

Passion Week (Tuesday)- The Olivet Discourse

Amillennialism. The Rapture. Postmillennialism. Tribulation. Great Tribulation. The antichrist. The Second Coming. The Millennial Kingdom. Premillennialism. New Babylon. Pretribulation. Posttribulation. Kingdom Age. Sounds like a game of prophecy buzzword bingo. Uh oh. He said 'prophecy.' That is the weird stuff those fringe churches get into. Yes, sometimes, but that is not nearly the complete picture.

Prophecy is a major part of the Bible. Many estimates posit that between one fourth and one third of the Bible is prophetic in nature. Even if these estimates are high, there are an awful lot of verses about prophecy and anything that makes up that much of the Good Book is a subject worth discussing. The most popular topic, certainly the sexiest one today, is about end times, also commonly referred to as the end of days, and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. An Arnold Schwarzenegger movie titled *End of Days* was not, however, popular. Having seen it, I am not particularly surprised by this.

A significant number of books in the Bible contain prophetic verses. We're going to look at some prophecy that falls in between Old Testament Daniel and New Testament Revelation. I grew up a Catholic and Revelation was that weird book at the end of the Bible. Before you start shifting in your seat and thinking that it's been five minutes since you checked in on Facebook, today's lesson is coming from Jesus himself. And I have found that he is a pretty reliable guy to listen to.

People have been predicting the end times and Jesus' Second Coming for nearly two thousand years. Of course, the Old Testament is full of people prophesying about Jesus' First Coming as well. History is littered with individuals and groups predicting the end of the world as we know it. Isaac Newton's private notes include his calculation of the end of the world occurring in 2060. So there we have a famous scientist predicting the end of the world over three hundred years ago. The ancient Mayan calendar supposedly predicts the end of the world to happen this year (2012). You will probably be hearing lots more about that in the coming months. Hopefully you will not be treated to a sequel to the movie, *2012*. Great Tribulation, indeed.

In 1970, Hal Lindsey published *The Late Great Planet Earth*, a book that has sold over thirty million copies. We can use that as a starting point for the current fascination with the subject. Of course, it is safe to say that Lindsey was wrong, since the Cold War did not lead us to Armageddon, as the book predicted, nor is it likely to in the future. But the author is still publishing prophetic books and regarded as an expert in the field.

A search of the internet or on Amazon will lead you to many other authors who predict that we can see the signs of the end times. New books are written, replacing prior ones that did not come to fruition. It is currently in vogue to avoid specific dates or years, which make the books more flexible and easier to replace with the next prediction. I enjoy reading books on biblical prophecy, but I do not get hung up on trying to make their claims fit the modern world. When I wrote this, it was Iran. Now it is Iraq (again). It used to be the USSR. You can look for the signs, but take the messages to heart.

I do not remember the source, but in one of the prophecy books in my library, someone said 'Jesus taught us that preparation, not calculation, is what is needed.' There is a very practical application for Bible prophecy to keep in mind.

I originally included a primer on the three basic schools of the end times but I decided not to subject you to that. Even I was bored reading it. You can always ask me any questions you have about the subject and I will be glad to do my best to answer somewhat intelligently.

If you decide to look further into prophecy, which I encourage, be skeptical. There are more paperback prophets than I can count. You must practice discernment. This is a very parochial issue and whomever you are reading is almost certainly trying to sway you to a particular viewpoint. There is a lot of interesting reading out there, but keep an open mind as you evaluate what you learn. Also try to keep in mind Jesus' teachings. Not everyone has those in mind when they forecast the future.

Mark Hitchcock is a prolific Premillennial, Pretribulation author and pastor. While I do not agree with everything he asserts, I have found his books to be reasonable and informative. His *101 Answers to the Most Asked Questions about the End Times* is a book I frequently reference. It should not be the only book you read on the subject, but it is not a bad starting point and will give you a foundational understanding of the topic.

Now, let us turn to Jesus. Boy, I like the way that sounds. We should be saying that more often. The Olivet Discourse is addressed in the three synoptic gospels: John did not include it in his. We will be focusing on Matthew's account, with a bit added from the other two. The Discourse covers two chapters and I urge you to read it for yourself. If you have a study Bible, there is usually much to learn from the notes. I find it among the most interesting parts of the Bible. What could be more exciting than Jesus, during his life on earth, talking about his return after being crucified and resurrected? And if you are going to listen to what anybody has to say about the future, Jesus Christ is the one I would vote for. He is also cheaper than Miss Cleo....

The Olivet Discourse can be broken down into three categories: Jesus tells about the future; Jesus tells about his return and Jesus tells about remaining watchful. This teaching is followed by the Last Supper, the arrest and Peter's Denial in the very next chapter. We are into a pretty serious part of the gospel here.

I love disclaimers; don't you? Here is one. This is not the whole picture. Jesus is in the final week of his earthly life. The twelve apostles still have not grasped the concepts of the crucifixion, the resurrection and the ascension. They do not yet realize what is coming regarding a church community dedicated to Christ. Jesus does not reveal every detail to them here because they are not yet ready for it. Future writers of New Testament books will 'flesh out' and add to what Jesus says during the Olivet Discourse. We are going to unpack the Discourse, one verse at a time.

1) Jesus Tells of **the Future**

Let's read from Matthew, starting with chapter 24:

¹ Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. ² "Do you see all these things?" he asked. "Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."

On Monday, Jesus wreaked havoc among the commercial activities of the Temple. On Tuesday he read the riot act to the religious leaders and then warned the public against them. You can imagine how popular he was in Jerusalem. Later that same day, heading back to Bethany, where they were staying, the disciples commented on the new Temple. Mark uses the words 'magnificent' and 'massive' in his account. They were almost certainly filled with pride at this wonder of the Jewish nation.

Did Jesus tell them how much he admired it? Nope. He told them that this wonder of Jewish building prowess would be destroyed to the last stone. This did in fact happen in 70 A.D., when Rome crushed a major rebellion. To the Jewish people, the Temple was the center of cultural and religious life; especially as they lived under Roman rule. But these people were rejecting their long awaited messiah and the Temple was full of, to borrow a phrase from Jesus, a brood of vipers. The Temple would fall. The Temple was physically pretty but spiritually ugly. We need to strive to live a Christ-like life. A pure heart is more important than the outward illusion of sanctity.

³ As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"

The disciples likely muttered amongst themselves as they continued home. But at a stop on the way, their curiosity was too much and they asked Jesus a couple of big questions. Perhaps looking down over Jerusalem and the Temple, Jesus delivered the last of his five major discourses. The Olivet Discourse gave the disciples a lot more than they asked for as Jesus mixed both near and distant prophetic elements in a lecture that still resounds with meaning and hope to us today.

⁴ Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. ⁵ For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Messiah,' and will deceive many. ⁶ You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. ⁷ Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. ⁸ All these are the beginning of birth pains.

'Watch out.' The first words of Jesus' response. Jesus also tells his disciples to keep watch when he is praying in the garden of Gethsemane. This is a much neglected concept in Christianity today. We need to watch out and be vigilant. Staying aware is the first step in recognizing and resisting temptation. Sin is always just around the corner and we need to see it coming. This is only the first of several warnings to watch out and be vigilant as times grow progressively worse.

Jesus tells us things are not going to be very pleasant before the Second Coming can occur. False messiahs will come and many will believe in them. Nations and kingdoms will go to war and there will be rumors of more war. Famines and earthquakes will happen. Note the plural. They will not be localized. Jesus refers to all of this as merely the beginning of birth pains. You mothers out there know that there

is a buildup of pain and discomfort (a few of you are silently saying 'Discomfort? Yeah, you try giving birth and then see if you use that word again!). Anyhoo...the pain increases quite a bit from the beginning stages and it comes and goes in waves. All of these terrible things are merely a taste of what is to come. It is vitally important that we never forget all of this leads to an inevitable conclusion: Jesus.

That first line is worth repeating: "Watch out that no one deceives you." The Bible says that many Christians will turn away from Jesus before the Second Coming (also referred to as the Glorious Reappearing). Those who falter will be banished to Hell; no special consideration given for fallen Christians. When things start to get bad, people begin searching for fixes and solutions. As desperation grows, more and more options look good. The Jews were suffering under Roman rule in Jesus' day. Many false prophets and would-be messiahs proclaimed themselves as deliverers of the people. And many believed in them in hopes of throwing off the yoke of Rome. How sad that they rejected the true Messiah who would have thrown off the yoke of sin!

As you struggle with difficult times, do not look for magical signs and do not look at other people (even Oprah!). Look at Christ and look at God's Word. That is how you can know and stay true to Jesus.

⁹ "Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. ¹⁰ At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other,

Jesus switches from prophesying about the suffering of the world to the specific suffering of his followers. Faithful Christians will be persecuted, put to death and hated throughout the world. Jesus also says that many Christians will lose the faith and turn on their former fellow Christians. They will become part of the savagery that it appears will characterize the world. This going to be a bad time for everyone in the world, and in particular for Christians. This is not a special event; it has been happening since Christ first attracted followers. Christians are persecuted every day. We should pray for those who do not enjoy the same security we do in worshipping Jesus.

¹¹ and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. ¹² Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, ¹³ but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.

Not only will there be fake messiahs, but Jesus also warns against false prophets. For the second time, he specifically says that many will be deceived. Jesus cannot be any more clear: we faithful must watch out and continue to follow Him. This is a warning for us today, not just for the end of times. The world is full of false prophets right now. Secular and religious figures are all around us, telling people what they want to hear. Look at our culture: watch television, listen to what people say at your workplace or in the store. Do we sound like a Biblical, Jesus-centered society? Do NOT listen to these false prophets. Listen to Jesus. Read your Bible. Pray to God.

According to Jesus, wickedness will cause hearts to grow cold. At some time in our lives, we have all seen someone we care about harden their heart. 'Wickedness' could be thought of as spiritual death. 1 Corinthians 13 is about love. It ends with a well-known verse: ¹³ ***And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.***

During a time of wickedness, loose morals and self-centeredness run rampant. Sin cools our love of God and others as we focus on ourselves. This is what Jesus warns us against. Biblical love is not some

esoteric concept. Jesus tells us to love and pray for our enemies. Why? He tells us in Mathew 5:45, ***In that way you will be acting as true children of your Father in Heaven.*** Then in verse 48, ***But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in Heaven is perfect.***

Loving others is not something God tells us would be nice if we could get around to it. It is a direct order. If we shut out sin and keep our love of God through times of persecution and temptation, we will be saved. There it is, folks. Horrible times are coming but those who remain faithful to Jesus and God will be saved. It will not be easy and it will not be fun, but it will be worth it. We can apply this to our daily lives: Jesus' lessons are not limited to a specific time.

Now, there is some debate about whether or not the faithful will still be on earth for all these events that Jesus foretells. In 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul tells us that Jesus will come down from Heaven, the dead in Christ will rise up and

¹⁷ After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

This event is commonly referred to as The Rapture. When the Rapture will occur is at the crux of the disagreement between the factions of the pretribulationist school. I am not going to get into that issue today. Personally, I hope the prerapture folks are correct, since they say it is the Rapture that is the kickoff event for all of this bad stuff. I would like to be gathered up and taken to Jesus before evil overtakes the world and the antichrist comes. If the Rapture happens during or at the end of the Tribulation, well, I am not looking forward to those days.

¹⁴ And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

I have not read a lot about verse 14. How will this happen? Will an angel hold forth from on high, heard throughout the world? I think that is what happens in the *Left Behind* series. I doubt it. A more mundane explanation is that Jesus is referring to the disciples' mission. The final verses of the Gospel of Matthew are known as The Great Commission.¹⁸ ***Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.***

It is our duty as Christians to be evangelists for Christ. We are to spread the Good News of salvation throughout the world before the end of days. *The Mission*, by Newsboys, is a song about this very topic:

*When the runners came from Bethlehem
All breathless with good news
They were passing a baton forward through time
The commission, from God's lips to our ears
Carried by His saints two thousand years
Connects us all to the same lifeline
As I fix my eyes ahead
I can feel the Spirit's breath...*

*I can hear the mission bell ringing out loud and clear
It's the revolution Jesus started, and it's here
Echoing across the world from the shores of Galilee
I can hear the mission bell call for you and me*

When you hear folks predicting the end of days and Jesus' Second Coming, remember verse 14 and ask yourself, "Has the whole world heard the Gospel?" If not, then ask yourself what you are doing to make that happen. It started with the twelve apostles but it continues on today through us.

Keep in mind Jesus' reassuring words that the faithful will be saved as we move forward. It certainly looks glum for the non-believers who do not have the reward ahead.

¹⁵ "So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand—¹⁶ then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. ¹⁷ Let no one on the housetop go down to take anything out of the house. ¹⁸ Let no one in the field go back to get their cloak. ¹⁹ How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! ²⁰ Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath. ²¹ For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again. ²² If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened."

It is going to get even worse. The 'abomination that causes desolation': Wonderful verbal imagery. Jesus is directly referring to Daniel 9:27 with this phrase. The holy place is often interpreted to be the site of the two great Temples of Jerusalem. The Romans thoroughly destroyed the second Temple in 70 AD when they sacked Jerusalem. The Temple Mount (the mountain where the Temples were; get it?) is currently the site of the Dome of the Rock, a holy place for Muslims.

Many prophecy scholars predict that a third temple will be built on the site and that is the holy place Jesus is referring to. Similarly, the Holy Place (as well as the Holy of Holies) was an especially sacred spot within the Temple. The Abomination is often predicted to be the Antichrist.

It could have a less literal meaning; Perhaps representing any desecration, mocking or denial of God and Jesus. The Dome of the Rock, a Muslim shrine on a sacred site to the Jews, where Jesus himself taught, could be viewed as the fulfillment of this piece of prophecy. See how easy the prophecy game can be to play! But other pieces of prophecy have to be evaluated in light of any conclusion made. Doing so results in my interpretation of this particular verse being wrong.

Suffering increases. Flee to the mountains to hide. Do not even stop to run inside your house and grab a coat. ***"Great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now – and never to be equaled again. If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened."***

It just keeps getting worse. The victory will come at great cost. In fact, mankind would be completely exterminated if God did not intervene on behalf of his chosen ones. But though it is the worst of times, God is still in control. Verse 22, which mentions 'great distress,' is often used to mark the middle point of the seven year Tribulation period, with the second half being known as the Great Tribulation. Like the first three and a half years were a lot of fun.

For the third time in this chapter, Jesus warns against false messiahs and prophets. Watch out! Be vigilant!

²³ At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Messiah!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it. ²⁴ For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. ²⁵ See, I have told you ahead of time. ²⁶ "So if anyone tells you, 'There he is, out in the wilderness,' do not go out; or, 'Here he is, in the inner rooms,' do not believe it.

Anybody who is surprised, or says that they did not see the deceivers coming, is not paying attention to Jesus. He gives three warnings. Instead of 'See,' Mark uses 'watch out!' When Moses was confronting the Pharaoh and turned his staff into a snake, Pharaoh's sorcerers did the same thing. Jesus tells us not to be fooled by signs and wonders. Do not be taken in by flash and style.

So, how do you know a deceiver when you see one? After all, they are deceptive, right? Here are a few things to look for:

A – Have their predictions come true, or do they have to revise them to fit what has already happened? I can be 100% at adjusting my predictions to fit events in the past, but that does not make me the real deal.

B – Do they use a small section of the Bible but neglect the whole? I showed above how the Dome of the Rock could be the abomination of desolation in verse 15. But then I pointed out that would not be consistent with the rest of the Olivet Discourse. Like statistics, a verse or chapter alone can be misrepresented to say whatever we want.

C – Does the teaching contradict what the Bible says about God? That is a pretty obvious one. The early Church's battle with the Gnostics would be a good example if it happened today.

D – Does the teaching glorify the teacher or Christ? The message should not turn us away from God and Jesus. David Koresh put himself at the center of his cult movement, not Jesus. To tragic results.

E – Does the teaching insulate or promote disharmony among Christians? God's divine plan is for all believers, not a subset who will rise above all others.

Jesus lets us know that when He does come again, it will not be quietly, out in the desert or hidden away in an inner room. The Messiah will not come unobtrusively with a select group of followers. As we will see in a moment, there will be no mistaking Jesus' Second Coming.

This ends the first section of the Olivet Discourse. Jesus warns his disciples to be watchful and to not be fooled. He foretells great suffering; war, famine, earthquakes, persecution. The holy place will be defiled by the abomination of desolation. Simply put, Jesus' Second Coming will be preceded by the worst times in history.

But he also assures his followers, including us today, that those who stay faithful to him will be saved. We must never forget. Jesus tells us in a few more verses that no one can know the day or hour when He will return. But we can live Christ-like lives to be prepared for it. We can pray to God and read our Bible. This will help us Think God and to resist temptation and false teachings.

2) Jesus Tells of **His Return**

You might have heard the phrase about buying a BMW, 'If you have to ask how much it costs, you cannot afford it.' Jesus' Return is similar. It will be beyond clear: if you have to ask if He has come, then no, he has not.

²⁷ For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

Jesus came as a lamb the first time. He's coming as a lion this time: He is the conquering lord and judge the second time around. No baby birth in a manger.

The NIV has an odd translation in verse 28.

²⁸ Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather.

Now, this could mean that those who are spiritually dead (carcass) attract false messiahs and false prophets (vultures) to feast on them.

The New Living Testament translation makes more sense to me, ***Just as the gathering of vultures shows there is a carcass nearby, so these signs indicate that the end is near.*** That is easier to understand. The next verse makes it clearer why we should not have any confusion about an authentic Second Coming:

²⁹ "Immediately after the distress of those days

***"the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light;
the stars will fall from the sky,
and the heavenly bodies will be shaken***

I would say that is pretty darn clear. The sun, the moon and the stars: hard to miss those signs. I am not sure what the last line means, but I imagine I will when it actually happens. Matthew 27:45 tells us ***At noon, darkness fell across the whole land until three o'clock.*** If we view that darkness as a sign of Jesus conquering sin with his death on the cross, then this darkness will symbolize his conquering Satan and evil with the Second Coming.

If you know your Bible, you are aware that the New Testament is full of allusions to the Old Testament. This supports that Jesus was the fulfillment of the messianic prophecies. Isaiah 13:10 says ***"The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light,"*** while 34:4 adds, ***"...all the starry host will fall."*** The Old Testament is a history of the Jewish people. But you can also think of it as setting the table for the New Testament. Jesus did not just show up out of the blue: he was the follow up to a promise God made long before.

So, finally, after having undergone all of these hardships, or tribulations, the faithful will be rewarded.

³⁰ "Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory.

³¹ And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

Verse 30 is wonderful. Let us read it again, ³⁰ ***“Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory.***

The Sign of Man could be a giant cross, or some type of banner or it could be Jesus himself. It is not specifically stated. But we know from the second part of verse 30 that the Son of Man does indeed come at this time. This is not the Christ riding a donkey into Jerusalem. This is Jesus Messiah coming on the clouds of Heaven, with power and great glory.

But if He has returned, why are the people mourning? Because all but the faithful have chosen the wrong side. The game is over and they have lost. Jesus Christ has come back and the doubters have been proven wrong. Is there anything more disappointing, more terrifying, more shocking? The persecution of the faithful is over. The first shall be last and the last shall be first.

If you are interested in biblical prophecy, you really need to read Daniel. That is not to say you should not also read Isaiah, Zephaniah, Zechariah, Thessalonians and other books, but God gave Daniel a major peek at what was coming and you should start there. In 7:13-14, we see the allusion to what Jesus is telling the apostles:

¹³ “In my [Daniel’s] vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. ¹⁴ He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

God keeps his promises. We have been told for thousands of years, bit by bit. John 14:6, ***I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*** That is it! Right there: Watch out! “I am the way.” Avoid false prophets and messiahs! “I am the truth.” The one who stands firm to the end will be saved.” I am the life.” All of the waiting will be done and we who acknowledge Christ as savior shall be rewarded for eternity.

³¹ And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

An angel announced Jesus’ birth. An angel revealed his resurrection. And a trumpet blast from angels will announce his Second Coming. Other passages refer to a heavenly host that will accompany Jesus to the final battle. ‘His elect’ may be those who remained faithful to the end of the Tribulation, or it may well include those who have died in Christ and come back with him from Heaven. Regardless, it will be the most glorious of glorious days.

³² “Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. ³³ Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door. ³⁴ Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. ³⁵ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

Jesus finishes this section with an example to make it clear to the people of his time. Not too many of us have run across a fig tree lately. The fig tree is bare in the winter, preparing for rebirth in the spring, when the 'twigs get tender' and the 'leaves come out.' When these signs appear, summer must be nearing. Many miss these subtle signs and do not notice the fig tree until it actually blooms.

Just so, as Jesus' followers see an increase in the tribulation; see the gospel proclaimed throughout the world and see the abomination of desolation in the holy place, then they should be alert that the end may be imminent. Unbelievers may miss these signs of spring, but the faithful should be alert for the signs of summer coming. The blessed fruitfulness of Jesus return does not come suddenly and should not be a surprise for us.

It is not clear what he meant by 'this generation.' By man's definition, we are quite a few generations removed from Jesus' age. He could be referring to the generation of wickedness, which will be with us until His Second Coming. Today, we are certainly living in a generation of wickedness and waiting for His Return. I choose to leave this verse unclear.

Verse 35 is telling us that things of man are temporary but His word is eternal. "Heaven" can be perplexing here. It could be viewed as a sort of 'ultimate' word, being used to drive home the point that Jesus' word is as big as it gets: even more bedrock than Heaven itself. A more scripture-driven explanation can be found in 2 Peter 3:10-11, where Peter says, "**...The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.**

¹¹ Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives ¹² as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. ¹³ But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.

When we accept Christ into our lives, we are reborn: we become a new person. Likewise, when Jesus comes again, heaven and earth will be recreated. Just as everything changes for us individually when we become believers, everything changes for everyone when Jesus returns to rule the earth.

So, this part of the Discourse told us of what awaits at the end of the trials and tribulation. The remaining faithful have survived the most perilous and difficult times in history but now they receive the jackpot. Jesus gathers together his elect. The unbelievers realize what they have missed and are grieved. This is the understatement of all time. What we have talked about is Hope, with a capital H. The drama often resembled a tragedy but had the happiest ending possible.

The next section of the Discourse reinforces that we need to remain watchful.

3 – Jesus Tells of Remaining Watchful

³⁶ “But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son but only the Father. ³⁷ As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸ For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; ³⁹ and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.

We will see the signs, but we cannot know the exact day and hour. The guy on the street corner with the sign saying ‘The End is near. Repent!’ could be right. But the Harold Campings who give you an exact date need to read their Bibles. It is a good thing we do not know the date. That would let us be lazy and sinful, then beg forgiveness at the last moment. We have work to do in the here and now.

⁴⁰ Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.

Well, now. It sure sounds like a description of the Rapture. Mercy Me sings about this in *In The Blink of an Eye*, which comes from 1 Corinthians 15:52 ...***in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye***. Those particular verses should give the Premillennialists something to think about, eh? But take that as it is written. Jesus’ coming will be swift and sudden. There will be no chance to beg for mercy. No last minute conversions. We will have already made our choices. We who chose Him, will be taken up to meet him. Those who chose wrong will be left behind.

⁴² “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. ⁴³ But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴ So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

I mentioned that a prophecy book in my library had the phrase, ‘Jesus taught us that preparation, not calculation, is what is needed.’ Jesus is not giving us clues to some cosmic game of ‘Guess the date I’m coming back.’ He is telling us to follow Him now so that we will be assured of eternal salvation on judgment day. Regarding Biblical prophecy, it is not important what you believe. The ONLY thing that matters is that you Believe in Jesus!

⁴⁵ “Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? ⁴⁶ It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. ⁴⁷ Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. ⁴⁸ But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, ‘My master is staying away a long time,’ ⁴⁹ and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. ⁵⁰ The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. ⁵¹ He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Any Jimmy Buffet fans out there? It is okay, you can admit it. In my younger days, I attended almost two dozen of his shows. I did not have any use for the debauchery, but I enjoyed the music. This reminds me

of Gypsies in the Palace. Jimmy gets two guys to watch his house while he is on the road and they throw one wild party, acting like gypsies left in charge of the palace. Then they get a surprise call that Jimmy is coming back to town the next night. They panic, shut down the party, throw everybody out and find someone to clean up before the boss gets back.

Great song. But those are the people that Jesus is warning us NOT to be. He is telling us that we are take care of his people and do his work while we wait for his return. Look at verse 51 again, ⁵¹ ***He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*** That is what happens to the gypsies in the Lord's version of the song. As Newsboys sang, this is life. We are not having a dress rehearsal. We do not get do-overs. Jesus has told us He is coming back and we need to be ready. Those who ignore His warning will have an eternity to regret the decision.

Chapter 25 starts with two parables that further clarify His message of readiness and preparation. He lets us know that we are responsible for our own spiritual state when He returns and He also instructs us to use well that which He has entrusted to us. I will touch on the final parable that drives home Jesus' message of service.

The last part of the Olivet Discourse is the Parable of The Sheep and the Goats. We will examine this in detail in a future missive. But Jesus tells us that He will come in glory and sit in judgment of the entire world. Those who served him and did good works during their lives will be granted admission to the Kingdom. Those who did not will be cast into the eternal fire.

We are saved by God's Grace, but that is not the end of the story. Verse 40 says, ⁴⁰ ***"The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'***

'These' included the hungry, the thirsty, the strangers in need of shelter, the ragged, the sick and the imprisoned. Mercy and compassion are not just nice things. Invest your time in serving God and doing His will: "Thy kingdom come, they will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Those are more than words. They are an affirmation of our choosing God. Imagine your life if you treated everyone the way you would treat Jesus. If we all did this, the heavens would resound with a symphony of service to God.

That is what the parable is about. You do not need wealth, special abilities or great intelligence to serve God. I cannot split an atom (heck, I can barely split a pea), but I can donate an old coat to a homeless shelter. Or bring some cans of corn to my church for a food drive. Live today like you will meet Jesus tomorrow. Could you stand before the Lord in heaven and say "Nah, I did not have to do any of that stuff. I was already saved by your death on the cross"?

I would be too shamed. I long to hear what the master said in Matthew 25:21, ***'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'***

What could possibly be sweeter?

WRAP UP

I am sure you have all been fascinated by my comments on the Olivet Discourse and will be buying prophecy books and arguing amongst yourselves about the timing of the Rapture. Great. But there are real life applications and purposes to Jesus' prophetic teachings.

1. We are to live Godly lives today. If we Think God, we will not be deceived by the false prophets and messiahs of our day. David Garland, in his commentary on the gospel of Mark, said, "God does not require a studious deciphering of the international threats and natural disasters but spiritual vigilance that makes one ready for Christ's return whenever he comes." That is a bit of a mouthful, but if you break it down, it tells you that studying prophecy should lead us to living Christ-like lives in preparation for Jesus' Second Coming.

2 We are warned that we will be persecuted and deceivers will tempt us. Forewarned is forearmed. Although, I would still have two forearms even without any warnings. Curious...Anyways. We should prepare ourselves mentally and spiritually for the hard times in our daily lives, not just the end of times. Pray and read your Bibles.

3 We KNOW He is returning. Holding to that conviction should help us to follow Jesus in trying times. And we know that he will win out over Satan and evil. Without the anchor of Biblical prophecy, we would be tossed helplessly about on the rough seas, desperately turning the rudder in any direction that looked hopeful. Instead, we keep our eyes focused on Jesus and follow his teachings.

4 On a less warm and fuzzy note, Judgment is coming. We have been warned. Jesus has even said that many believers will turn away from Him. We are both to warn, and be warned, that a Judgment Day is coming and there are eternal consequences for those found wanting.

5 Evangelism is difficult for most of us. It is easier to talk about Jesus to other believers. But what we must absolutely remember is that souls are at stake! This is not an academic issue, or a matter of religious curiosity. This is about eternal salvation and eternal damnation. Jesus tells us the end days will come after the whole world hears the gospel. That means every person will have a chance to be saved. It is our duty to bring them the Good News.

FURTHER READING

Matthew 25 – Starts with the two parables I only briefly touched upon. Get the full effect.

1 John - This five chapter book contains a warning about antichrists and false prophets. It also includes much discussion of love.

1 Thessalonians 4-5 – Paul discusses the Rapture and the Second Coming.

Romans: 12 – The first part of Paul's letter to the Romans tells us what to believe as Christians. The second part addresses how to behave as Christians, which includes serving others.