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THE OLIVET DISCOURSE

Lesson #1

Matthew 24:1-3

I. INTRODUCTION

Do you have a desire to know what is going to happen in the future? Do you want the veil to be removed from your mind to know something of the future as well as the past? The only one who knows the future is God and He has revealed it to us in the Bible. That is one of the things that makes the Bible such a fascinating book.

If we Christians are going to plan for the future, best we know what God's plans are for this world and get in line with God's program. Gladstone, the English statesman once said,

“The task of statesmanship is to discover the Direction in which God Almighty is going for the next fifty years.”

So how much more true is this for the Christian, for we want to be in tune with God's plan and operate accordingly, no matter what the rest of the world is doing.

Today we begin a study of the Olivet Discourse. Matthew 24 and 25 are prophetic sections of the Bible, and in these chapters the Lord Jesus Christ reveals many truths concerning the ultimate fate of the earth. Our Lord's words are the history of the future already written. This discourse was delivered on the Mount of Olives during our Lord's last week immediately before His crucifixion. It is definitely eschatological in nature for the Lord tells of the destruction of the city of Jerusalem which was in the near future. He looks across the centuries and outlines in a general way the perils that lie between the first and second advents. He looks past the present day to that time which he calls “the end of the age” which in turn will be consummated in his own return to earth and the ushering in of a new day.

II. JUDGMENT ANNOUNCED

“And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: “Our Lord had just preached a scathing sermon against the Pharisees in Jerusalem, pronouncing many woes on them for their religious hypocrisy. He pronounced judgment on the City of Jerusalem because of their rejection of Christ (Luke 19:41-44) and then drove out the money changers from the temple (Luke 19:45). Then He pronounced the destruction of the temple (Matthew 23:37-39), and said, “Your house is left unto you desolate.” Judgment was inevitable for the nation of Israel. NOTE: Jesus left the temple never to return again, and His judgment would be on Israel as a nation until the second advent when they will say, “Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.”

“And his disciples came to him for to show him the buildings of the temple.: -- Having made His pronouncement of judgment, the Lord leaves and walks down through the valley of the Kidron and up the other side to the Mount of Olives. There Jesus could overlook the city and the temple area. The disciples came to him and were confused, for they did not understand Christ’s pronouncement of judgment on Israel. They were not interested in the beauty or architecture of the temple (although it was beautiful) but they could not see how Israel’s program set forth by God in the Old Testament could be continued if the temple and city were destroyed. NOTE: We can see that the vast majority of teaching in the Olivet Discourse deals with God’s future plan for Israel and does not include Church truth per se, for the Church was not yet formed.

III JUDGMENT PREDICTED

“And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things?” -- The “these things” refers to the wickedness of the nation of Israel and the subsequent judgment upon the physical city and temple.

“Verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.” -- Jesus predicts that the temple shall be destroyed and that there will not be one stone standing upon another.

1. This prediction is more clearly taught in Luke 21:20-24. Our Lord says Jerusalem will be surrounded with armies and it will be a horrible time of suffering for the people. It will end in defeat for Israel and Jerusalem (including the temple) will be “trodden down until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.”

2. This prediction was historically fulfilled forty years later in 70 A.D. when the Roman general Titus came with a great army, surrounded the city of Jerusalem and utterly destroyed it and the temple as well. NOTE: Josephus, a Jewish historian of that day, records the fall of Jerusalem to Titus. It was one of the most ghastly sieges of all history. The city was torn with inter strife between warring factions of Jews. They were so busy fighting one another, they did not prepare to fight the Romans. Titus laid siege on the city, and his armies attacked the walls again and again, and gave every opportunity to the Jews to surrender and save their capital from destruction. During the long siege a terrible famine raged in the city and the dead bodies of the inhabitants were stacked in the streets and starving mothers and fathers ate their dead children. The toll of Jewish suffering was terrific. When the walls were finally breached, the armies broke through and destroyed the city and tore down the temple, even though Titus had given orders not to do it. The Romans hated the Jews for their stubbornness, and set fire to the temple. The Jews had hidden their gold in the temple in various places and when the temple burned it melted the gold, causing it to run down between the rocks and into the cracks of the stones. When the soldiers realized that the melted gold was in the walls of the temple, they took bars and pried apart the massive stones. Thus, quite literally, not one stone was left standing upon another. The only portion to remain was the Western Wall, now known as the wailing wall.

3. When Christ predicted the destruction of the city and temple, he was proving himself to be a true prophet according to the Old Testament (Deut. 18:18, 19, 20-22). Christ gave the sign of the destruction of the city and temple as His credentials for being a true prophet. This was then filled to the letter. NOTE: Therefore, we can conclude that whatever prophecies Christ gives in Matthew 24 and 25 will also come true in His appointed time. Our Lord Himself said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away" (24:35).

IV. THE DISCIPLES ASK THREE MAJOR QUESTIONS

"And as he sat upon the Mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately," -- The disciples are confused and ask the Lord three basic questions and He answers all three very directly in chapter 24.

"Saving, Tell us, when shall these things be?" -- This refers the destruction of the temple and the answer is recorded in the Gospel of Luke. It was fulfilled when Titus took Jerusalem, and some of the disciples were still living when Titus fulfilled this prediction in 70 A.D.

"And what shall be the sign of thy coming," -- The disciples want to know a sign that will indicate the Lord's return in His second advent. Christ answers this question in 24:27-51 but specifically states "and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven" (24:30).

"And of the end of the world (age)". -- This is incorrectly translated in the King James and should be translated "age" instead of world. This verse has nothing to do with the end of the world. The world will go on for a long time after the events of the Olivet Discourse are fulfilled, but the age will end with those events. The sign of the close of age is found in verse 15, and is covered in 24:15-26. It will be when the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stands in the holy place. NOTE: Notice that the disciples asked about the sign of his coming and then the end of the age, but our Lord answers them in reverse. Why? Apparently the disciples thought the Lord would come and then there would be the end of the age, but Christ says there will be the end of the age and then He will come. Christ had to correct his disciples in their Biblical prophecy. NOTE: What is very clear from this passage is that the end of the age lies far in the distant future, and we now know that this age has extended at least 2000 years.

POINT: You probably noticed that I purposely left out verses 4-14 and there is some disagreement among prophetic scholars about when they belong in the prophetic program. Many see these events as part of the future Tribulation period and others see them as applying to the whole age of many centuries before the end times. Therefore these verses are related indirectly to the Church. NOTE: Notice that Jesus speaks to these men as though they would live to see all the events he predicted. He must, therefore, be speaking to them as a representative group. Some lived to see the fall of

Jerusalem but not one of them lived to see the end of the age and none passed through the Great Tribulation. They were representatives of both Israel and the Church. At the time he spoke to them they were Jewish believers, men Israel, all of them and had little understanding, if any, of Church truth. As such they represented the nation of Israel. But after the cross and Pentecost they were Christians, part of the Church, neither Jew nor Gentile. They would belong to that unique body of Christ which was to fulfill the task of spreading the gospel message and the kingdom message in the intervening period before the end times and the second advent. Therefore, this discourse included truth for the Church in relation to this present age and also truth for Israel in relation to the end times and the second advent of Christ when Israel will have her kingdom.

V. CONCLUSION

The main purpose of prophecy is that each individual may realize that God has a plan for this world, and that His plan is going right according to schedule. Since God has a plan for the world, each person must get in line with this plan.

Did you know that God's plan not only includes events but also people? But no one can get in tune with God's plan until he receives Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Saviour. The first step in moving with God's purposes is to realize that God loves you and has a wonderful plan for you in Christ. The plan of God means nothing to those who are outside of Christ, but to those who acknowledge they are sinners and headed for eternal punishment and then receive Christ as their personal Saviour from sin and judgment, these are the ones who are consciously moving in God's plan for men. Are you aware of God's plan? Are you a recipient of God's love in Christ? Are you among the redeemed of God? Only you can answer "yes" or "no" to these questions. Your answer will determine where you will spend eternity and heaven and hell are part of God's plan too.