

To Seek and to Save the Lost

The Olivet Discourse

Luke 21:5-38

Rev. Freddy Fritz

February 7, 2016

The Olivet Discourse

Scripture

It was the final week of Jesus' life, just days before his death. All of the public attempts of the various groups of religious leaders to discredit Jesus had failed completely, and they no longer dared ask him any question (Luke 20:40). Jesus warned his disciples, in the hearing of all the people, to beware of the religious leaders because of their pride, greed, and hypocrisy (Luke 20:45-46). Jesus also affirmed the sacrificial generosity of a poor widow (Luke 21:1-4).

Then Jesus and his disciples left the temple, crossed the Kidron valley, and went up the Mount of Olives. That is where he taught the lesson we call "The Olivet Discourse."

Let's read about the Olivet Discourse in Luke 21:5-38:

⁵ And while some were speaking of the temple, how it was adorned with noble stones and offerings, he said, ⁶ "As for these things that you see, the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down." ⁷ And they asked him, "Teacher, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?" ⁸ And he said, "See that you are not led astray. For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!' and, 'The time is at hand!' Do not go after them. ⁹ And when you hear of wars and tumults, do not be terrified, for these things must first take place, but the end will not be at once."

¹⁰ Then he said to them, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. ¹¹ There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven. ¹² But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake. ¹³ This will be your opportunity to bear witness. ¹⁴ Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, ¹⁵ for I will give you a mouth

and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict. ¹⁶ You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death. ¹⁷ You will be hated by all for my name's sake. ¹⁸ But not a hair of your head will perish. ¹⁹ By your endurance you will gain your lives.

²⁰ "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. ²¹ Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those who are inside the city depart, and let not those who are out in the country enter it, ²² for these are days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written. ²³ Alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! For there will be great distress upon the earth and wrath against this people. ²⁴ They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

²⁵ "And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, ²⁶ people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ²⁷ And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. ²⁸ Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

²⁹ And he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. ³⁰ As soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near. ³¹ So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. ³² Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place. ³³ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

³⁴ "But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. ³⁵ For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶ But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."

³⁷ And every day he was teaching in the temple, but at night he went out and lodged on the mount called Olivet. ³⁸ And early in the morning all the people came to him in the temple to hear him.
(Luke 21:5-38)

Introduction

New Testament scholar Earle Ellis said that the Olivet Discourse “has been the subject of more scholarly debate than perhaps any other passage in the Gospels.”¹ That is because Jesus spoke in prophetic terms and also because future prophetic language sometimes had multiple fulfillments. That is what is going on in the Olivet Discourse. Some of Jesus’ statements had a near prophetic fulfillment, and some of his statements had a distant prophetic fulfillment.

Because of the complexity of Jesus’ teaching on the Mount of Olives, which we call the Olivet Discourse, I am simply going to highlight a few aspects of the passage. Perhaps one day I shall return to the Olivet Discourse and do a detailed and in-depth study of it.

Lesson

The analysis of the Olivet Discourse in Luke 21:5-38 teaches us that Jesus is coming again and has given us signs that ought to make us pray and get ready for his coming to establish his kingdom.

Let’s use the following outline:

1. The Disciples’ Observation (21:5)
2. Jesus’ Response (21:6)
3. The Disciples’ Questions (21:7)
4. Jesus’ Teaching (21:8-38)

I. The Disciples’ Observation (21:5)

First, notice the disciples’ observation.

¹ E. Earle Ellis, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981), 239.

As I mentioned previously, Jesus and his disciples were leaving the temple in order to go to the Mount of Olives. They were walking together, and **some** of the disciples **were speaking of the temple, how it was adorned with noble stones and offerings** (21:5). Mark records the conversation as follows, “And as [Jesus] came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!’” (Mark 13:1).

The temple about which the disciples were speaking was not the original temple. It was a temple that Herod the Great (37–4 BC) decided to refurbish as part of a national reconstruction program. Commentator Darrell Bock said, “The refurbishing started in 19 BC and continued for over eighty years, not being completed until 63–64 AD, just a few years before the city [of Jerusalem] and the temple fell.”²

Herod’s temple was stunning in its beauty. It was one of the most beautiful buildings in the ancient world. The ancient historian Josephus described the temple as follows:

The whole of the outer works of the temple was in the highest degree worthy of admiration; for it was completely covered with gold plates, which, when the sun was shining on them, glittered so dazzlingly that they blinded the eyes of the beholders not less than when one gazed at the sun’s rays themselves. And on the other sides, where there was no gold, the blocks of marble were of such a pure white that to strangers who had never previously seen them (from a distance) they looked like a mountain of snow.³

II. Jesus’ Response (21:6)

Second, let’s look at Jesus’ response.

Jesus’ response to the disciples’ admiration for the beauty of the temple was a bit surprising. Jesus said in verse 6, “**As for these things**

² Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: 9:51–24:53*, vol. 2, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1996), 1660.

³ Flavius Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, as quoted in Norval Geldenhuys, *The Gospel of Luke*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), 534.

that you see, the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”

Now this was a remarkable prophecy. According to Josephus, “Some of the stones in the building were forty-five cubits in length, five in height and six in breadth.”⁴ A cubit is about 18 inches, and so the dimension of some of the stones were 67½ feet in length, 7½ feet in height, and 9 feet in breadth. Those were massive stones! And yet, Jesus said that they **will be thrown down!**

Jesus’ prophecy was literally fulfilled in 70 AD, when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the temple. They erected scaffolds around the walls of the temple and its surrounding buildings, filled them with wood and other flammable material, and set them on fire. The intense heat from the fires caused the stones to crumble. After it was further dismantled and sifted to find all the melted gold, the rubble was thrown down into the Kidron Valley.⁵

The destruction of the temple was an act of divine judgment. God punished his people for rejecting his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. As commentator Philip Ryken said,

The destruction of the temple was also a gospel sign of the new salvation that God had provided in Jesus. The ancient system of Jewish religion had come to an end. The old temple sacrifices no longer atoned for sin. Now the only temple that mattered was the temple of Jesus – his own body – which was torn down from the cross and raised again from the grave (see John 2:19–22), giving eternal life to every Jew and every Gentile who trusts in him.⁶

III. The Disciples’ Questions (21:7)

Third, observe the disciples’ questions.

⁴ Flavius Josephus, quoted in R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 296.

⁵ MacArthur, John F (2014-10-01). *Luke 18-24* MacArthur New Testament Commentary (MacArthur New Testament Commentary Series) (p. 177). Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition.

⁶ Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, vol. 2, *Reformed Expository Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), 411.

And they asked him, “Teacher, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?” (21:7). The disciples wanted to know *when* the destruction of the temple would take place, and also *what* would be the sign that would precede the destruction of the temple.

Jesus answered their questions. It seems to me that he was largely answering the questions in relation to the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem. However, as Jesus answered their questions about the immediate destruction of the temple, he was also preparing future disciples for the end of the world. In other words, Jesus answered their questions about what would happen before and during the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple in 70 AD. And yet the end of the world is always in the background. Dr. Ryken says, “The destruction of the temple is a portent of the final judgment; it is the beginning of the end. So Jesus extends the discussion from the destruction of the temple all the way to the end of the world.”⁷

IV. Jesus’ Teaching (21:8-38)

And fourth, let’s look at Jesus’ teaching.

I don’t have time to go through Jesus’ teaching point by point. What I would like to do is highlight a few points for us today.

In verse 32 Jesus said, **“Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place.”** There has been much scholarly debate over the meaning of the word **generation**. I tend to side with those scholars who say that a generation in those days was about 40 years. And since Jesus was speaking these words in 30 AD, a generation would bring them to 70 AD, the year in which the temple and Jerusalem was destroyed. And so Jesus was saying that all the things he was teaching them would take place leading up to the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple in 70 AD.

Jesus began his teaching by warning his disciples about several things that would happen in the years prior to the fall of Jerusalem

⁷ Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, 412.

and the destruction of the temple in 70 AD.

First, Jesus warned his disciples about false teachers. Jesus said in verse 8, **“See that you are not led astray. For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he!’ and, ‘The time is at hand!’ Do not go after them.”** Jesus knew that people always made mistakes about predicting the end of the world. In the seventeenth century it was Sabbatai Sevi, whom thousands of Jews worshiped as the Christ. In the twentieth century it was men like Jim Jones and David Koresh, who led hundreds of people to unnecessary deaths. Today, there are even a number of websites, such as “The Rapture Index,” predicting how soon until Jesus returns!

Second, Jesus warned his disciples about wars. Jesus said in verses 9-10, **“And when you hear of wars and tumults, do not be terrified, for these things must first take place, but the end will not be at once. . . . Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.”** Will Durant wrote, “War is one of the constants of history, and has not diminished with civilization and democracy. In the last 3,421 years of recorded history only 268 have seen no war.”⁸ And, of course, there were the Romans who waged war against Jerusalem, which led to its fall in 70 AD.

Third, Jesus warned his disciples about catastrophes. Jesus said in verse 11a, **“There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences.”** There were powerful earthquakes in Phrygia in 61 AD, and the famous earthquake in Pompeii two years later. There were also a number of famines, such as the one in the early 60s when Paul was trying to raise money from the Corinthians for the relief of the Christians in Jerusalem. And these catastrophes have continued throughout the ages.

Fourth, Jesus warned his disciples about cosmic signs. Jesus said in verse 11b, **“And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven.”** The historian Josephus recorded that a comet (which he called a “tailed star”) appeared over the city of Jerusalem for a long

⁸ Will and Ariel Durant, *The Lessons of History* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1968), 81.

time in the form of a sword.

Fifth, Jesus warned his disciples about persecution. Jesus said in verse 12, **“But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name’s sake.”** Jesus’ disciples did face persecution, ironically not at the hands of the Romans but at the hands of the religious leaders. It is believed that every one of the apostles, with the exception of John who was banished to the Island of Patmos, was martyred because of his faith in Jesus.

Sixth, Jesus warned his disciples about evangelistic opportunities. Jesus said in verse 13, **“This will be your opportunity to bear witness.”** In the midst of persecution God’s people will be able to point people to Jesus. Again this happened to the apostles who were interrogated by the Sanhedrin. It happened to Stephen as he was being stoned for his faith in Jesus. And it has happened throughout history as well, as God’s people are enabled to speak for Jesus.

And seventh, Jesus warned his disciples to watch and pray. Jesus said in verse 36, **“But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”** That is what God’s people should do. Jesus is returning and he wants his people to be ready for his return.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the Olivet Discourse in Luke 21:5-38, we should pray and be ready for the return of Jesus.

Dr. Ryken says that the words of Jesus from this farewell prophecy make a dramatic difference in desperate times of danger. A powerful example comes from the preaching ministry of Donald Grey Barnhouse.⁹ It was the summer of 1939. While Barnhouse had been

⁹ Donald Grey Barnhouse first told this story in his studies on the “Epistle to the Romans,” part 55 (Philadelphia: The Bible Study Hour, 1955), 4–12.

preaching in Scotland, his family was vacationing on the coast of France. He was scheduled to be in Belfast, Northern Ireland, by Saturday night, but first he decided to make a quick trip to France to be with his family.

On his way out of Britain Dr. Barnhouse was warned that he might not make it back in time to preach on Sunday. Europe was in turmoil; there were rumors of war, as Hitler threatened to march on Danzig. Barnhouse decided to take his chances, but the official who stamped his passport said, "Don't forget that I warned you."

This proved to be a prescient warning. Just a few days later Hitler invaded Poland and all flights to England were cancelled. Dr. Barnhouse had to make a long, slow journey overland to Paris and then back to the French coast in order to catch a ferry across to England. Everywhere he went there were signs of the coming battle. Church bells were ringing across the countryside – the tocsins of war. Trains were jammed with soldiers mobilizing for war, and some of the towns they passed would be destroyed in the subsequent bombing. Barnhouse made his passage to England late at night, and while he was visiting with the ship's captain the radio reported that the prime minister had issued Germany an ultimatum: unless the Nazis withdrew from Poland, Britain would go to war. It would be the last civilian steamship to cross the English Channel until the war was over.

London was as chaotic as Paris had been. The railway platforms were lined with children being evacuated to the countryside. Many of them were crying – some of the first victims of war. Barnhouse crossed the countryside by train, and then took another night passage, this time to Northern Ireland. By the time he reached Belfast it was three in the morning, and he had only a few hours to get some rest before the morning worship service.

The church was packed, with everyone expecting the declaration of war to be announced at any time. The church's pastor was only too happy for Barnhouse to preach, and kept saying, "Thank God you're here! I pray that God will give you something to say to the lads. This may be the last sermon that some of them ever hear." Then, just

as Barnhouse was getting ready to step into the pulpit, one of the elders slipped a note to the pastor, who passed it to Barnhouse. It read, "No reply from Hitler. The prime minister has declared war."

Barnhouse began by telling the congregation that he had a perfect text for them that morning – a text first spoken by the Lord Jesus Christ as a command to his people: "You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed." He then recounted the alarming experiences he had on his way to Belfast. As he described each terror, he stopped and repeated his text: *Do not be alarmed*. The siren will sound, and soldiers will mobilize: *Do not be alarmed*. Millions of homes will be broken up: *Do not be alarmed*. Children will be torn from their mothers, and their cries will represent the wails that are going up all over the world. But Jesus said, "Do not be alarmed."

As Barnhouse went through this litany of lamentation, piling monstrous grief on agonizing horror, the tension in the church was mounting. Finally, Barnhouse stopped and said, "These words are either the words of a madman or they are the words of God." Then he shook his fist toward heaven, and cried out, "Oh, God, unless Jesus Christ is God, these words are the most horrible that could be spoken to men who have hearts that can weep and bowels that can be gripped by human suffering. Men are dying. *Do not be alarmed?* Children are crying in their misery with no beloved face in sight. *Do not be alarmed?* How can Jesus Christ say such a thing?"

Then Barnhouse gave the answer: Jesus Christ *is* God. He is the Lord of history. He is the God of detailed circumstance. Nothing has ever happened without God knowing it. The sin of man has reduced the world to passion and fury. Men tear at each other's throats. Yet in the midst of the history in which Jesus is Lord, everyone who believes in him will know the power of his resurrection and will learn that no event, however terrible, can ever separate us from the love of God.¹⁰

Friends, this is our hope in all of life's difficulties. Whatever trial, difficulty, or circumstance may befall us, let us trust in Jesus. Amen.

¹⁰ Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, 420–422.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can be found at:

1. www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons
2. www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp
3. www.sermonaudio.com/source_detail.asp?sourceid=Fred-dyFritz

Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church (PCA)

Answers for Life!

Address: 19911 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33647

Telephone: (813) 973-2484

Fax: (813) 973-4673

Email: Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org

Web site: www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org

PRAYER:

Our Father, this passage is a sobering one. Jesus taught his disciples to be ready for the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple in 70 AD. The destruction of the temple was a sign that the ancient system of Jewish religion had come to an end. The old temple sacrifices were no longer of any use because of the once-for-all perfect sacrifice of your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. He gave his body to be sacrificed for sinners so that we might have life.

And Father, we know that Jesus is coming back again. The signs that preceded the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple may very well appear again as signs to point us to the return of Jesus.

Enable each one of us to watch and pray and be ready for the return of Jesus. If there is anyone here today who has not yet put his or her trust in Jesus, would you enable that person to do so today.

And for this I pray in Jesus' name.

BENEDICTION:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

CHARGE:

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve God wholeheartedly!