

**“Eschatology”**  
**(Part 38: The Olivet Discourse, Part 5)**

**V. The Olivet Discourse.**

**E. Warnings to be ready, part 1 (vv. 32-44).**

1. Review.

- a. In Matthew 24, following on the eight curses Jesus pronounced on the Jewish leaders for their apostasy, Jesus addresses the judgment that was going to fall on them in 70 AD.
- b. We know this is His subject because of the time indicators in Matthew 23 and 24.
  - (i) “Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation” (Matt. 23:36).
  - (ii) “Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place” (Matt. 24:34).
- c. He tells His disciples in advance so they would be ready for it when it came.
  - (i) He told them what the signs would be that it was approaching.
  - (ii) He told them what the signs would be that it had arrived.
  - (iii) And He told them what would happen immediately following that judgment: the Lord would overthrow the nation of Israel (as symbolized by the darkening of the heavens), the Jews would see clearly that it was the Lord’s coming in judgment against them (as symbolized by Christ coming on the clouds of heaven), and then He would send His church armed with the Gospel out to the farthest reaches of the earth to gather in His elect (as symbolized by the sending of the angels/messengers with the sound of a great trumpet).
- d. This morning, we’ll begin to look at a series of warnings intended to help them stay on the alert.
  - (i) The event was still forty years off, and they might tend to forget.
  - (ii) Since the Second Coming was also something His church should be ready for from the end of that judgment to the end of the world, He also appears to begin to transition towards that event, with a view to the wellbeing of His elect living during that time frame.

2. Warnings to be ready.

- a. Jesus continued with the parable of the Fig Tree to show them that they could know the times and seasons of His coming, **“Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender, and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near; even so you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door” (vv. 32-33).**
  - (i) There doesn’t seem to be any special spiritual significance to this parable; it’s simply a warning to pay attention to the signs.
    - (a) They knew that when leaves began to sprout on fig trees, that summer was approaching. When we see things warming up and plants beginning to grow again, we know spring has come and summer is just around the corner.

- (b) “So too,” Jesus said to His disciples, “when you see all *these things* (i.e., the things He’s already mentioned), “recognize that He is near, right at the door” (v. 33).
- (c) Notice again that Jesus said, “When *you* see *all* these things.” This warning was directed to His disciples because He knew they would live to see this event – perhaps not all of them, but many of them would.

(ii) This is followed with the final reminder, **“Truly I say to you, *this generation* will not pass away until all these things take place” (v. 34).**

- (a) Jesus uses the phrase “this generation” several times in the book of Matthew, and in each case it refers to the generation of Jews *then* living.
  - (1) “But to what shall I compare *this generation*? It is like children sitting in the market places, who call out to the other *children*, and say, ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.’ For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon!’ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds” (Matt. 11:16-19).
  - (2) “The men of Nineveh will stand up with *this generation* at the judgment, and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. *The Queen of the South* will rise up with *this generation* at the judgment and will condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here. Now when the unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and does not find *it*. Then it says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came’; and when it comes, it finds *it* unoccupied, swept, and put in order. Then it goes and takes along with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. That is the way it will also be with *this evil generation*” (Matt. 12:41-45).
  - (3) “‘An evil and adulterous *generation* seeks after a sign; and a sign will not be given it, except the sign of Jonah.’ And He left them and went away” (Matt. 16:4).
  - (4) “And Jesus answered and said, ‘You unbelieving and perverted *generation*, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him here to Me’” (Matt. 17:17).
  - (5) Matthew 23:36 is especially significant, where Jesus says, “Truly I say to you, all these things shall come upon *this generation*.”
  - (6) Notice how each use brings out the evil character of the people then living, showing they were worthy of judgment.
- (b) Jesus was warning that many of them would live to see it, therefore, they needed to be ready. He was not talking about some far distant generation, as many believe in the church today.
  - (1) Many believe the sprouting of the fig tree was symbolic of the rebirth of Israel as a nation, which in their view occurred in 1948.

- (2) The generation that would see this happen would not pass away until Christ returned at His Second Coming.
- (3) This is why so many in the church were expecting Christ's return back in 1981. If Israel became a nation in 1948, and a biblical generation is roughly forty years, then Jesus was due to come in 1988.
- (4) But since His coming was to be preceded by a seven-year tribulation, He had to return for His church in 1981 to take them out of the world before it happened.
- (5) If you were in one of those churches before 1981, you probably remember the excitement and concern: excitement because Jesus was coming; but concern, because of family members and friends who would be left to endure the seven-year Tribulation.
- (6) However, Jesus didn't come because this interpretation was wrong – this isn't what He meant by the fig tree. He was speaking of what would happen to that generation then living about 40 years in the future.
- (7) That judgment was so near that James used it as an incentive to the early Christians to settle their differences quickly. He said, "Do not complain, brethren, against one another, that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door" (James 5:9).

(iii) To enforce even further that they would see it, He added, **"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away"** (v. 35).

- (a) It's the strongest way of saying that it would surely come to pass.
- (b) Jesus uses the same language in Matthew 5:18 to emphasize the fact that His Law would endure as long as the heavens and the earth endured, which in the Jewish mind meant forever.

b. Jesus said they would know the time and the seasons – the signs would show them that it was near – but the *precise time* was hidden.

(i) Even He didn't know when it would be, **"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone"** (v. 36).

- (a) Jehovah's Witnesses like to use this verse to try and prove that Jesus isn't God, because if He was, He would have known the day and the hour.
  - (1) If God knows all things, and Jesus is God, then Jesus too must know all things.
  - (2) But if there was something Jesus didn't know, then He doesn't know all things, and therefore must not be God.
- (b) To answer this, don't forget that Jesus is fully man, as well as fully God, and man, by definition, is limited in every way.
  - (1) Jesus, as a man, didn't have unlimited knowledge – He did in His divine nature, but not in His human nature.
  - (2) His human mind could not, and therefore did not, carry all the knowledge of His divine mind, but only those things the Spirit of God revealed to Him. That's why He didn't know.
  - (3) The fact He didn't know the exact time doesn't prove He isn't God, but proves He is a man.

- (ii) The point is that it wasn't God's will for the disciples to know when Christ was coming, so that they would be ready at all times.
- (a) It was to come unexpectedly on those who rejected Him, **"For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. 38 For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, 39 and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be."** (vv. 37-39).
- (1) Noah and his sons knew that judgment was coming and so built an ark to prepare for it. They knew it wouldn't come until the ark was finished, but they didn't know the exact day or hour, and so were to be ready.
  - (2) The people who lived in Noah's day heard him preaching about it, but didn't believe him. When it came, it caught them off guard and swept them away.
  - (3) The same thing would happen when Jesus came.
- (b) **"Then,"** Jesus said, **"there will be two men in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women *will be* grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left"** (vv. 40-41).
- (1) He's not referring here to the rapture since when that takes place at his Second Coming, everyone will be taken to judgment and no one will be left behind.
  - (2) Instead, He's referring to those who will be taken for judgment by the Romans: some will be ready and escape, while others will not be ready and end up being trapped in that judgment.
  - (3) There was *the possibility of escape*. **"Therefore,"** Jesus said, **"be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming"** (v. 42).
  - (4) They knew the signs and seasons, but they didn't know the day or hour. They were to be on the alert so the day didn't come upon them unexpectedly.
- (c) Watchfulness is the same point of what He said next, **"But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. For this reason you also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think *He will*"** (vv. 43-44).
- (1) Thieves come at unexpected times, and so we must be ready for them at all times.
  - (2) In the same way, Jesus told them to be watching constantly, because He was coming at an unexpected time.
  - (3) Next week, we'll consider some further warnings to be ready.