

Lecture 25 “Discourse on Last Things”

Matthew 24:36-25:46; Mark 13:32-37; Luke 21:34-38

Dan got us off to a good start last week on what is termed the Olivet Discourse because Jesus and His disciples were spending their days in the Temple, but their evenings “camping out” so to speak on the Mount of Olives. Jerusalem was packed for Passover and the time was near for what Jesus had told them in Matthew 20:18-19, “We are going to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn Him to death and will turn Him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day He will be raised to life!”

They had seen Him rebuke the Pharisees before the crowds in the Temple and heard His comment on the coming destruction of that Temple, so now Jesus is with His disciples answering the questions asked in Matthew 24:3 “Tell us,” they said, “when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” Dan talked to us about God’s timing as revealed in Scripture, but our lesson today begins with Jesus saying regarding His Second Coming, “No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”

This is major teaching from Jesus’ own lips about “the future” or what is termed Eschatology. Dan covered that very well last week and pointed out to us that this discourse is in reference to God’s future program for Israel and not the church.

I'd like to comment on a couple of things. The first has to do with biblical prophecy and the second has to do with Israel and the church.

If you've been in our study very long, you know that there are several views about "when" Jesus will come again. Viewpoints differ over both the timing of the Second Coming and the timing of the Rapture of the church. Regarding the Second Coming, some deny that Jesus will ever set foot physically on earth again. Others of us believe the prophecy in Zechariah 14:4-5, "On that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south. . . Then the Lord my God will come, and all the holy ones with Him." Also, Zechariah 13:10 . . . They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child."

For those who believe Jesus will actually set foot on the Mount of Olives again, they disagree on if it will be after the seven year period of tribulation but before institution of the millennial kingdom, or if there will be no literal kingdom just a long period of peace on earth and then Jesus returns.

As to the timing of the Rapture of the church, some believe it will happen before the tribulation; some think the church will go through the first good 3 ½ years of the tribulation but raptured before the Great Tribulation begins; and still others think the church will go through the whole tribulation period and the Rapture will take place at the end of the seven years and

happen just before the Second Coming. In other words, go up to Jesus and immediately come down with Him for the judgment.

Jesus stressed in His great rebuke in Matthew 22:29, “You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God.” That’s the same downfall of mankind today. That is our goal at People of the Word – to help you know the Scriptures and believe in the power of God.

I believe and teach that God has a very specific plan – and that He has revealed it to us in His Word. Prophecy is meant to encourage us not just forecast doom. The very fact that God does know the end from the beginning is the greatest encouragement . . . He is King of Kings, Lord of Lords, The Almighty God!

My personal viewpoint on prophecy is pre-millennial (and I don’t bind it on you as a test of fellowship). I’ll explain that and tie it in with my other introductory thought about Israel and the church.

I believe (based on Scripture) that Jesus is the resurrected Son of God – Second Person of the Holy Trinity – seated now in Heaven at the right hand of God the Father and preparing a place for the church (His Bride). The Rapture of the church (being caught up into heaven to be with Christ) is different from His Second Coming.

Today the church is being built stone by living stone (person by person) through evangelistic outreach, but one day (in what 1 Corinthians 15:52 says is the “twinkling of an eye”) living Christians will be caught up into the air (or raptured) to join those who have already passed into Jesus’ presence. There

they will face the judgment seat of Christ to be judged, not for salvation, but for reward of service.

Those left behind face a severe period of tribulation when the Antichrist begins his rule. After he sets up the “abomination of desolation” in the rebuilt temple and the earth endures 3 ½ years of God’s wrath, Christ – His angels – and the church will descend to destroy the Antichrist. Jesus will be recognized by the Jews as their Messiah; the nations will be judged; and Jesus will set up a new earthly government in Jerusalem for what is called the millennium because it will last one thousand years. This will be the time of peace long anticipated throughout the Scriptures.

Revelation teaches us that Satan will be bound for those thousand years while Christ rules, but released one last time to war on the world before the earth is renovated by fire and we have the new heaven and the new earth.

God does have a plan and we **are** in error if **we** do not know Scripture or the power of God to execute His plan.

That said . . . Here is another statement . . . Israel is not the church and the church is not Israel. There is a prophetic plan for each.

Prophecy forecasts history; history confirms prophecy, and some parts of the Bible will never be properly understood until the day when its prophecy is fulfilled.

There is one secret date in Scripture – the Rapture of the church. There was no secret about how long the Israelites would be in bondage (400 years), or how long they would be in Babylonian captivity (70 years). Even the date

of the Messiah's arrival in Jerusalem – 483 years – was prophesied accurately. After the Rapture, lengths of times are freely given, but no one knows the date of the Rapture of the church. Therefore, everything we read about watchfulness, readiness, and faithfulness in the gospels has application for the Christian even though the church was still a mystery at the time of the Olivet Discourse.

The signs of the times we studied last week are for Israel and the world to note, because they herald Christ's Second Coming. The prophets called it not D-Day or J-Day, but THAT DAY. THAT DAY is so important in the plan of God that about one-third of the Bible is directed toward it. And Jesus spelled it out for the disciples.

We know about the destruction of the Temple because that prophecy is now history; it happened in 70 A.D. Current events tell us that the world is in tribulation – not The Tribulation – but signs are evident to those who have eyes to see and ears to hear that the Lord is still going forward with His plan.

The signs will be there – but no one knows the exact day or hour of the Second Coming . . . only the Father. Life will be like it was in the days of Noah before the flood, mankind so carried away with the pleasures of the world and the business of living that they were oblivious that judgment was coming upon them.

Noah and his family in the ark is a picture of God's miraculous preservation of Israel during the awful time of The Tribulation. (It is said of Enoch in Genesis 5:24 "Enoch walked with God; then he was no more,

because God took him away.” That, I believe, is a picture of the church which is raptured before the Tribulation.)

Matthew 24:39 goes on to say, “. . . and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away.” The verb “taken” in verses 39-41 means “taken away in judgment.” During the Tribulation, a division will take place: like the two men in the field, or the two women grinding, some people will perish in judgment (be taken away), while others will remain to enter into His kingdom. Vs. 42 says, “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will return.”

Jesus used Noah to warn that men will not know the day . . . then He used the picture of the thief to warn that they will not know the hour. Vs. 43 “But 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.”

People alive on earth during the Tribulation period will be able, from the Scriptures, to tell the drift of events, but they will not be able to calculate the exact day or hour of Christ’s return. If the home owner knew the thief was coming, would he be prepared? Yes. The simple moral – you don’t know when Jesus is coming, so expect the unexpected. Watch and prepare! That’s the advice for both Israel and the church.

How grateful we ought to be church that God has not appointed us to wrath, but to salvation. 1 Thessalonians 1:10 says, “. . . Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.” In 1 Thessalonians 5:9-10 Paul writes, “For God did

not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him.” As the people of God, we will certainly go through tribulation as it says in John 16:33 “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world”; but not go through The Tribulation.

So if this section of the Olivet Discourse relates to Israel during the Tribulation, we must also realize that we do not know the day or time that the Lord will return for His church. We too must be alert, watchful, and faithful and Jesus deals with this in the next section we studied.

We need to remind ourselves about parables. By definition it means to “set alongside each other to compare.” They illustrate a point by using something familiar the listener can relate to.

In the parable about the servants, the point is—there are duties to be discharged while waiting for the Master’s return. Vs. 46 “It will be good for that servant whose Master finds him doing so when he returns.” (That means delay has not robbed the servant of his commitment to serve, even if the Master doesn’t return for a long time.) On the other hand, some start well, but become distracted and even disobedient – perhaps feeling “there’s always time to repent later.”

We know at the judgment seat of Christ, when we appear before Him after the Rapture, it will not be to judge our sins, because these have already been judged on the cross (Rom. 8:1 “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,”). He will judge our works and give rewards

to those who have earned them (1 Cor. 3:9-15). Some will have works burned up and he will suffer loss of reward; 1 Corinthians 3:15 says “he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping the flames.” The wise servant is diligent to discharge his duties faithfully because he loves the Master.

The parable of the Ten Virgins is interesting because the focus is not like today in the Western world where all eyes are on the bride. Rather this is about the delay of the groom that may be longer than anyone anticipates. Therefore wisdom and foresight are necessary to prepare for the pressures of delay.

You’ve probably heard sermons about marriage customs of the ancient near East. The groom would come at an unexpected time and take his bride back to his home where the main festivities would take place, often for many days. Guests and even the equivalent of some “bridesmaids” might wait along the way to the groom’s house, intending to join the procession. Everyone in the procession was expected to carry his or her own torch. Those without a torch could safely be assumed to be party crashers. Remember the guest with no wedding garment?

The plot turns on the groom’s delay (25:5). There is no moral blame attached to the sleeping – both the wise and the foolish succumb to drowsiness. But the groom’s delay distinguishes between the wise and the foolish because the wise prepare for the possibility of delay by bringing extra oil, and the foolish are unprepared. It’s interesting that the word foolish is the Greek word “moros” from which we get word moron.

How do we prepare ourselves if the Rapture is delayed? We keep our light shining with the oil of the Spirit through prayer and we ground ourselves in Scriptural truth so we're not swayed by false doctrines. We physically sleep for the body, and we serve for the soul. A daily refilling through prayer and God's Word keeps us disciplined for delay . . . however long He tarries.

What lessons can we draw from this parable?

1. Preparation is an individual responsibility not a group plan.
2. The time of His coming is unknown.
3. There is no alternative if you're not ready.
4. Today is the time to prepare.

In the last parable of the profitable and unprofitable servants, each was given money according to his ability (a talent according to some commentators was worth about 20 years' of a laborer's wages). So it was a very large sum. The point of the parable is that only those servants who truly served the Master and made improvement of the goods entrusted to them received the Master's blessing and reward when he returned. They were the ones who heard, "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."

For the servant who only hung on to what was entrusted to him and didn't use it wisely – he was considered a poor servant. Here again we have the phrase Jesus used, "weeping and gnashing of teeth." This is the fifth time Matthew has recorded this phrase. Let's review them:

Matthew 8:11-12 speaking of the Centurion's faith

I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Matthew 13:48-50 speaking of the parable of the net

When it was full, the fishermen pulled it to shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Matthew 22:8-14 speaking of the parable of the wedding banquet

Then he said to his servants, "The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find." So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. "Friend," he asked, "how did you get in here without wedding clothes?" The man was speechless. Then the king told the attendants, "Tie him hand and foot, and

throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Matthew 24:50-51 speaking of the wicked servant

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. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Matthew 25:28-30 speaking of the worthless servant

Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has ten talents. For everyone who has will be given more and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

And there is one reference to this phrase in the gospel of Luke:

Luke 13: 23-30 speaking of the narrow door

Someone asked him, “Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?” He said to them, “Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, ‘Sir, open the door for us.’ But he will answer, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from.’ Then you will say, ‘We ate and drank with you, and

you taught in our streets.’ But he will reply, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!’ There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out. People will come from the east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last.”

This parable again serves as a warning that there will come a day of accountability. The Jewish people, led by their hypocritical Pharisees and Sadducees, had their opportunity to accept Jesus as their Messiah but chose instead to seek His death. We are those from the east, west, north and south who will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. During the Tribulation only those who enter by the narrow gate, accepting Jesus Christ as their Savior, will enter the millennial kingdom. Perhaps we can sum it up like this: when the Master returns – He expects and inspects.

For the church while we await the Rapture, these three parables remind us there are:

- 1) Duties to discharge – keep serving and loving
- 2) Disciplines in delay – keep alert and prepared
- 3) Danger in disloyalty – keep trusting and growing

The last section of the Olivet Discourse is about Christ’s Second Coming and the Gentile nations (25:31-46). Between the time that Jesus returns and defeats the Antichrist and those saved during the Tribulation

inherit the millennial kingdom, there will be a judgment of nations. This is not the Great White Throne judgment of Revelation 20 – that takes place after the 1000 year reign of Christ.

The Gentile nations will be gathered before Jesus Christ, but He will judge them as individuals. This will not be a judgment of national groups (Germany, Italy, the United States, etc.) but of individuals within all nations as to how they treated the Jews.

The prophet Joel in chapter three, verses 1-2 says, “In those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, I will gather all nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. There I will enter into judgment against them concerning my inheritance, my people Israel, for they scattered my people among the nations and divided up my land.”

In Matthew 25:31- 46 there are sheep, goats, and “brothers” in this account of judgment. Who are these people the King calls “brothers?” It seems likely that they are the believing Jews from the Tribulation Period. Revelation 7:1-8 indicates that there will be 144,000 servants of God sealed from the tribes of Israel to evangelize during the Tribulation as well as two witnesses and the angel of Revelation 14. Many people will hear their message and trust Jesus Christ. Since these believing Jews will not receive the “mark of the beast” they will be unable to buy or sell. So how will they survive? No doubt through the loving care of the Gentiles who have also trusted Christ and who care for His brothers.

The interesting thing about this judgment is that the sheep individuals are surprised at what they hear. They don't remember having seen the Lord Jesus Christ and ministering to His needs. But just as they lovingly ministered to the believing Jews with food and drink, hospitality and clothing, and compassion for the sick and imprisoned, they did it to Christ. Their motive was not reward, but sacrificial love.

The individuals designated goats were judged because they did not trust Jesus Christ and gave evidence of that fact by not caring for His brethren. They apparently took the mark of the beast and took care of themselves and their own, but had no time for the Jewish remnant that was suffering on earth (Rev. 12:17).

When we compare the two judicial sentences, we notice that the sheep were blessed of the Father and inherited (based on new birth – born again by faith) the kingdom and eternal life.

The goats shared Satan's fate because they listened to him and followed his ways. Hell was prepared for Satan, not for people, but there are only two destinies – eternal punishment for those who reject Christ or eternal life for those who trust Him.

The sheep will be ushered into the kingdom to share in Christ's glory. The church will reign with Christ and Israel will enjoy the fulfillment of the promises made through the prophets. All of creation will share in the glorious liberty of God's children. Jesus Christ will rule from David's throne in Jerusalem and peace will reign a thousand years. Amen!

To summarize the Olivet Discourse:

- 1) **God is not finished with the people of Israel.** God has not cast away His people. Romans 11:11-12, “Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring!”
- 2) **The Old Testament promises of the kingdom will be fulfilled.** Revelation 20:6 “Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.”
- 3) **God is going to judge this world.** This is the age of grace when God’s message is “Be reconciled to God. God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Cor. 5:20-21) The heavens are silent because man’s sins have been judged at the cross. God has spoken once and for all through His Son and the Scriptures. But a day of judgment is coming when He will say, “Away from me, all you evildoers!” And they will be thrown into the darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.
- 4) **We as Christians and members of His church are not looking for signs.** (The Jews require a sign). There will be no sign before the Rapture. However, as we see some of the tribulation signs begin to take

place . . . Jesus said in Matthew 21:28, “lift up your head, your redemption draweth neigh.”

- 5) **Finally, no matter what view of prophecy we take, we know that Jesus is coming again.** As Christians we must be alert and ready. We must not waste our opportunities. We may not feel like we have a great many gifts or a great deal of ability, but we do know the power of God so we can still be faithful in the calling He has given to each of us. So, did Jesus answer the disciples’ questions?

When will this happen?

You will see the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place; only the Father knows the day and hour.

What will be the sign of your coming?

As lightning is visible, so will the Son of Man’s coming be visible. The angels will gather the elect. This generation will not pass away until all these things have happened. The Son of Man will come in glory and judge the nations.

What will be the sign of the end of the age?

Many false prophets will appear; there will be wars and rumors of war; many will turn from the faith; some will be ready and some will not. Some will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous will inherit eternal life.

Let’s pray.