

Matthew 24-The Olivet Discourse

In Matthew 21, Jesus and His disciples approached Jerusalem for the Passover feast and celebration. They came from the east because they would be staying in Bethany with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Bethany was east of Jerusalem on the other side of the Mount of Olives. They came to Jerusalem on the first day of the week (Sunday), and Jesus was greeted by a great crowd that was strung out all along the road that came down the Mount of Olives and led into the gates of Jerusalem. We call that celebration Palm Sunday, and that whole week is known as the Passion Week of Christ. On Monday and Tuesday of that week Jesus entered Jerusalem and went to the Temple Mount to teach all day. It was during these sessions that Jesus had dialogue and debate with the scribes and Pharisees which culminated with His condemning them in Matthew 23 with the seven “woes”. At the end of the seven woes, Jesus told them they were going to hell (23:33). At the end of the day, Jesus and His disciples were leaving the Temple and the city, and walking up the Mt. of Olives when Jesus stopped, looked back at Jerusalem and said, “O Jerusalem...How often I have wanted to gather your children together...and you were unwilling. Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! For I say to you, from now on you shall not see Me until you say, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!”

Jesus was walking up near the top of the Mount of Olives where the view of Jerusalem is perfect when His disciples came up to Him to point out how awesome the buildings on the Temple Mount were that Herod had built. Herod had brought in massive ornate marble stones for the buildings and gold plated the gates and doors. Even today the Temple Mount is the dominant feature of the city of Jerusalem, but then the Temple itself along with the other buildings and colonnades were an amazing sight to behold while looking down from the Mt. of Olives. These fishermen from rural Galilee were in awe of the big city and amazed at the beauty of the Temple. No doubt they were thinking it would last forever, but Jesus popped their balloon by saying in Matt.24:2 that the whole thing would be torn down. Of course we can look back on history and see that this was fulfilled in 70 AD when the Jews revolted against Rome. The Roman legions attacked the city and burned it down.

Three Questions

When they got to the top of the Mt. of Olives, Jesus sat down to rest and teach His disciples. Mark’s account in Mark 13:3 tells us that Peter, James, John, and Andrew came to Him privately to ask three “when” questions. It seems that people have always wanted to know the future and when things will happen so they can be prepared. Selfishly, people want to know what tomorrow’s Wall Street Journal will say so they know what to buy and sell today. In school we needed to know the date of the test so we could “cram” the night before. Therefore, the disciples ask Jesus, “when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming, and the end of the age?” From these questions we can deduce that Jesus had been teaching them about the “parousia”, meaning His coming, and the end of the world as they knew it. Jesus’ purpose in answering their questions was that based on what they know about the future they need to concentrate now on being ready,

being prepared for the end, and being faithful now to all the opportunities to serve God while there is still time. After all, you never know how soon it will be too late. Jesus' answer recorded here in Matthew 24-25 is the longest answer given to any question in the New Testament. This sermon given to His closest disciples while on the Mount of Olives is called the Olivet Discourse.

Living in the Fallen World

They want to know the signs of when these things will happen so they will be ready then, so in Matt.24:4-8 Jesus told them what the signs would not be. He said, "See that no one misleads you", or in other words don't be fooled by the following events. Don't be fooled by false Messiahs. We know that for 2,000 years a steady flow of fake prophets and "whack job" religious leaders have claimed to be the second coming of Christ, so don't be fooled because when the real Jesus shows up it will be in all His glory and accompanied by the heavenly host and no one will doubt Him then. Don't be fooled by wars and political intrigue—this is just the norm for planet earth. Don't even be fooled by natural disasters like famines and earthquakes, because all these things are just business as usual in a fallen world.

In the End Times Tribulation

Matthew 24:9 seems to be a pivot to a different time marked by a new sentence that begins with "Then". You should know that we can't be sure at what point in chapter 24 Jesus switches to the end times, and it seems every theologian has a different view, but I believe His discussion of the end times begins with verse 9. This is where He first uses the term "tribulation" in regard to the suffering and persecution that will be distinctive about that era. You can see the suffering, lawlessness, and persecution of the tribulation in verses 9-13, and in verse 13, He even talked about enduring to the end.

Matthew 24:14 is a very important passage for us to consider. It says that the gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world and then the end will come. The traditional church used to teach that Jesus would not come back until the church succeeded in reaching the whole world for Christ, and this was one of the key passages they used. It was like a guilt trip that it was our fault that Jesus had not come back, or even worse, it was up to us when Jesus would come back based on when we would get busy and do evangelism throughout the world. Today this view is not popular, and I believe Jesus was talking about a distinct world wide evangelism movement that will occur just prior to the second coming of Christ. Obviously the Spirit of God is responsible for any great "witness to all the nations", and God will be busy sending His messengers out preaching the gospel during the end times.

The Sign Predicted by Daniel

In Daniel 9:27, the prophet predicted that an evil ruler would enter the holy place in the Temple and put an end to the sacrifices and offerings. This is why many theologians believe that the Temple, which was destroyed in Jerusalem in 70 AD will have to be

rebuilt before or during these end times spoken of by Jesus. When you compare Jesus' quote from Daniel in Matt.24:15 to what Paul wrote in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4 about an evil world ruler during the end times "who takes his seat in the temple of God displaying himself as being God."; it seems to me that Jesus is saying that this will be the clear sign that the end is near. John called him the Antichrist in his epistles, and he is called the beast in Revelation 13.

The Great Tribulation

In Matt.24:16-22, Jesus revealed that during those end times that precede His second coming, there will be an intense persecution of God's people that is unprecedented in history. That means it will be worse than the Holocaust. According to Matt.24:23-26, there will be a lot of spiritual deception with many false prophets, false teachers, and bogus false Christs who will even be able to do "signs and wonders" in order to deceive people. Jesus established this fact because He wants His true disciples to know that when He comes there will be no mistaking Him. Everyone will see Him in all His glory, and everyone will know it's Him, therefore don't get confused or wonder what is going on. Today when these world religious leaders like a Jim Jones or the guy down in Waco try to make themselves out to be Christ, we can be absolutely positive there is no truth in it.

The Sign of His Coming

In Matthew 24:30, Jesus said that the "sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky". The disciples had asked what the sign of His coming would be, and now Jesus answered. Jesus used a simile in verse 27 "as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west so shall the coming of the Son of Man be." When lightning strikes across the sky, you see it no matter where you are, in the same way Jesus will come in all God's glory in a great display with all the heavenly angels, and no matter where you are everyone will see it and be amazed by the great glorious spectacle. Jesus quoted in verse 29 from Isaiah and Joel and Zechariah about the great "day of the Lord" in which the current luminaries in the sky will be darkened by the awesome brilliance of the glory of God. Then Jesus Christ will appear in the sky, and all the people of the earth will see Him coming in all His power and great glory. Christ will be revealed as the eternal ruler, the conquering king who will rule over the kingdom of God.

Jesus' purpose in delivering this sermon, called the Olivet Discourse, is to encourage His disciples to know for certain that this future event is coming, and therefore since we don't know when, we need to be ready now. The rest of the world is (and will always be) totally focused on the material temporal things, but believers must look forward with a spiritual perspective to the Parousia. The rest of the world will be just like the unbelievers during the time of Noah who were never expecting the flood. Noah preached for a long time but nobody listened, and they were unprepared. We must be alert, prepared, and live expecting Christ to come soon.

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