Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Signs of Christ's Coming, Part 1
Scripture: Matthew 24:1-3
Code: 2366

Starting this morning, we have the privilege to begin a series for which I have waited for many, many years, and that is a study of Matthew 24 and 25, known commonly as “The Olivet Discourse” because it is a sermon given by our Lord to His disciples on the Mount of Olives. The theme of this great sermon is the second coming of Jesus Christ. It is a sermon from our Lord about His coming and the end of the present age and the establishment of His kingdom. Any expository Bible teacher would love to be in this passage, and I certainly am thrilled to be here. And I have the feeling we’re going to be here for a while because there’s so much in Matthew 24 and 25 to deal with. The whole sermon is triggered by the question of the disciples. The answer the Lord gives is the longest answer to any question recorded in the New Testament. Its insights are absolutely essential for any understanding of the future, and I trust that, as we move through, you will be as thrilled and as excited as I am in studying these tremendous truths about the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Bible says a lot about it, the Old Testament prophets, particularly Isaiah, Ezekiel, Zechariah, the New Testament, the book of Revelation, and we’re familiar to one degree or another with what the Bible has to say about the future. The hub of much of it is found in the prophecies of Daniel, especially when compared with Revelation. And I think sometimes in all of those pursuits, Matthew 24 and 25 sort of gets left out. And yet when it came to our Lord speaking on this subject, this is what He said, and in my mind it therefore must be treated with tremendous emphasis. It’s our Lord’s own teaching on His return in glory to establish His kingdom, and we’re going to see it as we pass through chapters 24 and 25.

Now, I want also to say that these are much discussed chapters and, I think, much misunderstood chapters. There are many, many different kinds of viewpoints and interpretations of this and that as you move through. And again, like so many things in Scripture, it seems to me that it’s not quite as complex as people tend to make it. It rather unfolds relatively simply for me, and I confess that may be my problem because that happens to me rather frequently, that I see things somewhat simply. But I try to put myself in the place of the disciples who were not the most profound of men, as any student of the Bible must know, and who must have been given by our Lord at least the benefit of the doubt in understanding these things. And so I believe we can understand Matthew 24 and 25. I believe we can understand it most clearly, most simply, most directly, and I believe it can have a most profound and far-reaching effect on our lives. I also believe we’re going to find it some of the most exciting teaching and some of the most thrilling teaching we’ve ever taught, we’ve ever learned, and we’ll see that as we move through.

But one thing that anyone who does exposition of Scripture knows is sometimes you just have to deal with nuts and bolts. Sometimes you just have to sort of put the frame together. And that's where we are this morning. I really need to lay some foundation work down so that we can understand where we're going in this particular message of our Lord, this great discourse, this great sermon on His coming. And so this morning what I'd like to do is see if I can't set in place in your thinking the foundation understanding that's going to make this whole thing really make sense as we move into it.

Everybody is curious about the future. I mean that's obvious, all of us are. For one reason or another, we would like to see ahead. We would like to know what we don't know. Almost anybody would like to know how it's going to be in their life in the future. And there are people who would like to know what's going to happen in the economy so they can make the right investments. There are many reasons for wanting to understand the future, and so man has always sought to understand what is not known about the future. There's a pull to understand that. The preoccupation with future things is not only limited to those who study the Bible by any means. Throughout all of human history, religion to religion, there have been seers and prophets and prognosticators and witch doctors and mediums and futurists, fortune tellers, religious leaders, and all kinds of people who've always been trying to take a leap into the future, as it were, and get a picture of what's happening there and then report back so folks can better handle the present by understanding something of the future.

The Jews of Jesus' day were no different. They wanted to know the future, too, and they had their reasons. I mean they were tired of being oppressed. They were tired of being under the thumb of some controlling nation. They were, in every sense, a noble people and still are. The Jewish line of humanity is indeed a noble line of people. They are not a people who don't have what it takes to be autonomous. They are not a people who can't rule themselves and create their own meaningful society and make contributions. They really don't need to be subjects of someone else, but that's exactly where history has found them for most of their life. And so by the time you come to the time of Jesus, they are anxious to see the cessation of oppression which has plagued them throughout all the time period which the Bible calls the times of the Gentiles up to that point.

They long also to see the coming of their Messiah because they know when Messiah comes He'll make things right. He'll throw over the oppressors. He'll settle the issues that need to be settled, and He'll establish again the kingdom in Israel and things will be the way that God promised they would be and should be. And so they're filled with eschatological anticipation. Eschatological comes from the word *eschatos* in Greek which means "the last thing," so it's the study of the last things, and the Jews were really into the last things. They had had enough of all the difficulty. They had experienced Assyrian oppression in the taking away of the ten tribes from the north. They had experienced the Babylonian captivity in the taking away of the southern kingdom, Judah. They had gone through the Persian rule and the Greek rule and now the Roman oppression, and they'd had enough of all of that. And in their spirits, as they articulated in John 8 to Jesus, they were never servant to any man. They

were looking for the day when they would be free again and they would be ruled again by a righteous king and they would know the kingdom God had promised them with the flourishing of all of its benedictions and blessings promised in the Old Testament.

And they read the Old Testament, and they knew the Old Testament talked about a bright and hopeful future. They knew the Old Testament talked about God setting up a kingdom. They knew they were to anticipate an anointed one, a king, a Messiah, or in the Greek, a Christ who would come and establish the rule and reign of David again on the earth. And they longed for that to come, a time when righteousness and peace prevailed, a time when Jerusalem dwelled in prosperity and safety and not only for a brief time but forever and ever as the prophet Isaiah had told them. They longed to see that day when the restoration of the kingdom was given as God had promised it would be given.

And so they were filled with hope for the future. And, no doubt, they read with relish the Old Testament prophets. No doubt they exalted as they anticipated what Isaiah said in chapter 9 when he said there would come one, the government of the world would be upon His shoulders, and He would rule and reign. He would be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Father of Eternity, Prince of Peace, and of the increase of His government and peace there would be no end upon the throne of His father David to order and establish it forever and ever with justice, and so forth. They really understood that. They thrilled at that. They must have read Isaiah 11:1 that there would come a branch out of the root of Jesse who was the father of David. Another like unto David, not David but one like David, a king like David, who would reign in a prosperous time. And this particular one like David, it says in Isaiah 11:2, would be anointed with the sevenfold power of the Holy Spirit. And as you flow through that 11th chapter, they must have read it many times and saw all of the things that were yet to come.

And they must have read, as well, Jeremiah chapter 23, chapter 30, and read about how that there would come one who would sit upon the throne of His father David and reign and rule and Israel would be again the flower that it should have been, blooming in full bloom and full glory under the blessing of God. And they must have read Zechariah because Zechariah talks about that, particularly in chapter 14. And surely they knew Daniel, and they must have known that in Daniel there was the promise of great holocaust at the end but that holocaust wouldn’t be the end because there would come a stone cut out without hands that would establish an eternal kingdom on the earth. They were well aware of what the prophets had to say.

And so by the time you come to the life of Jesus, there is a very, very clear scenario of eschatological events in the mind of the Jew. And they had basically taken the Old Testament teaching from Daniel and Zechariah and Isaiah and Jeremiah and they had framed it together with the teaching of Ezekiel to give them a whole flow of how it would be in the end. And we see this, this eschatology, coming through the writings of that time period. If you read the non-biblical writings around the time of Christ, they give us insight into the thinking of the Jews of that time. This is very important as a background

to our text. What did the Jews think was going to be the end of the age? What did they think was going to be the coming of the Son of Man or the Christ? What did they think the judgment was going to be like? What are the events they anticipated?

Well, if we take the material that they wrote in that period, non-biblical books, they wrote religious books that were non-biblical. For example, there was the Book of Enoch, there is the Psalms of Solomon, and there is the Assumption of Moses, the Book of Jubilees, the Ascension of Isaiah, the Fourth Book of Ezra, the Apocalypse of Baruch, and the Book of the Secrets of Enoch. And these kinds of books, the Sibylline Oracles, various religious books, revealed they're not God-written, God-authored, they're by men giving their religious attitudes, but they revealed the thinking of the Jews. They tell us what their thinking was at that time, and we see that many of these books are dominated by eschatological things, by future things. And if we were to look at those books, we would find some very fascinating beliefs.

Let me see if I can't draw you to a source that'll outline this for you. This, to me, is a very fascinating point. A man by the name of Schurer, S-C-H-U-R-E-R, wrote a book entitled *The History of the Jewish People in the Time of Christ*. This man, who has no particular eschatological view to champion, at least certainly not the view that we would hold, tells us what it was that the Jews believed in that time, and it's most fascinating, and he draws it out of their contemporary literature as to what they were writing. Let me give you the sequence. First of all, Schurer says the Jews believed that before the Messiah came, there would be a time of terrible tribulation so that before the Messiah arrives, there would be a time of birth pain. As a woman has birth pain immediately before life comes out of her womb, so before the kingdom of Messiah is established, the nation will suffer some tribulation, some pain.

Now, they could have understood that simply by reading the 14th chapter of Zechariah because, in effect, that's exactly what it says there. And we see that that's where their thinking was by reading, for example, the second book of Baruch in which it says, "And honor shall be turned into shame and strength humiliated into contempt and beauty shall become ugliness and envy shall rise in those who had not thought aught of themselves and passion shall seize him that is peaceful and many shall be stirred up in anger to injure many and they shall rouse up armies in order to shed blood. And in the end, they shall perish together with them."

So they anticipated a time of terrible breakdown of morals, a time when honor and decency would be torn down, a time when the world would become warlike and there would be a physical moral chaos in the world, and this would be the birth pain about to bring the Messiah. In Fourth Ezra, another one of their books that tells us what they were thinking, it says there will be earthquakes, tumult of peoples, schemings of nations, confusion of leaders and the disquietude of princes.

Furthermore, in the Sibylline Oracles, it says, “From heaven shall fall fiery swords down to the earth, light shall come bright and great flashing into the midst of men, and earth, the universal mother, shall shake in these days at the hand of the eternal, and the fishes of the sea and the beasts of the earth and the countless tribes of flying things and all the souls of men and every sea shall shudder at the presence of the eternal and there shall be panic. And the towering mountain peaks and the hills of the giants, he shall rend. And the murky abyss shall be visible to all. And the high ravines and the lofty mountains shall be full of dead bodies, and rocks shall flow with blood and each torrent shall flood the plain and God shall judge all with war and the sword and there shall be brimstone from heaven, yea stones and rain and hail incessant and grievous. And death shall be on the four-footed beasts. Yea, the land itself shall drink of the blood of the perishing and beasts shall eat their fill of flesh.”

Now, if you didn’t know better, you’d think this guy had been reading the book of Revelation, but it hadn’t been written yet. They saw a future time of tremendous turmoil, tribulation across the world. In fact, they anticipate in the Mishnah that “arrogance increases, ambition shoots up, and the vine yields fruit yet wine is scarce. The government turns to heresy. There is no instruction. The synagogue is devoted to lewdness. Galilee is destroyed, Gablan laid waste. The inhabitants of a district go from city to city without finding compassion. The wisdom of the learned is hated. The godly is despised. Truth is absent. Boys insult old men. Old men stand in the presence of children. The son depreciates the father. The daughter rebels against the mother, the daughter-in-law against the mother-in-law, and a man’s enemies are his house fellows.” That’s out of the Mishnah. Now, they didn’t know it but they were pre-millennialists. They anticipated the Tribulation. So the time which preceded the coming of Messiah was to be a time of turmoil around the world.

The second thing that they had in their eschatology was that into this turmoil would come a forerunner and a herald announcing the immediate arrival of the Messiah and he would be like Elijah. As the Messiah is not David but like David, so the forerunner is not Elijah but like Elijah. As the king himself comes in the spirit, as it were, and the power of David, even to a greater extent so the forerunner comes in the spirit and power of Elijah to even a greater extent. And so they anticipated that one like Elijah would come. That’s why they were so drawn initially to John the Baptist because he was so much like Elijah. And John the Baptist would have been that Elijah, fulfilling that prophecy, if they had received Jesus Christ and His kingdom. But because they rejected Him and the kingdom was postponed, therefore, there has to be another like Elijah coming prior to the second coming of the King.

And so the Jews. Not necessarily seeing all that I’ve just said to you, did see there would come one like an Elijah who would announce the coming of Messiah. In fact, the Jewish oral law laid it down that money and property, the ownership of which was disputed, or anything found whose owner was unknown must wait “until Elijah comes” because he would set everything right to ready everyone for the Messiah.

The next thing they saw was the coming of Messiah. First a tribulation time, then a herald, and then the coming of Messiah Himself, the one who was the King. The great, divine figure who would come and end the present age and establish the age of glory, the kingdom, and vindicate God's people.

The next thing they saw in their eschatology, according to Schurer, is that the nations would ally themselves and gather to fight against the Messiah. Amazing. For example, in the Sibylline Oracles, again we read this Jewish teaching: "The kings of the nations shall throw themselves against this land, bringing retribution on themselves. They shall seek to ravage the shrine of the mighty God and of the noblest men whensoever they come to the land. In a ring round the city, the accursed king shall place each one his throne with his infidel people by him, and then with a mighty voice God shall speak unto all the undisciplined, empty-minded people and judgment shall come upon them from the mighty God and all shall perish at the hand of the eternal."

He sees all the nations gathered in Jerusalem, or around it, all the nations gathered in Israel to fight against God. They stick up their own gods with all their people around them and in the midst of all of that effort to fight against God, God destroys them all. And in Fourth Ezra, it says: "It shall be that when all the nations hear this" – the Messiah's voice – "every man shall leave his own land and the warfare they have one against the other, and an innumerable multitude shall be gathered together desiring to fight against Him." All the other wars will stop and everybody will go to fight against the Messiah. Now, again, this was the Jewish belief at the time of Christ, according to Schurer, and it's exactly what the Bible teaches, exactly what we understand from the Old Testament prophets and from the book of Revelation as well.

Now, that takes us to the next thing that they taught in their eschatology, and that is that the result of that battle against the Messiah would be total destruction of all these nations. There would be a total devastation of the nations that oppose Messiah. In fact, Philo said the Messiah would "take the field and make war and destroy great and populous nations." And in Four Ezra again it says, "He shall reprove them for their ungodliness, rebuke them for their unrighteousness, reproach them to their faces with their treacheries, and when He has rebuked them, He will destroy them." And in Enoch it says, "It will come to pass in those days that none shall be saved, either by gold or by silver, none shall be able to escape. There shall be no iron for war. No one can clothe himself with a breastplate. Bronze shall be of no service and tin shall not be esteemed and lead shall not be desired and all things shall be destroyed from the service of the earth." In other words, He'll come and destroy all the hostile nations so that their armor and all the things they use to protect themselves are utterly useless.

Now, remember, I'm not giving you pre-millennial contemporary dispensational viewpoints – this is a look at Israel at the time of Christ. They saw tribulation coming and then comes the Messiah, after having been heralded by His forerunner. When He comes He is fought against by the nations whom

He defeats in a devastating way.

Then they believed the next event would be the renovation of Jerusalem. There would be a wholesale renovation of Jerusalem. This would be the purification of that city so that it would be the Jerusalem of the great Millennium, the Jerusalem of the great kingdom, and the Jerusalem of the great eternal glory of the king. In fact, in Enoch it says, the book of Enoch, “All the pillars were new and the ornaments larger than those of the first Jerusalem, as it were,” it says. So they saw this renovating of the whole of Jerusalem.

The next event they saw was that the dispersed Jews who had been scattered all over the world would be collected back. They’d be re-gathered back into the city of Jerusalem. In fact, to this day, the Jewish daily prayer says this, in part: “Lift up a banner to gather our dispersed and assemble us from the four ends of the earth.” That’s part of the daily Jewish prayer. They look for the day when Messiah comes, defeats all these nations, renovates Jerusalem, and then re-gathers all the Jews from all over the world.

In fact, in the Psalms of Solomon it is written: “Blow ye in Zion on the trumpet to summon the saints, cause ye to be heard in Jerusalem the voice of him that bringeth good tidings, for God hath had pity on Israel in visiting them. Stand on the height, O Jerusalem, and behold thy children from the east and the west. Gathered together by the Lord from the north, they come in the gladness of their God. From the isles afar off, God hath gathered them. High mountains hath He abased into a plain for them. The hills fled at their entrance. The woods gave them shelter as they passed by. Every sweet-smelling tree God caused to spring up for them that Israel might pass by in the visitation of the glory of their God. Put on, O Jerusalem, thy glorious garments. Make ready thy holy robe, for God hath spoken good for Israel forever and ever. Let the Lord do what He has spoken concerning Israel and Jerusalem. Let the Lord raise up Israel by His glorious name. The mercy of the Lord be upon Israel forever and ever.”

So they see God coming and collecting everybody and bringing them back to a glorified Jerusalem. This was their dream. This was what they anticipated on the basis of the Old Testament prophets. The point is, they understood the Old Testament prophets the same way we do. We understand the same sequence. People say, “Well, if you’re pre-millennial, if you believe in the pre-millennial viewpoint, you believe that Christ is going to return after a time of tribulation to set up His kingdom on the earth, this is something new.” This isn’t anything new. This is understanding the Old Testament prophets exactly the way the Jews of Jesus’ time understood them.

And then after that, they believe Palestine will become the center of the world. That was the Jewish belief. Palestine would become the center of everything. The whole world would be subject to it. All the nations would be subdued. And the nations would come to Jerusalem to worship the king. In fact, in the Sibylline Oracles again, “All the isles and the cities shall say, ‘How doth the eternal love those

men?'" – speaking of the Jews – "For all things work in sympathy with them and help them. Come, let us all fall upon the earth and supplicate the eternal king, the mighty everlasting God, let us make procession to His temple for He is the soul potentate." So they believed that the whole world was going to come subject to the Messiah and come to Jerusalem to worship that God. And finally, the last point in this little eschatological flow was that there would come a new age of peace and goodness and glory that would last forever.

Now, in that we see the eschatological viewpoint of the Jews of the time of Jesus. They believed there would come a time a tribulation, a time of difficulty, a time of trouble. And then there would come a herald to announce the coming of Messiah. And then there would come the Messiah. And when the Messiah came, the nations of the earth would gather to fight against Him and He would devastate and destroy them. And then He would purify the city of Jerusalem – follow this very carefully – purify the city of Jerusalem, gather together the Jews from all over the earth and establish His eternal kingdom. That was Jewish eschatology. Now, follow their thinking. They had been under tribulation, from their viewpoint, for a long time, right? I mean they'd been under it. Persians, Greeks, and now Romans. And they looked at the Roman oppression as a time of tribulation, a time of difficulty. And they could easily remember back not long before when their people had suffered, in the Maccabean period, the terrible desecrations by Antiochus Epiphanes and the Greeks. And so they may have well thought the tribulation was already going on, that the Roman oppression under which they now existed was in fact that.

And then shows up John the Baptist. What do you think they think now? Here's the one like who? Elijah. And then all of a sudden comes Jesus Christ. And He heals people. And He raises the dead. And He has this amazing power to feed multitudes. And He's a wonder worker and miracle worker who banishes disease from Palestine during the duration of His ministry. And He comes riding into Jerusalem at the Passover. And they throw palm branches and garments in front of Him and they say to themselves, "This is it – this is the Messiah." And they remember – what is the first thing that's going to happen when the Messiah comes? Oh, the first thing that's going to happen is the nations of the earth are going to gather against Him and He's going to destroy them. And so they immediately think He's going to start a war and the Romans are going to be the first ones to get it and the holocaust ought to start real fast. And once He's done that, then He's going to purify Jerusalem. Then He's going to throw out all the hypocrites and all the false religion and all the false worship. And then we're going to see that glorious – maybe they thought of the Ezekiel temple of 40 to 48 in Ezekiel, that glorious final temple where the true worship is going to go on. And then He's going to gather all the Jews from all over the world and establish the eternal kingdom.

Now you know what's in the head of the disciples as we approach chapter 24, okay? This is the kind of thinking that's going on in their minds. And the scene is unfolding so clearly, it seems, to them. You say, "Well, what about when Jesus told them that He was going to die? When even on the day of the triumphal entry He said to them, 'Unless a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abides alone.'

What about that?" Does not compute. It's not in their eschatological scenario. They can't handle that; they reject that. And they're always saying, "No, no, no, that can't happen." So they do not comprehend the death of Christ. They do not apprehend the resurrection of Christ. They only see the coming glory, you see. And they have a very compressed view of Christ. They see it all happening when He comes the first time. They don't understand what we understand. He came once, and now we got a long time period, right? Until He comes again. The Old Testament prophets didn't see that. They didn't talk about that. They just saw Christ coming and the whole thing happening. They didn't see the time element in there. That's why we call that a mystery because it was not revealed in the Old Testament. In fact, Paul calls the whole New Testament a mystery hidden from ages past because it unfolds a time period not seen previously. "Mystery" meaning that which was hidden.

So the Old Testament prophet saw it all happening at one time and that's the way the disciples saw it. So they expected, boy, it's right on schedule. Our eschatology was on target. We rightly interpreted the Old Testament prophets. We have been through the tribulation in our own experience. We've seen the Elijah come in John the Baptist. Here is Christ the Messiah. He's coming into the city. He accepts our hallelujahs and our triumphal praises and He's going to, first of all, take on the whole Gentile world in the day of the Gentile, purify the temple, gather the Jews and establish His kingdom. It's all on time, all on target.

Now, I believe that this is exactly what kept Judas locked into the thing. I don't think Judas ever really, truly believed in all that Christ was. But he hung around and when he heard the sermon in Matthew 24 and 25, it must have just sent him into orbit, he was saying to himself, "This is it, we're going in, the kingdom is here and I'm in on it, I'm going to be on the inside group," because that's what he was basically motivated by, greed and self-desire. And that is why when you come to chapter 26, as soon as Jesus finishes this sermon about all the glory and all the second coming and all the end of the age and all, the first thing He does, chapter 26, He finished all these things, He says to the disciples, "You know, after two days is the feast of the Passover and let me tell you this, the Son of Man is betrayed to be crucified."

Listen, when He says that, that is the last straw for Judas and he's back to ground zero again. Does not understand it, how you can have all of this grandeur about the second coming and all of this anticipation and all of the eschatological events falling into line and now Jesus says He's going to die again and that's it. His hopes are smashed for the last time. He has been on a roller coaster, he can't take it anymore. He runs out on the thing and he starts to betray Jesus Christ to get the money he can get and get out. But up until that time, there's sort of a hanging on, see, because he's filled with anticipation, and the Olivet Discourse must have increased and heightened that anticipation.

Now, what brings it into focus here is verse 38, 39 of chapter 23. Let me just look at that for a minute with you. Jesus has ended a whole day in the temple and most of the time arguing with the religious leaders. I shouldn't say arguing; it wasn't much of an argument. They said something and He shut

them off. He answered their questions with self-condemning answers which condemned them. I should say with condemning answers and gave them condemning parables. But He has just been in a confrontation with these religious leaders. It has ended. And it has ended with a pronunciation of judgment upon them. Verse 38, “Your house is left unto you desolate.” And then He says in verse 39, “You shall not see me henceforth till you shall say, ‘Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord.’” He says judgment is coming on you and then you will see Me again when I come in the name of the Lord.

Now, He that comes in the name of the Lord – I told you last time – is a Messianic title. That’s exactly what they hailed Jesus with when He entered the city in the triumphal entry. So He says to them – now follow this. The disciples are listening to this and He is giving His last public sermon to the Jews and He says, “Look, your house is left desolate, and the next time you see me, I’ll be coming in my glory.” That’s what He’s saying. How would the disciples hear that? Oh, we’ve been through the tribulation, the Elijah has come, the Messiah is here, the next event is the destruction of the opposing nations. And then the renovation or purification of Jerusalem and then the gathering for the kingdom. So when they hear Him say, “I’m going to renovate your house and then I’m going to come,” they really think He’s on schedule. And they anticipate happening in there, of course, the destruction of the nations that will fight against Him.

Now remember, He pronounced His final judgment on the nation Israel, but He triggered in the thinking of the disciples all these thoughts about is this then it? Is this it? And the question pops up in verse 3, “Tell us, when shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of Thy coming and the end of the age?” You see, they’re thrust right into that mold. And they’re thinking, “It’s here, guys. When’s it going to be?” You know, implied in the word “when” is today or tomorrow. Or – it’s going to be next Tuesday maybe? And what is the trigger? What’s the sign? I mean what’s the first indicator that shows us this is it? We’ve come to the end of the age.

So, you see, that’s where they are in their thinking as we come to chapter 24. And let’s read the first two verses. “Jesus went out and departed from the temple. And His disciples came to Him to show Him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said unto them, ‘See ye not all these things? Verily I say unto you, there shall not be left here one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down.’”

Now, they’re walking out of the temple, right? He has just said “your house desolate” – not “My house.” He used to call it that. Not “My Father’s house.” He used to call it that. Now it’s your house because God left. Ichabod – that’s right, ichabod. Read Ezekiel chapter 9 verse 3, chapter 10 verse 4, chapter 11 verse 23, see how God’s glory departs and ichabod. God’s not there, it’s not the Father’s house. “It’s not My house, it’s your house.” The word “desolate,” *ermsis*, “abandoned to ruin” is what it means – abandoned to ruin. This place is in abandonment. God has left. It’s cursed, devoted over to ruination. And you won’t see Me again until I come in full Messianic glory.

Oh, man, they see it then. But as they leave, they have a real hard question bothering them. See, they're simple country guys and they look at this massive temple and it's more than one building, it's surrounded by a wall – it's on the top of a mount. I don't know if you've – if you haven't been there you need to understand. The temple was on top of the mount and sitting right on that – it's a big, massive, flat area. And on that mount was a great wall surrounding it. And enclosed in that wall were various buildings that were a part of the temple area. And it was all sort of supported by a retaining wall, particularly to the south and west. That retaining wall went down and sort of held that mountain in place. There was a natural slope on the west part and a flat on the north part, so that part was supported. So they put these massive retaining walls on the south and on the west and held up the temple mount, which had walls going up then from there so that if you were at the very top of the wall and all the way down to the bottom where the temple mount was and clear to the bottom of the retaining wall on the outside, it was a tremendous distance on the south part. That may be where Satan took Jesus and told Him to jump off because it was such a tremendous drop.

And so this was a massive thing. It was more like a fort than anything else. And so as the disciples are walking out of the place with Jesus in the twilight of the day, no doubt, they're in awe of this thing. I mean they're used to lakes and little rolling hills and little tiny houses. And they can't even fathom how this thing could be built, perhaps. Even though they had seen it on many occasions. It's so massive. It's so inconceivable. It's impossible to think that it could be put up, let alone that it could be torn down, see. "Your house is left desolate, ruined." And they're sort of stuck with that, trying to figure out just exactly how that's going to work, you know? And so Jesus understands what's in their minds.

Mark 13:3, a comparative passage, says they mentioned great buildings. Luke says in chapter 21 verse 5 the buildings were adorned with offerings so that people had brought these wealthy treasures and they were placed all around so that it was filled with treasure. Tacitus said it was a place of immense wealth, the collected and accumulated treasures of all the Jews who brought them there, and it was an excellent fortress, Tacitus says. The Babylonian Talmud says he that never saw the temple of Herod never saw a fine building. And Luke says it was built with beautiful stones. In fact, if you study a little bit about it, it's incredible. Josephus tells us that Herod built the place. Herod, by the way, was not a Jew, and that sort of stuck in the minds of the Jews, that their temple was built by an Idumaean and they would like to think that the final one would be built by someone other than one who's not a Jew.

But nonetheless, Herod had built a pretty formidable place. For example, some of the stones were 40 feet by 12 by 12. That's a single cut stone, quarried and carried. And how they ever elevated a stone like that, which would weigh up to a hundred tons, is hard to understand. And they had them going in some places, actually, as far as possibly two to three hundred feet, just piled high from the bottom of the retaining wall to the top of the wall around the temple. It was a massive undertaking. Some of the

stones were as long as 85 feet in length, a single stone cut and quarried. And the disciples are walking out looking at this thing and saying, “How’s this whole place going to come down? And how is such a busy place, the center of all life, going to be desolate and abandoned to ruin? How can it ever be? How can it ever happen?”

So they’re leaving the temple sort of scratching their heads about how it’s going to become desolate. But their eschatology tells them it is. And there’s going to be a temple described by Ezekiel in chapter 40 to 48, they’re probably thinking about that. They just don’t know how it can happen.

And so in verse 2 He says, “Take a look at all those things, take a look at all those buildings.” He reads their minds. He knows exactly what they’re thinking. They came up to Him and said, “Look at all those things, look at all those buildings, all those stones.” And they don’t even get to the question. He says, “Yeah, take a look at them. And then listen to this. Truly I say to you, there shall not be left here one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down.” Now, you can just see their jaws drop. I mean they don’t understand how they got them up, let alone how they could get them down. It’s massive. I mean I have stood there at the footings of the Western Wall, which are stones of the Herodian temple. I’ve stood at the southeast corner, the southwest corner where you have those great cornerstones of the Herodian temple. And they have been there since the time of Christ and they don’t look like there could be anything to remove them.

Now you say, “Well, doesn’t that contradict this?” Not at all because those are stones that hold up the retaining wall; those are not the stones of the temple or its wall around it. They are the retaining wall stones that hold the mountain there, and if they were removed, you know, the mountain would come down. But simply to say Jesus said here that the stones in that place are going to come down, there won’t be one left on another, and that’s exactly what happened. And you read Josephus again and he says the thing was leveled to the degree where you would never know if you visited there that anybody ever inhabited the place. They tore the whole thing down, the Romans did. Because they knew if they were going to conquer the Israelites effectively, they had to totally devastate their entire religious orientation. And that’s exactly what they did. So Jesus says they’ll be torn down in a very strong statement, “There shall not be left here” – not left here is a double negative – “not even one upon another.” It’ll be so deserted and so destroyed and so devastated. And that’s exactly what happened.

And this – all this is going to do – “Oh,” they’re saying to themselves, “Ooh, this is really getting exciting. Jerusalem is going to be renovated. This is it. The tribulation, we’ve had that part. The forerunner’s been here. The Messiah’s here. He made His triumphal entry, identified Himself, and now we can see the purification, renovation of the temple and, of course, with it the city implied.” All that’s in their minds. And, man, as they leave that place, their heads are just swimming in these thoughts. And they’re so filled with hope. And they go down the back side of the temple mount. They cross the little Kidron Valley where the brook runs and the spring, and they go up the Mount of Olives

– and that is an up – and when you'd climbed to the top, you'd want to rest. And so they climb all the way to the top and they're forming their question as they go. And Mark tells us it's James, Peter, John, and Andrew, the intimate four of the Twelve that are forming the question for the rest. And by the time they get to the top, they sit down.

And you can imagine them sitting there as the sun is setting in the west – I mean it's a spectacular sight, one of the most spectacular in the whole world, to sit on the Mount of Olives and see the sun set over the white buildings of Jerusalem, built today out of the same limestone they were built out of in those days. And with, in many cases, much the same architecture. Only in those days, instead of the Dome of the Rock and the Mosque of Omar glistening in the final setting sun, there would have been the temple with the gold on the top of it, and they would have sat on the mount and looked down at that massive structure. And they would be thinking, "This is it, guys, it's all coming to a wrap right here. It's all going to come to a great climax. We're living in this moment of glory in the history of Israel."

And so out of that questioning in their hearts, Peter, James, John, and Andrew approach the Lord, Mark says, and they ask Him a question. Verse 3, "And as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came" – and I told you which ones – "privately." No more public ministry, they come alone. "And they said," and, of course, it probably means that Peter spoke because Peter always spoke whenever there was anything to be said, he was the spokesman. And on behalf of all of them and particularly the four who were there, "Tell us, when shall these things be?" they say. What things? Well, the things He's just been talking about. Well, what has He just been talking about? The tearing down of the temple. What else? The desolation of Jerusalem, verse 38. What else? The coming in the name of the Lord, verse 39. They saw it all as one event. The temple is torn down, the city becomes desolate, and the Messiah comes in His glory. When shall these things – and in that they see the judgment that He's going to have upon the nations that fight against Him, they see the re-gathering of the people of Israel from around the world, the end of the present age, and the establishing of His kingdom.

So they say: "When shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of Thy coming in the end of the age?" See, they connect these things with "Thy coming and the end of the age." They don't see any space. Destruction of Jerusalem is a part of the whole thing. So they're just – this is the most excited they've been, I think, in the whole ministry of Christ. I mean how would you feel if you thought you were living in the eminency of the kingdom of Jesus Christ any time? And He was sitting there telling you that He was going to destroy the temple, leave the city desolate, and the next time you saw Him, He'd be in glory coming in the name of the Lord? Boy, they were e2xcited. And so they pose the question and the question is: When and what? What's the sign? I mean how do we know it's going to happen? Give us the indicator. Something's going to happen first, what is it? Darkness? A brilliant light? What is it? An angel? A trumpet? What is it? And when is it? And they were really excited and anxious.

And, you know, this carried on, you know, believe it or not, even after the resurrection. Have you read Acts 1 lately? After the resurrection, they said when they asked – they gathered with Jesus, they said, “Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” “This is the time, isn’t it?” I mean they’re still asking that. And the resurrection didn’t end that, it just heightened it. I mean when He died they got despondent. Were they despondent when He died? Oh – why? Because of the hope they had, see? And when He was nailed to the cross, that just smashed everything. And they went into instant despair. And when He came out of the grave, boy, the lights went back on and they said, “Is this the time? Is this the time? Is it now? Is it now?” Because they lived incessantly in the anticipation that it was the time and the kingdom was coming.

In Luke 19, even before this event, verse 11: “And as they heard these things, He added and spoke a parable because He was near Jerusalem and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear.” There you go, Luke 19:11. They thought the kingdom of God should immediately appear. Now, that was just coming out of Jericho on His way to Jerusalem. They lived in that anticipation all the time. And these kinds of words by our Lord only increased that.

So now you understand. We go into chapter 24 and what are they thinking? Right now is the kingdom, right now is the second coming, right now is the judgment, right now is the establishing of the eternal kingdom of the glory of Messiah, right now it’s going to happen. The whole point of this sermon is to tell them this: “Guys, it’s not right now.” The whole point. Now you understand Matthew 24 and 25. “It’s not right now. You’re wrong.” That is the purpose.

Now look back at verse 3, just a couple of things to draw it together. I want to draw to your attention the word “coming.” What are they asking when they say, “What should be the sign of their coming?” You say, “Well, they’re talking about the second coming.” No, they’re not. You see, they didn’t even believe in a second coming as such. They didn’t see any distinction. They didn’t see any first coming, then long period, second coming. They saw – *foom!* – it all happens. Why? Because that’s the way the Old Testament outlined it. I mean that’s the way it happened by the Old Testament prophet view. The Old Testament prophet looked ahead and compressed all the time factors and just saw Messiah coming, setting up His kingdom, and all that. Didn’t see the big gap. As I said, that’s why it’s called a mystery.

So they see it all at once. So they’re not talking here about a second coming. What are they talking about? Well, you look at the word “coming,” it’s the word *parousia*. Comes from two Greek words, *para* and the verb “to be.” Means to be around – to be around, to be present. The best way to translate it might be, “And what shall be the sign of Thy full presence, of Thy being here?” It isn’t so much the idea that it conveys coming as much it conveys a permanent presence. The word “*parousia* ” is used four times in this chapter, verse 3, verse 27, 37, and 39, and then, having been used by Jesus, it becomes a key word used by the New Testament writers. It’s used by James, it’s used by

Peter, and it's used by John. It becomes a technical term for the arrival of Jesus Christ to establish His kingdom, His second coming, His coming in glory. But they're simply saying, "When are You going to arrive in full presence? When are You going to be here in Your full Messianic revelation? When are You going to be here to be all that we anticipate You're going to be? Your coming?" In other words, the point being it isn't that He has to go away and come back because the issue of the word isn't the actual coming, it's the presence. So they're saying, "When are You going to enter into the fullness of Your Messianic presence?" That's the idea.

And they say, "What shall be the sign of this and of the end of the age?" And I want to close by looking at that phrase. What a phrase, "the end of the age." That is a very, very clear phrase, *sunteleias tou aionos*. It is used five times in Matthew, that same phrase – the end of the age – the end of the age – the end of the age. Once here in this verse, the end of the age. And the word *sunteleia* means the complete end, the full end, the final end. *Tele* means end, *sunteleia,* compound *teleia*, means the full final end. So when is the full and final end of man's age, of man's day? It is used also, not only in this verse but in Matthew 28:20, where Jesus promises that we have authority and we go out to make disciples. And then He says, "Lo, I am with you – what? – "to the end of the age." To the end of the age. "Until the full and final end, I'll be with you."

But three other times – and I want you to note them – Matthew 13 – look closely at them, very important. Matthew 13 verse 39, the parable of the wheat and the tares. The middle of the verse, it says, "The harvest is the end of the age." The end of the age, then, is the time of God's harvest, Jesus says, and the reapers are the angels, the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so shall it be in the end of the age. And it's used again twice in that parable. It is the time when God goes out, gathers the wheat and the tares, separates them out, sends the tares to hell to be burned in the fire. Says in verse 42, "Cast them into the furnace of fire where there is wailing and gnashing of teeth." Takes the wheat, the righteous, and they are shining forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. So the end of the age, then, to Matthew is an eschatological term that means the very end of everything, when God comes in ultimate, final, complete judgment and takes the unbelieving and sends them to hell and the believers go into His presence.

Now, in the same chapter, verse 49, that same phrase is used again. "So shall it be at the end of the age," verse 49. "The angels shall come forth, separate the wicked from among the righteous, cast them into the furnace of fire, wailing and gnashing of teeth." Again it's used at the end of the age when the Lord separates. There, a big net is thrown out, catch fish, and as a fisherman pulls in a net with all kinds of fish and sorts out the ones to eat and the ones to throw away, so God catches everybody in a net, pulls them in, sorts out the righteous unto glory, the unrighteous unto damnation. That happens again in the end of the age.

So the disciples' question is about the end of the age. It is an ultimate kind of question. Now you can go back to Matthew 24 for one moment. They're asking Him, then, questions about final things,

ultimate things. When is the Messiah coming in full presence and glory? When will final, full, complete, and total judgment take place when the ungodly are damned and sent to hell and the righteous are sent into the glory of the kingdom? When will this be? And what is the sign we look for to indicate it's going to happen? That's their question. And all the events up to this point indicate their thinking that brought about this question.

The Lord's answer begins in verse 4. Okay? Now, listen very carefully. The Lord's answer begins in verse 4, and from verse 4 on, listen carefully – He is answering their question. And their question has to do with the full coming of Christ and the end of man's age, and that is the question He answers. He says nothing about the destruction of Jerusalem from now on. That was outside the Olivet Discourse in verse 2 before the question was even asked. That judgment on Jerusalem was for that period of history, for that time and that unregenerate, ungodly, Christ-rejecting people. And it's only a small example of the kind of judgment that God is going to bring in the end of the age when the Messiah comes in full glory and full presence.

And so what He's saying to them is, "Look, what you have seen is not the end of the age. What you have seen is not preliminary to the full coming of the Messiah in glory. Let Me show you what is the indication of His full coming. Let Me show you what are the signs of His second coming. Let Me show you what does indicate the end of the age." And that is the theme of the sermon in the Olivet Discourse. Takes them from where they are to what will be the character of the time when the Lord comes. And so He lifts them from their historical moment into the far future, a future which we have yet not entered into, and describes all the events surrounding the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. And that's what we're going to see as we approach verse 4 in our next study.

You know where you are? Well, let's have a word of prayer then.

Thank You, our blessed Father, for good fellowship this morning in our worship time. And oh, what blessedness it is to open Your Word and see it so clearly, revealing not only the past and our redemption but the future and our glory in Christ. Thank You, oh, Lord, that the Savior will return and that He, returning, will bring us to glory and He will reign as King of kings and Lord of lords in the end of the age. But, Lord, we are aware, too, that in the end of the age, there will be judgment on the ungodly as well as glory for the righteous, and so we pray that no one here this day in the hearing of this message will turn their back on the Savior who alone can redeem men from judgment unto glory.

We thank You, Father, for Your Word. Open it to us in days ahead that we may understand not only the meaning of the Savior's coming in the past but the full understanding, as much as we can grasp, of His coming in the future. That we who live in this most exciting of all times, between the first and the second coming, may grasp both and because of our understanding find ourselves motivated to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, whom we love and serve. And we pray in His name. Amen.

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