

"The Olivet Discourse"

Matthew 24-25

Part 17

Introduction: Last week in our study of Matthew 24 we looked at the return of Jesus Christ to the earth at the end of the Great Tribulation. That spectacular event was recorded in Matthew 24:27-31.

Notice Matthew 24:27-31

Now as we continue to work our way through Matthew 24 and 25 we will see that our Lord will make practical application concerning His second coming. The focus upon the rest of our Lord's teaching will be based upon all that He has said in Matthew 24:27-31 which is His second coming. Now as we work our way through the rest of the Olivet Discourse our Lord will speak of 2 important points concerning His second coming:

1. Expectation
2. Preparedness

These 2 thoughts will take us from Matthew 24:32-25:46. So the first point we shall consider will be:

I. Expectation

A. The Parable of the Fig Tree

Notice Matthew 24:32-35

There is much for us to consider within these verses but before we get into the meaning of the verses there are 2 points we need to consider.

1. The meaning and purpose of a parable.

The word "parable" means to place alongside. Here is the very definition we find in Blue Letter Bible-"**a placing of one thing by the side of another**". Jesus often taught in parables and when He did He was simply taking a true earthly story and "placing it alongside" of a spiritual truth so as to help His disciples to understand the spiritual truth. Anytime you read a parable in the Bible it is always an earthly story used to communicate a spiritual truth.

Now Jesus taught in parables for 3 reasons:

1. To fulfill the Old Testament prophecies.

Matthew 13:34-35

³⁴ All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them:

³⁵ That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world.

2. To communicate Truth to His disciples.

3. To conceal the Truth from those who refused to believe in Him.

Both of these are seen in two verses.

Luke 8:9-10

⁹ And his disciples asked him, saying, What might this parable be?

¹⁰ And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand.

So that is the meaning and the purpose of the parables.

2. The danger of spiritualizing within parables.

Let me explain what I mean by "spiritualizing" within the parables. Some people will look at the parable and want to say that certain things in the parable represent this or that. Unless Jesus clearly states that something in the parable is a picture of something else then we must be very careful not to claim something in a parable is a type.

Let me show you the parable of the sower.

Matthew 13:18-23

¹⁸ Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower.

¹⁹ When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side.

²⁰ But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it;

²¹ Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.

²² He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.

²³ But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

Jesus used this parable to show the different responses to the Word of God which is the seed here. But some people go further and try to determine which of the responses picture true salvation and which ones do not. The point is that Jesus does not say. All He tells His disciple is the seed is the Word.

That very practice of spiritualizing also has been done to the parable of the fig tree here in Matthew 24. You see many want to look at the parable of the fig tree and teach that the fig tree represents Israel. They say that before the return of Jesus Christ Israel will go through a major revival and there will be many signs of spiritual life.

Notice Matthew 24:32

This is the verse which they use and the leaves are a sign of life and so they teach that our eyes are to be on Israel and when we see signs of life then we can know that the 2nd coming is getting closer. There are 3 problems with this teaching.

1. Jesus never said that. Really, if we remember what we just came through and how the persecution will come on Israel and two thirds will be slaughtered in the Great Tribulation we were never told of a revival within the people of Israel. Therefore, to say that the leaves on the fig tree represent the nation of Israel and their revival is to add much to what Jesus said here.
2. The fig tree does not always represent the nation of Israel in the Bible. There would be some who would argue with the first problem for they would point to the fact that Israel is pictured in the Bible as a fig tree. That is true in some passages but not all. Not every time the fig tree is mentioned is it connected with Israel.

3. Jesus did not limit this parable to just the fig tree.

Luke 21:29

²⁹ *And he spake to them a parable; Behold the fig tree, and all the trees:*

The point we need to understand is that the fig tree was a common tree in Palestine and was used as a means to teach and that is exactly what our Lord is doing here in Matthew 24.

A. The Parable

Notice Matthew 24:32

Here Jesus points to the fig tree as an instrument to teach with. He tells them that when the branch of the fig tree is tender and you see the buds starting to come forth then you can be sure that summer is really close. The fig tree is a tree that would be one of the last of spring to bring forth its leaves. It is much like the walnut tree in our land. All the other trees have their leaves before the walnut tree ever shows signs of life. It is the same way with the fig tree.

Now when they saw the leaves begin to come out they knew that summer was very close and it was unstoppable.

That is the parable. Jesus was just using something very common to His disciple to teach His disciples a very important Truth.

B. The Meaning

Notice Matthew 24:33

Now Jesus applies the parable. He tells His disciples that when "these things" are seen then they are to know the "it" is at the doors. Now we must ask several questions:

1. What are "these things"?

"These things" refer to all that Jesus had just spoken of from Matthew 24:4-31. It refers to the birth pains, (the seal judgments, the trumpet judgments, the bowl judgments,) the abomination of desolation, the persecution, the deception, and the signs in the heavens. We will put this altogether in a moment.

2. What does the word "it" refers to?

Now we must understand what the word "it" refers to in verse 33. Jesus tells His disciples that when they see the events of the Great Tribulation then "it" is near. To get our answer we must look at what Luke recorded.

Luke 21:29-31

²⁹ And he spake to them a parable; Behold the fig tree, and all the trees;

³⁰ When they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand.

³¹ So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand.

Si the word "it" in Matthew 24:33 refers to the Kingdom of God.

C. The Surety of the Kingdom

Years ago I was sharing with someone about the Great Tribulation and the second coming of Jesus and there response was, "They have been preaching that for years and we have not seen one glimpse of His return." They continued by saying, "I don't buy into any of that."

The verses which we are about to look at show how solid the promise of the Kingdom really is.

Notice Matthew 24:34

Now we need to spend some time on this statement which Jesus made. We need to know who this "generation" refers to. First of all let me tell explain some of the false teachings which exist today concerning this statement.

1. There are many today that teach "this generation" refers to the disciples which Jesus was speaking to and all of the people of their generation. They teach that the events of Matthew 24 refer to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 when the Romans came in and destroyed the Temple and the city. This is a very popular view. But there are several problems with this view. For example: In AD 70 the sun was not darkened, the stars did not fall from the sky and the powers of the heavens were not shaken. Above all Jesus did not come in the clouds in all of His glory.
2. Another view is that Jesus was referring to the present generation of His day but He was wrong about His prediction. They even claim that He admitted to His mistake in Mark.

Mark 13:32

³² *But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.*

This is a very dangerous teaching. I say this because if Jesus was wrong about what He taught the disciples here in Matthew 24:32-35 then how can we be sure that He was correct anything else that He taught?

So, those 2 ideas do not fit the passage.

Let me tell you what Jesus did mean when He spoke of "this generation". He was simply speaking of those who will be alive during the Great Tribulation. To help you better understand this let me remind you that His disciples were really wanting to know WHEN He would come and set up His Kingdom.

Matthew 24:3

³ And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?

Luke 19:11

¹¹ And as they heard these things, he added and spake a parable, because he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear.

They wanted to know when it was going to happen and so in Matthew 24:32-35 Jesus points to the fig tree and all the other trees and says, "When you see the budding of the leaves you know that summer is near. In the same way the generation which is alive during the start of the birth pains, when they see the birth pains begin they will know that the Kingdom is not far away." He is basically telling them that when the

birth pains start there will be no delay. The same thought is found in Revelation.

Revelation 1:1

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John:

The phrase "**which must shortly come to pass**" did not mean they would happen right after John wrote Revelation. But it means that when the events of the book (the events of the Great Tribulation) start they will fall on the earth in rapid succession. They will all take place in the 7 year period. This is also the same idea which Jesus has when He tells His disciples that "this generation" will not pass until all of this is fulfilled.

Notice Matthew 24:35

This is a very interesting verse. In this verse Jesus points to the eternality of His Word. He references here the heaven and the earth and tells us that they will pass away but His Word will never pass away. Why did He reference the heaven and the earth? Why did He not just say that His Word is eternal?

He referenced the heaven and the earth because they are the most solid things which we know of. For example in this life we know that all things are temporary. Some things may last a long time but in time even houses and buildings made of stone will deteriorate. But if we were to pick something which we would say was indestructible we would have to say the earth. It has been around for over 6000 years and shows very little sign of wear. I mean it still rotates and it still produces crops and

resources for all life. So the earth and the heavens are the most solid thing we know.

But Jesus said there is something more solid than the earth and the solar system. It is the Word of God! It is eternal! Heaven and earth will pass away but the Word of God will last forever. Now here is what that means in this context, Jesus took us through the Great Tribulation in Matthew 24:4-31. He spoke of the birth pains, the persecution, the calamity, the abomination of desolation, and the glorious account of His return. Now if His Word is indestructible and eternal and it is, then you can be sure these events will come to pass just as He said.

Conclusion:

Let me just give to you some encouragement connected to the eternality of the Bible. Because God's Word is eternal that means we can hold tight to the promises which are addressed to us and know for sure they will come to pass.

Psalm 119:89

⁸⁹ For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven.