**CLOUD WATCHING**

***Looking For Christ’s Return***

While by no stretch of the imagination am I a meteorologist or astronomer, I am an amateur cloud watcher. As a kid I loved to lay on my back and stare at the passing clouds, imagining what things I could see in each formation. With my vivid imagination I “saw” all manner of people and things. Did you do this too? If so, what did you see?

One day in my high school Bible class we were studying the book of Acts. I can’t remember the exact question in our workbook but it had to do with Acts 1:9-11. That text says this fascinating fact about Jesus’ ascension into heaven, and His return,

*Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and* ***a cloud received Him out of their sight****. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.”*

What? Jesus was transported to heaven in a cloud? Not only that but He is coming again in a cloud? Wow! Did that ever change my cloud-watching routine! From that day until now I have been searching the skies for clouds that might bring Jesus back to gather His people. As I point to a cloud I say, “Is He in that one? Or in that one? Or…”

Paul reminds us of this fact in these words,

*For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them* ***in the clouds*** *to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.* - I Thess. 4:16-17

John gets in on the act when he gives us a photograph of what it will look like when Jesus comes again,

*Behold,* ***He is coming with clouds****, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen.*– Rev. 1:7

If we combine all of these verses we will hopefully be motivated to become cloud-watchers. 1) He was taken up in a cloud. 2) He is coming back in a cloud. 3) God’s people will be *caught up* into the clouds. 4) Every eye will see Him coming with clouds.

All of us should be constantly looking up, wondering, searching, waiting to see our Savior coming for us. After studying these scriptures I would think every Christian would become an amateur cloud-watcher.

I have a Christian brother who calls himself an amateur astronomer. He has not one, but two, powerful telescopes. At our summer camp a few of us run each year we used to ask him to bring his equipment and set it up in an open field late at night in order to allow all the kids to star-gaze. He could tell you just about every fact you would ever want to know (or not know) about the stars. He knew their names, distances from earth, size, surface temperature, etc. etc. etc. He would train his scope on a planet, star or galaxy and allow us to explore the heavens. After those summers with Nathaniel I have ever since read Psalm 19:1 with more clarity: “*The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows His handiwork*.” Nathaniel taught us to “look up” and see more than just stars and planets, he taught us to look for God’s fingerprint.

In the same way that my brother was an amateur astronomer, I have wanted to become an amateur cloud-gazer. When people ask me how I am doing I usually give all kinds of silly answers (“gooder’n grits” – “finer’n frog hairs” – “almost in heaven”…), but one that I like to say also is “I’m on Cloud 9.” Do you know what that means? In the world of clouds there are various types. There are cirrus, stratus, cumulus, nimbus and a combination of each (cirrostratus, stratocumulus, cumulonimbus, etc). While this might not be technically correct, the idea of being “*on cloud nine*” is to be emotionally elevated to the highest clouds in the atmosphere. The International Cloud Atlas classifies clouds and says there are ten types, with cloud nine being the cumulonimbus, which can tower upwards to 52,000 feet (almost 10 miles!). To be on cloud nine is to be feeling euphoric. From a Christian’s viewpoint that means I feel close to God.

Paul was “*caught up*” to the “third heaven.” He then added this, “*I was* *caught up* *into Paradise*” to hear inexpressible words not lawful for man to utter (2 Cor. 12:2-4). That phrase “*caught up*” comes from the Greek *HARPAZO*, defined as “to seize, carry off by force, to snatch away.” Paul was suddenly seized by God and carried rapidly to the “*third heaven*” – the Jewish phrase for where God dwells (first heaven = our atmosphere; second heaven = outer space; third heaven = spiritual realm of deity). There he saw and heard things he was not authorized to talk about.

What Paul saw and heard we will one day see and hear. When Jesus returns we are going to be “*caught up*” (*HARPAZO*) “*in the clouds*” to meet the Lord in the air (I Thess. 4:17). He is going to rescue us (“to snatch away”) from this broken sinful world and allow us to “*ever be with the Lord*.”

I’ll tell you something, that gets me pumped up! Just picture our Lord as He comes hurdling down from the clouds to rapture us (the Latin translation of I Thess. 4:17 uses ***rapturo*** for the Greek word *HARPAZO*, signifying a raptor hawk or eagle snatching its prey).

So today, as I cloud-watch, I no longer see alligators, gorillas, or Noah’s ark, I see Jesus coming to take me home. Until then I’m practicing my singing:

Some glad [morning](https://www.definitions.net/definition/morning) when this life is o'er I'll fly away, To a home on God's [celestial](https://www.definitions.net/definition/celestial) shore, I'll fly away.
When the [shadows](https://www.definitions.net/definition/shadows) of this life have flown I'll fly away, Like a bird from [prison](https://www.definitions.net/definition/prison) bars has flown, I'll fly away.
Just a few more [weary](https://www.definitions.net/definition/weary) days and then, I'll fly away, To a land [where](https://www.definitions.net/definition/where) joy [shall](https://www.definitions.net/definition/shall) never end, I’ll fly away.
*Chorus*: I'll fly away, oh [Glory](https://www.definitions.net/definition/Glory), I'll fly away when I die, Hallelujah by and by I'll fly away.

I love you. – Rick