here's a very frightening passage that seems to indicate that if you don't believe in a pre-tribulation rapture, you are in big trouble with God.

Look at Matthew 24. In Matthew 24, Jesus, of course, has the Olivet Discourse and the prediction of his coming and all that, and he says, in verse 45 and following, through verse 51, Matthew 24, verses 45 through 51, Jesus says, Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household to give them food in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. Assuredly, I say to you, that he will make him ruler over all his goods.

But if that evil servant says in his heart, My master is delaying his coming, and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him, and at an hour that he is not aware of, and will cut him in two, and appoint him as portion with the hypocrites. Therefore, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Now, what does this say? If one of Christ's servants begins to say, My Lord delays his coming, then when the Lord comes, it will take him by surprise, and what will his fate be? He'll be cut in two, he'll be given his portion along with the hypocrites, there'll be gnashing of teeth and weeping.

This servant is in deep doo-doo, this person is in serious problems in terms of his salvation, he's lost. And what is his crime? He said, My Lord delays his coming. Now think

about it.

Doesn't this mean that the servant was denying the doctrine of imminency? He did not believe that his Lord might come at any time. He believed there would be a delay, that there would be intervening events. He did not believe in any moment coming of his master.

Therefore, he got into serious trouble, you see. Now, if a person believes in a mid-trib rapture, a pre-wrath rapture, or especially a post-trib rapture, what are they saying? They're saying, My Lord delays his coming, because they know he can't come right now, the tribulation hasn't started yet. Those events of the early part of the tribulation have to happen first.

So, if you believe in a post-trib rapture or a mid-trib rapture, you're saying, My Lord delays his coming. And you ought to know better than that if you read this passage. Because the servant who says that, he gets the weeping and gnashing of teeth and gets cut in two.

That is not a very favorable prospect. And certainly it is, as Chuck says, teaching this, that the Lord is delaying his coming. Teaching this is very dangerous, and Jesus himself warns against it.

Okay, well, that's certainly something to consider. Okay, here's a second argument from the imminency. And that is that Jesus said, and so did the apostles, that the coming of the Lord will be like a thief in the night.

In the same passage, Matthew 24, verses 43 and 44, he says, But know this, that if the master of the house had known at what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed the house to be broken into. Therefore, you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not expect it. Jesus likened his second coming to that of a thief coming at an unexpected time.

Well, Paul and Peter also refer to the coming of the Lord as a thief. In 1 Thessalonians 5, verses 2 and 3, and also in 2 Peter 3.10, both Peter and Paul refer to the coming of the Lord being like a thief in the night. Now, what this would mean, of course, is that you have to be prepared, because he'll come like a thief without warning.

There are no signs that will indicate that it's going to be tonight. The thief does not phone ahead and say, By the way, are you going to be available? I'm going to be coming to break into your house tonight. And I'm coming at three in the morning.

He doesn't do that. He comes unannounced, unexpected, and therefore, no one can ever be quite sure that he won't come at any given time. And Jesus' coming is going to be like that, like a thief.

He might come at any unexpected moment. And we have to be ready at any moment for his coming. This could only be true, of course, if there's a pre-trib rapture, because otherwise, if there's not a pre-trib rapture, then he can't come right now.

He can't come at any time, and we'd have ample warning of his coming by simply seeing the events of the tribulation unfold around us. John Walvoord, on this point, says, The rapture is described as imminent, while the second coming is preceded by definite signs. A third argument based on the imminence doctrine is that Jesus said in Matthew 24, 36, and we're still working the same chapter, Matthew 24, moving further back.

In verse 36, Jesus said, But of that day and hour, no one knows, no, not even the angels of heaven, but my Father only. Now, here's the deal. Jesus indicated that his coming for his saints, no one knows or could know the day or the hour of that.

Yet, if you think about it a moment, Daniel and Revelation both tell us certain things, that from the rise of the Antichrist, there will be, what, 1,260 days. And that will bring you to the end of the tribulation, obviously the second coming of Christ. Does it not follow that if we were to be here in the tribulation, and if we were to see the rise of the man of sin, that we could calculate 1,260 days from there and know the exact day of the second coming? Therefore, when Jesus says, no one knows the day or the hour, he must not be referring to the judgment coming, because that could be calculated in the midst of the tribulation.

You could calculate how many days are left before the Lord comes back. But he must be talking about the rapture, and he must be talking about the rapture as something separate from the coming of the Lord at the end of the tribulation, which could be calculated. The rapture cannot.

He will come at an hour when you don't expect, as a thief in the night, no one knows the day or the hour. If we were to expect him at the end of the tribulation, then it could not be said that no one knows the day or the hour, right? Because you could know at least the day. Chuck Smith confirms this.

He says, quote, the Bible says that no man knows the day or the hour. This cannot refer to the day Christ returns to reign on earth, because that exact day has been given to us in Daniel's prophecy. So, obviously, it must refer to the rapture, as opposed to the judgment coming of Christ when he comes to reign on the earth.

Okay, there's one other argument based on the imminency, the necessity of an imminency doctrine. And that is simply this, that the doctrine that Jesus might come and rapture the church at any moment provides the church with very important and essential incentives to, first of all, to live right, and secondly, to evangelize others. Because if Jesus might come at any moment, we don't have the luxury of taking any chances.

If Jesus might rapture the church at any moment, and that can only happen if it's a pre-trib rapture, we're told, then we just can't take any chances. If he might come before I'm finished with this sentence, or later today, or tonight, then we would certainly be embarrassed if that coming caught us unexpectedly and we were involved in some compromise. Therefore, any moment, the period of Christ, provides a necessary incentive for holy living and for just keeping our lives obedient to God.

And additionally, of course, history has shown that those who believe in any moment coming of Christ, they're evangelistic. Strong incentive for reaching people. Because we know their time is short.

We know that their opportunities may end at any moment. It provides a sense of urgency and evangelism. Now, can anyone deny that incentives for holy living and urgency and evangelism, can anyone deny that those are good things? Very important things.

We need those in our life. We need that incentive. We need that motivation.

And the pre-tribulation rapture provides that incentive and that motivation. The doctrine of the imminency that Jesus can come and rapture the church at any moment, even though the tribulation has not yet begun, is that which generates this excitement, this urgency, this passion to stay on the path and to live a holy life. By the way, it also provides a very good evangelistic tool.

Because in a meeting where you're evangelizing a group of people, you can always tell them that they might miss the rapture. If they don't accept Christ at this particular altar call, the rapture might happen later tonight and they'd have to be here to face the tribulation. They'd have to go through and face the Antichrist and take the mark of the beast and go to hell, or else have their head lopped off for not taking the mark of the beast.

So, I mean, who would want that? That makes a very, very good scare tactic, as it were, to motivate people to say yes now to an altar call rather than wait. And this is, by the way, a device that has been used to very good effect. The Jesus Movement itself was one of the greatest harvests of souls that I think has occurred in the second half of the 20th century.

Thousands and thousands of people in a very short time came forward and responded to altar calls. Many of these people are still saved. But that harvest could hardly have been made possible had not the preaching of that movement been so predominantly an emphasis on the immediate coming of Christ.

People came in droves forward because it was preached that the rapture might happen at any moment. Of course, some of these people are not saved anymore. One of the

reasons might be because the rapture didn't come.

It's now 25 years have passed. But nonetheless, it was very good at getting them to come forward. And this is something the Church can hardly spare.

We cannot do without these motivators. Tim LaHaye states it about as well as anybody does in his book, *No Fear of the Storm*. He says, quote, Historically, belief in the any moment coming of Christ has three vital effects on Christians and their churches.

One, by the way, I only list two. I think the third one was sort of like one of the others, so I didn't list all three, and I didn't have much room on my page. But he said three vital effects.

But here's two of them. One, it produces holy living in an unholy society like ours. First, John 3.3 says, Whosoever has this hope in him purifies himself, even as he is pure.

And number two, he says, It produces an evangelistic church of soul winning Christians. For when we believe Christ could appear at any moment, we seek to share him with our friends, lest they be left behind at his coming. Unquote.

He means, of course, at the rapture coming, not the actual second coming. So I seriously doubt if there's any doctrine that you hold to for which such a large number of biblical arguments could be marshaled in its support. Would we not be correct, perhaps, in saying that our belief in a pre-tribulation rapture has more arguments in its favor than most beliefs that we hold? I have laid out for you 19 cogent arguments, each one based on Scripture, proving that the book of Revelation teaches a pre-tribulation rapture, that it would be altogether inappropriate for God to have the church here during the tribulation, which is the time of his wrath on the wicked, and therefore suggesting strongly a pre-tribulation rapture.

There are arguments that we looked at that showed that it's absolutely impossible for certain statements of Scripture to be reconciled unless there is a pre-tribulation rapture. And finally we saw that only the doctrine of the pre-tribulation rapture really allows us to hold to the doctrine of the imminency of the second coming of Christ. And this doctrine is a major concern and needs to be maintained at all costs, if not for other reasons.

Just for the value it provides the church, in terms of incentive and motivation and urgency to do the will of God and to live a life pleasing to him and to reach others with the same urgent message. And so we now come to the end of our session and we've covered pretty much the arguments. I don't believe, I'm going to snap back into my real self now, I personally don't believe that you'll ever find additional arguments to these in favor of the pre-tribulation rapture.

If you do, it'll be rare, because I read the best books by the best advocates of it and I have done my best to comb through and gain every argument available for the pre-

tribulation rapture, and I think they're all here. If there are any others that you hear, they will be of the same type, that is they will be another way of arguing for the imminency or another way of arguing for the inappropriateness of the church being here, or another way of arguing that it's another wrinkle on some passage in Revelation or something. But essentially these are them, these are the arguments, and I have presented them to you as convincingly as I know how.

Of course you know I don't believe that they prove the point and therefore you probably, even if you didn't know why these arguments didn't convince me, you already know they didn't or don't, they did once, but they don't now. And therefore if you don't know how to answer these arguments, you might be thinking, I wonder what he's going to say about that, I wonder why he doesn't believe that. Well, I'll talk to you about that at the beginning of the next session, and we will go through each of these arguments, not so thoroughly, but we will look at them again and I will make my comments.

Now of course you have on your notes essentially my responses, I hope you have not been cheating and looking ahead, but we will in the next session go over and look at these scriptures again and discuss their actual relevance to the question of the pre-trib rapture. Thank you.