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The rapture is come!

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Not everyone is afraid of the coming millennium. In my hometown, it's not unusual to see a bumper sticker announcing, "In case of rapture, this vehicle will be unmanned." There are quite a few devout Christians who anticipate the coming of Jesus to be the true millennial event, regardless of the year. This is a cause for their rejoicing, and is looked forward to with eager anticipation.

The word *rapture* refers to a transporting of someone from one place to another, especially to heaven. It is used specifically to refer to Jesus' prophecy as told in Matthew, chapter 24 and Luke, chapter 17. Put simply in Matthew: "So shall also the coming of the Son of man be. Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Watch therefore: for ye know not that hour your Lord doth come." ¹ Many faithful Christians believe the Bible is prophesying that when Jesus comes again to earth, those who are saved will be transported to heaven without passing through the experience of death, just as Jesus ascended. Those who are not saved will be left behind.

While this scripture appeals to some, it seems improbable to others, who resist the message that some are chosen and others are not. No one wants to think he or she would be left at the mill (or the mall). Others have so accepted the inevitability of death for the body that it seems fanciful to consider that we could actually ascend as Jesus did. The caveat that this translation will occur with the coming of the Son of man has caused Christians either to expect rapture on a certain date or to ignore it as religious superstition and irrelevant to their lives. Those seeking a spiritual meaning of the Scriptures should do neither.

The concept of rapture actually blends the two events: the second coming of Jesus and the translation of those saved into the kingdom of heaven.

The second coming

I have so appreciated the spiritual light that Christian Science shines on the concept

of the second coming. Jesus was sent by God to illustrate the way of salvation to mankind. He came to show how it is possible for mankind to be free of sin, sickness, and death through Christ, the healing and saving power of God. As Mary Baker Eddy writes, "Jesus demonstrated Christ" ² He proved Christ to be his divine nature.

While Jesus ascended above human apprehension, the Christ remains present with us on earth. Christ is present today, always available to heal the hurts of the world. Christ never left. Christ is and always has been present, so the second coming is actually something we experience individually in consciousness as we open our hearts to receive Christ.

During his ministry, Jesus promised that he would come again. In one sense, Jesus returned in the flesh when he resurrected from the grave. He appeared in bodily form to the apostles, to the faithful women followers, to two disciples on the road to Emmaus, and to about five hundred disciples.³ Jesus had promised before the crucifixion that he would come again to them. And he did. The question is, to what is Jesus referring when he says, "So shall also the coming of the Son of man be" in Matthew, chapter 24? Isn't this the coming of the Comforter? The Comforter is the Holy Spirit or spirit of Truth. It is the pouring out of the spirit of understanding. When Jesus prophesied that he would leave permanently, he promised to send a Comforter. "It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you."⁴ He assured the disciples that this Comforter would never leave them. "And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever."⁵

This perspective illumines what is written in Acts, chapter 1: "And when he [Jesus] had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven."⁶

The disciples witnessed Jesus' ascension above physicality. Jesus proved through his life, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension that man as the son of God has dominion over matter and material conditions. Jesus' ascension illuminated the powerlessness, even the nothingness, of material laws or conditions before the allness of Spirit. With the ascension, matter was proved unnecessary and impotent

to define life. Of the ascension, the Gospel of Mark states, “So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God.”⁷ (*Right hand* in the Bible signifies spiritual power.) Jesus received the complete consciousness of harmony, heaven. He rested in the perfect understanding of spiritual power, which is sitting on the right hand of God. This spiritual status was permanent, his reward for being so faithful.

How could Jesus return to a condition of physicality, of matter, after demonstrating the nothingness of material conditions? Might not the phrase “shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go” refer, not to a reversal of the ascension, but to a continuation of the demonstration of divine power over material limitations? Rather than thinking materially and assuming that Jesus would receive the Comforter, an influx of the same spiritual understanding that uplifted Jesus? The appearing of spiritual understanding was to be as tangible to the disciples as the human Jesus had been.

Was this prophecy fulfilled? Yes. On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Ghost, of spirit of Truth, descended upon the disciples and remained with them.⁸ From this point onward, the disciples preached and practiced Christian healing with an increased sense of divine authority. The Comforter was the Holy Ghost, which taught them all things spiritually.

The Apostle Peter summarized the relation of Jesus to the Comforter or Holy Ghost in a speech given in Acts, chapter 2: “This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.”⁹ The New King James Version translated this last phrase, “He poured out this which you now see and hear.” The disciples recognized the pouring out of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost as that which was prophesied at Jesus; ascension.

Mary Baker Eddy recognized the Holy Ghost as the Comforter that Jesus had promised. In fact, in the second tenet of Christian Science, she states: “We acknowledge and adore one supreme and infinite God. We acknowledge His Son, one Christ; the Holy Ghost or divine Comforter; and man in God’s image and likeness.”¹⁰ She also identifies the second appearing as a spiritual rather than a material event. “The second appearing of Jesus is, unquestionably, the spiritual advent of the advancing idea of God, as in Christian Science.”¹¹ Not in any denominational sense but in a universal sense, Mrs. Eddy equated the Comforter and the second appearing with Christian Science. She saw the Comforter in this

age as Divine Science, or absolute Truth.

How could the Comforter come to the disciples at the day of Pentecost and come again in this age? The coming of the Comforter is a spiritual unfoldment rather than a physical event. The Comforter is entirely spiritual, unlimited by time and space. Those who are advancing spiritually in all ages have been receptive and experienced something of the coming of the Comforter. Mrs. Eddy received the Comforter in 1866 and experienced an influx of spiritual understanding that healed her physically and rejuvenated her spiritually. Unlike those before her, she perceived that the coming of the Holy Ghost was more than just a profound personal experience; it was the revelation of universal, absolute Truth. This perception led to her discovery of Christian Science, or the law of God, defining and governing the universe.

Translation

How does this relate to the rapture-one being taken and the other being left in the field or grinding at the mill? The word *rapture* is not actually used in the King James Bible. Instead, the Biblical term is *translated*. In Matthew, Jesus was prophesying a spiritual translation rather than a physical one. A Bible software study resource, drawing on a number of reference works, gives two definitions that are helpful in understanding the Greek word rendered “shall be taken.” The word can mean “to receive near,” and it can also mean figuratively “to receive with the mind.” The word of “one left” means “the one let alone or disregarded.” Isn’t it possible that, rather than referring to a sudden disappearance from earth, Jesus was prophesying that those in all ages who are spiritually-minded would be receptive of the Comforter and receive the influx of spiritual understanding, which would lift them above matter to a more spiritual consciousness? The materially-minded, however, would not perceive, that is, would disregard, the Comforter and be left in the darkness of material ignorance.

This more spiritual sense of the rapture relates to the Biblical concept of translation used primarily by Paul. In Colossians, Paul writes, “[The Father] hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.”¹² Also, the book of Hebrews speaks of Enoch, who ascended, as having been translated.¹³ Receptivity to the spiritual understanding of being results in this transformation, or translation from matter to Spirit.

In her writings, Mrs. Eddy addressed this concept of translation directly. Responding to the question “Do you believe in translation?” she writes, “If you

refer to the removal of a person to heaven, without his subjection to death,... I believe in this removal being possible after all the footsteps requisite have been taken up to the very throne, up to the spiritual sense and fact of divine substance, intelligence, Life and Love. This translation is not the work of moments; it requires both time and eternity. It means more than mere disappearance to the human sense; it must include also man's changed appearance and diviner form visible to those beholding him here."¹⁴ In her book *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, Mrs. Eddy more fully explains the demands for spiritual growth she mentions in this brief commentary.

All the means for this translation, or the rapture, are already present. The Christ is here. The Comforter is come. We need not wait patiently for some future time or place in which to demonstrate our eternal salvation, or translation. Death is not a necessary precursor to eternal life. Christ Jesus has shown us the way to eternal life by the translation of mortal mind and body through an influx of spiritual understanding.

The spiritual sense of rapture is oneness with God. Uplifted from a material sense of existence, we perceive and demonstrate Life as purely spiritual. This is the original and ultimate state of being, when man is seen as God's own child, made entirely in His image and likeness. Discovering this is becoming enraptured now. As a beloved hymn says,

O, happy servant he,
In watchful service found;
He shall his Lord with rapture see,
And be with honor crowned.¹⁵

¹ Matt. 24:39-42. ² Science and Health, p. 332. ³ See, for example, John, chap. 21, Matt. 28:5-9, Luke 24:13-31, and I Cor. 15:5-7. ⁴ John 16:7. ⁵ John 14:16. ⁶ Acts 1:9-11. ⁷ Mark 16:19. ⁸ See Acts, chap.1. ⁹ Acts 2:32, 33. ¹⁰ Science and Health, p. 497. ¹¹ Retrospection and Introspection, p. 70. ¹² Col. 1:13. ¹³ See Heb. 11:5. ¹⁴ Miscellaneous Writings,, pp. 67-68. ¹⁵ Christian Science Hymnal, No. 398.