

**The Olivet Discourse
Part 1 – The Test of a True Prophet
Matt 24:1-3**

1. How would you like to know the future? To know what was coming next week, next year, or even 50 years from now?
 - a. Life sure would be different – If you knew you were going to get in an automobile accident, you could stay at home and be safe!
 - i. If I knew the numbers for the next lottery... well I'm just saying!
 - ii. But think about it – you may have made very different decisions...
 - iii. Maybe bought Google stock, or invested with Warren Buffet!
 - iv. If my wife knew how I would age – would she still have married me?!
 - b. Point it knowing the future can affect how you live your life. The problem is, we don't have the ability to look into the future. Many people attempt it, or claim it, but no have ever had 100% accuracy.
 - c. Except one. The bible. The bible is unrivaled in it's specifics and it's accuracy regarding the things that are written in it.
 - d. Specifically the bible tells us how things will happen as we move forward in history.
2. There are many predictive passages in both Old and New Testaments, but none is clearer or more detailed than the messaged delivered by Jesus himself as he sat on the Mount of Olives overlooking the city of Jerusalem during the turbulent events of his last week before the cross.
 - a. These words have immense significance for us for they are a revelation of the ultimate fate of earth.
 - b. From His point in time (about A.D. 32) he looks ahead to foretell the destruction of the city of Jerusalem.
 - c. He looks on across the centuries and outlines the signs and times between his first and second coming, thus describing the very age in which we live.
 - d. He looks past the present day to that time which he calls "the end of the age" and sets its events before us in searing and vivid detail, culminating in his own return to earth and the ushering in of the Millennial Kingdom of God.

Overview

- #1 The test of a true prophet
Matt 24:1-3 (Deut 18:18-19)
- #2 The signs of the end-times
Matt 24:4-14
- #3 The Great Tribulation & Second Coming of Christ
Matt 24:15 - 31
- #4 Be Ready!
Matt 24:32-44
- #5 The Contrast: Faithful vs Foolish
Matt 24:45-25:30
- #6 The Reign of the True King
Matt 25:31-46

24:1 Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple, and His disciples came up to show Him the buildings of the temple. 2 And Jesus said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down."

- 3. Remember Jesus had just been at the temple, preaching at the temple, so we might wonder why the disciples were pointing out the temple to Jesus, its not like he was a stranger to it.
 - a. Each year of His life He traveled to Jerusalem for Passover (Luke 2:41 confirms this), He taught there many times, He had just cleansed it a few days prior...
 - b. Perhaps after Jesus had finished his sermon, and talked about not swearing by the temple, His disciples may have felt a little protective of the temple. It was, after all, the center of Jewish life.
 - c. First built by Solomon in 1000 BC, it stood for 500 years until Nebuchadnezzar destroyed it in 586BC.
 - d. But it was rebuilt by Zerubbabel and Ezra just 70 years later.
 - e. Then in the year 19 BC Herod began an expansion project that lasted nearly 80 years, and it was truly magnificent...
 - i. Josephus the historian wrote that the building itself was 500 yards long and 400 yards wide.
 - ii. Its outer panels were covered in gold, so that when the sun shone it was blinding to look at.
 - iii. The parts not covered in gold were paneled with marble so pure that from a distance it looked as if snow were on the walls.
 - f. This icon of the Jewish faith had been the center of worship for the Jewish nation for nearly 1000 years.

4. Perhaps the disciples felt a little threatened by Jesus charges against the Jewish religious leadership, and His teaching against “swearing by the temple”.
 - a. Perhaps they were startled by His closing statement...

Matt 23:38-39

See! Your house is left to you desolate; for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!'"

- b. The temple? Desolate? That means it no longer has value, no longer has worth, its inhabitants have left... ...God has left the building...
5. But I believe that there was another reason that Jesus made this startling prediction about the destruction of the temple – it was to be a *test of the prophet*, and the prophecy He was about the give.

Deut 18:18-22

I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account. But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, must be put to death."

You may say to yourselves, "How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the LORD?" If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him. (from New International Version)

- a. In other words, if someone speaks a prophecy, how can you believe know if it is from the Lord? Simple: You wait to see if it comes true!
- b. You see Jesus is about to tell His disciples some serious things about the end of the age, the great Tribulation, the Rapture, and the return of Jesus at the end of the Tribulation.
- c. The men that were listening to Him would not see these events in their lifetime – but the generations that followed would read these words, and they would have to make a determination “are these words true?”
 - i. Note that there is an indicator in v15 that what Jesus is saying is *meant* for future generations...

Matt 24:15 "Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place" (whoever reads, let him understand)

- d. What better way to establish His accuracy than to give a prophecy that would occur in the near-term, something that would prove that the words He was speaking would indeed come to pass?
6. And come to pass they did – 40 years later, in 70 BC, when the Roman general Titus surrounded Jerusalem, and laid siege to the city.
- a. Luke's account gives a little more detail:

Luke 21:20

"When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. (NIV)

With Titus was a Jewish historian named Josephus who recorded the terrible story in minute detail. It was one of the most ghastly sieges in all history. When the Romans came the city was divided among three warring factions of Jews, who were so at each others' throats that they paid no heed to the approach of the Romans. Thus, Titus came up and surrounded the city while it was distracted by its own warring factions. During the siege the Romans assaulted the walls again and again, and they gave many opportunities to the Jews to surrender and save their capital from destruction.

During the long siege a terrible famine raged in the city and the bodies of the inhabitants of the city were literally stacked like cordwood in the streets. Mothers ate their own children to preserve their own strength. The toll of Jewish suffering was horrible but they would not surrender the city. Again and again they attempted to trick the Romans. Once the Romans entered the city, the last Jewish holdouts retreated to the largest, most secure building in the city – the temple. Titus tried to preserve the Temple by giving orders to his soldiers not to destroy or burn it. But the anger of the soldiers against the Jews was so intense that, maddened by the resistance they encountered, they disobeyed the order of their general and set fire to the temple.

There were great quantities of gold and silver which had been placed in the Temple for safekeeping. Those precious metals melted and ran down between the rocks and into the cracks of the stones that formed the Temple and the walls around it. When the fires had died down, the soldiers took long bars and pried apart these massive stones. Thus, quite literally, not one stone was left standing upon another. The Temple itself was totally destroyed, though the wall supporting the area upon which the Temple was built was left partially intact and a portion of it remains to this day, called the Western Wall.

In this remarkable fulfillment, confirmed by secular history, is convincing proof that God will fulfill every other part of this amazing message fully and literally. As Jesus himself said in the discourse, *"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away."*

7. So what is the point of all this? Jesus is about to lay out some heavy stuff – basically a summary of the age to come... the “last days”
 - a. He will share about the signs that will precede His return, the Great Tribulation, the Rapture, His return, and the Millennial Kingdom.
 - b. Some people who would hear his words would say it’s crazy. Some who hear it now say it’s crazy.
 - c. And the fact of the matter is we shouldn’t believe everything we hear or read... which is why God gave a very basic test for a prophet: *“If what they say doesn’t come true, then don’t believe their words!”*
 - d. In other words – there is a TEST.
8. Well – this is Jesus submitting his prophecy to the test. He is giving his disciples a scenario that will happen in the near future – 40 years – when several of the disciples will still be alive to witness it.
 - a. And those of us who read this now can also attest that the prophecy that Jesus spoke did indeed come to pass.
 - b. So Jesus passes the test of a prophet – His word is true, the prophecy is sure, these things will come to pass.
9. So when His disciples come to Him and ask...

3 Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"

10. They are asking three questions...
 - a. When will these things be?
 - i. Jesus will answer this question – Lukes account gives the answer.
 - b. What will be the sign of Your coming?
 - i. It is an honest question, but without the ability to see into the future, as we can look to the past, the answer is much harder to quantify.
 - ii. They are probably still thinking that Jesus would set up His kingdom – like – soon! A political uprising, an overthrow of the Roman Empire, and nice houses for all of His disciples!
 - c. What will be the sign of the end of the age?

- i. These men, being Jewish, knew the OT and the prophecies of Gods Kingdom, and of a final judgment,
 - ii. But what they could not see would be the large expanse of time between that time and the end of the church age.
- 11. Jesus will answer these questions for His disciples, in reverse order, and we will walk through His statements in detail, so that we all can have an understanding of these things that Jesus communicates.
 - a. They are important – they are the future – everything will unfold just as Jesus predicted, because His word is true – the prophecies are solid.
- 12. We will notice that Jesus speaks to these men as though they would live to see all the events he predicts. Obviously, therefore, he is speaking to them as representative men.
 - a. Some of them saw the destruction of Jerusalem as he had foretold it, but none would live to see the close of the age, and none would pass through the Great Tribulation.
 - b. These men were uniquely representative men. They were representatives both of Israel and the church.
 - c. At the time he spoke to them they were Jewish believers, men of Israel, all of them. As such they represented the nation and God's dealings with that remarkable people.
 - d. But after the cross and Pentecost they were Christians, part of the Church, neither Jew nor Greek. They would then belong to a unique body which has a task to fulfill – preaching the gospel message - throughout the intervening centuries before the end times.
 - e. Thus the message includes truth for the church in its relationship to the present age, and also truth for Israel in its time of trouble to come at the end of the age.
- 13. As Jesus sits looking out over the city he is facing the darkest hour of his life. He knows the scheming of his enemies and the opposition that is growing.
 - a. He knows what Judas is planning. His enemies think they are doing their nefarious deeds in secret, but he knows it all.
 - b. He knows the frailty of his friends and that he can never depend upon them. These very disciples who gather around him on the mountain will in just a few hours forsake him and flee.
 - c. One of them will even deny him with curses. He knows all that.
 - d. Even more so: He sees the darkness of the coming centuries, the tragedies, the evil, even the terrible things that will be done in His name...

- e. **But he looks through them to the future beyond. When all around him seems utterly hopeless he quietly declares what the end will be, and He doesn't have the slightest uncertainty or doubt.**
- 14. All things, he says, all events, will find their significance and meaning in one thing and one thing only: Their relationship to Him.**
- a. **Any event which is not related to his purpose in the age is worthless and useless, without real meaning or significance.**
 - b. **As we listen to his declaration of what the course of human history will be, we must each face the inevitable question:**
 - i. **What part am I playing in the age that we live in?**
 - ii. **We might feel like a tiny speck – but the truth is that every single thing that is done in alignment with God and His purpose is a significant contribution to His plan.**
 - c. **Am I contributing to the plan of God which is moving through history to bring the age to its appointed climax, and which will usher in the return of the Son of God to establish his kingdom over the earth?**
- 15. We do not live our life in an isolated segment of time.**
- a. **What is happening today in our town, our state, our country, all of it is moving towards the time known as “The end of the age”**
 - b. **With all the talk and debate about political parties, and government expansion, financial crisis, global solution... the leaders of our country and others approach all of these things as if the future of the human race lies in their hands.**
 - c. **That somehow through programs or legislative initiative they can usher mankind out of crisis and into that elusive nirvana of “The Great and Just society”.**
 - d. **But the fact of the matter is there is a God in heaven who is sovereign, and He has seen the future, and it is not a man-made heaven of peace and justice.**
 - e. **Man's best efforts will bring our world to the brink of self-destruction.**
 - f. **And then the Lord Jesus Christ will return – amen!**

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