

THE OLIVET DISCOURSE

Matthew 24-25

Let's turn to Matthew 24.

The Gospel of Matthew has turned a major corner. Jesus is now done speaking to the Jewish leaders, and His focus will be entirely on His disciples. In the Upper Room discourse in John 13-16, Jesus prepares His disciples for their future ministry. In the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24 & 25, He teaches them about the end of time.

Here's our plan for this morning. The Olivet Discourse is prompted by a **troubling interaction** between Jesus and His disciples in Matthew 24:1-2. They respond by asking Him **three excellent questions** in Matthew 24:3. His answers to those questions are contained in the remainder of Matthew 24 and all of Matthew 25. We should be able to get through these two chapters this morning. Nah, you know me better than that! We are going to move patiently through the Olivet Discourse. It's too important to rush through. So after considering the three questions asked by Jesus' disciples, we'll go over an outline of the Olivet Discourse so that you can read and think ahead. I'll speak a little bit about my convictions about the end times and then bring the message home with an exhortation.

A TROUBLING INTERACTION

Matthew 24:1-2

1 And coming out from the temple,
 Jesus was going along,
 and His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him.
(Matthew 24:1, 2022 LSB)

This is taking place on Wednesday of Passion Week. Several chapters give us Jesus' teaching in the Temple that day. We know from Matthew 26:6 that Jesus and

His disciples have supper Wednesday evening at the house of Simon the leper in Bethany. They need to get to Bethany in time for supper. So it's probably sometime in the afternoon when they begin to leave the Temple through the eastern gate.

As they make their way through the Temple to the gate, the disciples can't help but express their amazement at the Temple buildings. They want Jesus to take notice of them, so they call attention to them. We aren't told the words they used, but the language suggests something like, "Look at the glory of the Temple; what a wonderful, magnificent place!"

As Galileans, they weren't at the Temple very often, just a few times a year, and they didn't linger long in the Temple itself. Most of their time during the feasts was spent outside the city. What's more, the rebuilding project that Herod the Great began around 19 B.C. was still in progress; it had thirty years to go. So it's possible that each visit to the Temple revealed new buildings, designs, or decorations.

Whatever the case, the disciples are greatly impressed and want to share their enthusiasm with Jesus. The Temple complex was not built of wood and brick. It was built of stone, primarily limestone and marble. Generally speaking, the stones used weighed between two and five tons each, although one particular stone found in the western wall tunnel measures 42 feet long, 11 feet high, and 14 feet wide and weighs an estimated 600 tons. The Second Temple was easily comparable to any building in Rome or Athens in both size and beauty. That's what stands out to the disciples.

But Jesus' response is troubling to them:

**2 And He answered and said to them,
"Do you not see all these things?
Truly I say to you,
not one stone here will be left upon another,
which will not be torn down."
(Matthew 24:2, 2022 LSB)**

Every one of those impressive structures will be pulled down so completely that not one stone will remain on top of another. It will be utterly dismantled. That glorious, magnificent place is going to be reduced to rubble.

That message no doubt chilled them to the bone, confused them, and shocked them. I can imagine that they were very subdued as they turned and followed Jesus out of the eastern gate, and down through the Kidron Valley, and up again onto the Mount of Olives, where it appears they stopped to rest before continuing on to Bethany. Jesus sat by Himself a little ways away, and they talked amongst themselves about His words before they approached Him with three excellent questions.

THREE EXCELLENT QUESTIONS

Matthew 24 3

3 Now as He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?”
(**Matthew 24:3, 2022 LSB**)

When will these things happen?

What will be the sign of Your coming?

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

Those are three excellent questions, and they are connected to one another.

As to “when,” that’s none of their business or ours.

36 “But of that day and hour no one knows,
not even the angels of heaven,
nor the Son,
but the Father alone.”
(Matthew 24:36, 2022 LSB)

We’ll dive deeper into Jesus’ meaning when we get to that passage. For now, we will just take Jesus’ words at face value: He is not going to answer the question of *when* because that information belongs to the Father alone.

As to the signs of Christ’s coming and the end of the age, Jesus has much more to say. We could think of these signs as the *symptoms* or *clues* that Christ’s return and the end of the age are getting close.

That doesn’t mean that we will be able to guess *when* once we see the *signs*:

42 “Therefore stay awake,
for you do not know which day your Lord is coming.”
(Matthew 24:42, 2022 LSB)

If you happen to get up before sunrise, you know that the sky begins to gradually lighten as the earth rotates to the east. If you go outside and watch, you can pretty much guess the moment that the disk of the sun peeks over the horizon.

But the coming of Christ is going to be like a flash of lightning:

27 “For just as the lightning comes from the east and appears even to the west,
so will the coming of the Son of Man be.”
(Matthew 24:27, 2022 LSB)

Since we can’t predict when Jesus will return, we have to remain ready.

Jesus also answers two unasked questions.

First, how should they – and we – live in light of Christ’s return and the end of the age? Putting it briefly, Christians are to remain in a state of readiness at all times. Jesus could return at any time. Nothing hinders Him from coming back before I finish this sermon.

And second, what exactly will take place at the end of the age? Again, putting it briefly, this age will end with Christ gathering His people and the execution of God’s judgment on the wicked.

Every child of God through Christ, all those who have trusted in Yahweh throughout time, will be brought into His eternal Kingdom, according to the love and mercy of God.

And all sin and rebellion, every last bit of it, will be rooted out, and every sinner will be judged according to the holiness and justice of God.

The end of Matthew 25 compares the final judgment to a stockman separating sheep and goats. If I may put it this way, the wicked and righteous in creation are currently integrated. There are weeds in the wheat field, as the parable of Matthew 13 says. Jesus is going to separate and isolate the wicked and the righteous. There will no longer be any contact between the two. The intermingling of the children of God and the children of wrath will end.

The wicked will no longer benefit from the influence of the righteous. Neither will the wicked benefit from the blessings of God upon the righteous.

And the righteous will no longer suffer because of the influence of the wicked. Neither will the righteous suffer because of God’s temporal judgment upon the wicked.

I'm not simply speaking of active persecution but also of the influence of the wicked in our world. I don't know if there will be television in eternity or not; if there is, you won't see fornication or drunkenness being displayed; you won't see two men holding hands or two women wearing wedding dresses; you won't see a man pretending to be a woman, or a baby, or a bunny rabbit.

AN OUTLINE OF THE OLIVET DISCOURSE

Matthew 24:3-25:46

The Olivet Discourse contains three broad topics:

- The need for Jesus' disciples to be prepared for what is to come; we'll call this "Readiness."
- The Signs of the end times.
- Descriptions of the Judgment to come.

The Olivet Discourse

24:1-3: Preface	24:34-35: Judgment "This" generation will not pass away
24:4-8: Readiness Do not be deceived or alarmed	24:36: "When" None of our business
24:9-12: Signs False prophets and apostasy	24:37-41: Judgment Just like the days of Noah
24:13-14: Readiness Enduring faith and continuing evangelism	24:42-44: Readiness The Parable of the Thief in the Night
24:15-24: Signs The abomination of desolation	24:45-51: Readiness The Parable of the Faithful Slave
24:25-28: Readiness The Son will coming like lightning	25:1-13: Readiness The Parable of the Ten Virgins
24:29-31: Judgment The Elect are gathered	25:14-30: Readiness The Parable of the Talents
24:32-33: Readiness The Parable of the Fig Tree	25:31-46: Judgment Eternal separation of the "sheep" and "goats"

MY CONVICTIONS ABOUT THE END TIMES

As I study and teach through these chapters, it will be with a particular conviction about the end times and how they will play out.

There are three primary views of the end times, all of which define themselves in terms of Christ's relationship to the millennial kingdom as described in Revelation 20:1-4.

1 Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven,
having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand.

2 And he laid hold of the dragon,
the serpent of old,
who is the devil and Satan,
and bound him for a thousand years; **[that is, a millennium]**

3 and he threw him into the abyss,
and shut it and sealed it over him,
so that he would not deceive the nations any longer,
until the thousand years were finished.

After these things he must be released for a short time.

4 Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them,
and judgment was given to them.

And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded
because of their witness of Jesus and because of the word of God,
and who also had not worshiped the beast or his image,
and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand.

And they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. **[that is, a millennium]**

(Revelation 20:1–4, 2022 LSB)

The three views are called pre-millennialism, post-millennialism, and a-

millennialism.

I am going to teach more specifically about these views tonight, but I want to give you a basic foundation this morning. You understand, of course, that basic foundations are, by definition, basic. Each of these views has a number of variations which I will not try to explain.

A-millennialism is the belief that the millennium is not literal but symbolic or allegorical. It teaches that Jesus is reigning now in heaven over the hearts of His saints on earth, and that's the full extent of God's Kingdom on earth. It teaches that there is an ongoing spiritual battle between good and evil in the world, which will end immediately with the final judgment and the establishment of the new heavens and earth. It also teaches that there is a parallel development of both good and evil in creation, described as God's Kingdom and Satan's kingdom, which will continue until the Second Coming of Christ.

My problem with a-millennialism is that it has to deny that Satan is bound and no longer deceiving the nations. I would love to ask an a-millennialist if they really believe that Satan is not dominating the unbelieving world right now.

Post-millennialism is the belief that Jesus will personally return after the millennial period. The millennium is real, but not 1,000 years; that's just a poetic way of saying that the millennium will last a really long time. Post-millennialism denies that Jesus will personally establish and rule over His Kingdom on earth. Instead, the millennium will begin when the church has, through the preaching of the Gospel, "Christianized" the world. Few, if any, unbelievers will exist. Virtually everyone will be born again. The millennium will be a "golden age" (that's their phrasing) that could last hundreds or even thousands of years before Jesus personally returns. And when He returns, it will not be to rule on earth but to initiate final judgment.

My problem with post-millennialism is that the Scriptures describe the great

tribulation as the worst time of tribulation the world has ever known. Jesus says of the end of time,

**22 “And unless those days had been cut short,
no life would have been saved;
but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.”
(Matthew 24:22, 2022 LSB)**

“Those days” will be cut short by the Second Coming of Christ when He establishes His Kingdom on the earth.

Pre-millennialism is the belief that Jesus will return personally to initiate His Kingdom on earth, which will last for 1,000 years: a millennium. The end times will unfold exactly and literally as the Scriptures describe. So, Jesus will personally reign over the world of mortal men from Jerusalem. His government will be the only government. Resurrected and glorified believers will reign with Him on earth. Satan will be literally bound so that he cannot deceive the nations during that time. Satan will be released from his bonds after 1,000 years in order to deceive the peoples of the world and gather them together into a single army against the Lord Jesus at Jerusalem, which will then be destroyed by fire from heaven. This will be immediately followed by the great white throne judgment.

One of the biggest problems with the a- and post-millennial views is what they must do to Revelation 20. They believe that Revelation 20:1-10 are symbolic and allegorical and absolutely not real events. But both believe that Revelation 20:11-15, which describes the Great White Throne judgment, is real and is going to happen beyond any shadow of a doubt. But why? What happens between Revelation 20:9 and Revelation 20:10 to say, “OK, now it’s not allegorical and symbolic any longer but real and literal”? I don’t know. Pre-millennialism says that it is all equally real, equally literal, and will happen just as Scripture describes.

BRINGING IT HOME: AN EXHORTATION

The Bible is true. What Jesus describes in the Olivet Discourse will happen exactly as He said it will. The signs of His coming will take place. The signs of the end will take place. Judgment will proceed in a strategic, methodical way.

And so we who submit to Jesus as Lord and trust Him as Savior must faithfully believe and follow His instructions. We must be ready at any time, not just for His return, but for the signs of the end and the phases of judgment that will occur before final judgment. We must be ready for what the Lord does. We don't know when He will return. We don't need to know when. We simply need to be ready. And we *can* be ready because He has already told us what *He* is doing and how the world is going to respond.

You know, the colored outline I showed you has sixteen blocks that are all the same size. But when we look at the number of words that Jesus used, we see that about twenty percent describe the signs of the end, thirty percent describe the coming judgment, and one-half are repeated exhortations to be ready: not deceived, not alarmed, prepared to endure in faith and the Gospel, and to be ready for Jesus to return at any time.

Sometimes premillennialists are criticized for believing that Jesus could return at any moment. In recent years that belief has been called “escapism” and even “loser theology.” All I can do is point to what the Lord Jesus says. He could return at any time like a lightning bolt, like an unexpected thief in the night. We don't know when He will return. In fact, Jesus says that “The Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will.” Our job is not to try to figure out when but to understand that it could be today and live accordingly.

Let's understand that whatever others say, Jesus doesn't criticize those who long for His return. He doesn't say that we have loser theology for wanting to be with

Him. He doesn't accuse us of wanting to escape the world. He prayed in John 17:24,

24 “Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.”
(John 17:24, 2022 LSB)

It appears to me that Jesus wants to be with us even more than we want to be with Him. So go ahead and dream of heaven. Long for His return. Hunger to see Him and worship Him without the weight of sin, the grief of sickness, the sorrow of loss, and the distractions of this sinful world. And live ready to see Him.

Let's pray.