

# Already Among You

*What we believe about the rapture & the end of the world.*

*by Pastor Caleb*

The Bible never once speaks about the **end of the world**. And the destruction of the earth in the Book of Revelation is typical of highly-symbolic apocalyptic literature.

The Bible *\*does\** speak about the **end of this age**, though. By “this age,” it means the earth as currently ruled by sinful humans – it’s the former world – the old order. “The age to come,” means the age when God returns to ruling directly over the earth – a *renewed* heaven and a *renewed* earth.

United Methodists recognize that this reign of God is both a present and future reality.

John Wesley once wrote, “*The kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God are two phrases meaning the same thing. They do not mean simply a future happy state in heaven, but a state to be enjoyed right here on earth.*”

We affirm with the early Christians that God’s kingdom *\*has come\** to earth with Jesus.

Jesus Himself said, “*God’s kingdom isn’t coming with signs that are easily noticed. Nor will people say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘Look, there it goes!’ God’s kingdom is already among you*” (Luke 17:20-21).

We believe that wherever God’s will is done, the kingdom or reign of God is alive and well and active in the world. Our *Book of Discipline* says, “*Wherever persons are being made new creatures in Christ, God’s reign is already effective in its healing and renewing power.*”

Yet we still pray, “*Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*” We are still anticipating the fulfillment of this kingdom – the end of “this age.” In Latin, it’s called God’s *Parousia* – meaning, God’s Goal.

This is where history is headed. And this new kingdom will not look like business as usual! The values and systems of this world will be turned on its head. This New Age is a good thing.

Therefore, we do not believe that the history of the world will just end one day, as the *Left Behind* series would have us assume is *the* biblical forecast.

“This age” and “the age to come” are currently overlapping. What we call the “Second Coming” of Jesus is the end of that overlap. This new age also doesn’t take place *only* in heaven or on another planet. (*Trust me, do you think God would trust us again on another planet?*) The action takes place *here*.

One of my dear members at my first appointment in Illinois had an “*aha!*” moment during one of our Bible studies. We were studying the Book of Revelation:

*“I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, [and settling upon the earth.] And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘See, the home of God is among mortals. God will dwell with them now!’”* (Revelation 21:2-3).

She gasped and said, “*I get it now – heaven comes to earth! The story of humans continues here on this planet. Not somewhere else!*”

The word **rapture** does not appear anywhere in the Bible. And the People Called Methodists have never formally believed in this idea. When the rapture concept was invented by John Nelson Darby in the late 1800s, it would go on to influence a lot of Christian traditions, but it did not catch on with the Methodists.

So, you don’t have to worry about your pilot disappearing midflight, your surgeon disappearing mid-surgery, or worse yet, your waitress disappearing before your food is brought to the table!

The action takes place here on earth. Our planet. Our home. And we have the privilege of welcoming this Son back when it is time for the Creator to complete all things and “love among us” forever and ever and ever!