

The Gospel of Matthew

Lesson 29: The Olivet Discourse: Signs of the End -- Matthew 24:1-35

The disciples are doing what tourists have always done. They are admiring the architecture. The temple in Jerusalem was one of the wonders of the ancient world, its massive stones gleaming white and gold in the sun, and they point it out to Jesus like proud hometown boys. "Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!" They expect Him to be impressed. Instead He says something that must have stopped them cold: "Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down" (v. 2).

Later, on the Mount of Olives, looking back across the valley at that same temple, the disciples come to Him privately with the questions burning in them. When will these things happen? What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age? They have tangled several things together in their minds, as we often do, and the answer Jesus gives is one we have to read carefully, because much of it was about to come true within their own lifetimes.

Within about forty years, it happened exactly as He said. In AD 70 the Roman armies surrounded Jerusalem, broke through, and burned the temple to the ground. Not one stone was left on another. Jesus had warned them: when you see the armies, flee to the mountains, do not turn back, pray it is not in winter. He was preparing His people to survive a coming judgment on a city that had rejected its Messiah. "This generation will not pass away," He said, "until all these things take place" (v. 34). And it did not.

There is great comfort and great sobriety in this chapter for us. Comfort, because Jesus' words came true to the letter, which means we can trust every word He says about what is still to come. Sobriety, because the God who judged a city that turned away from Him is the God we still answer to. So we read this chapter not to set dates or chase headlines, but to learn to take Jesus at His word, to stay awake, and to keep our hearts ready for the day that truly is still ahead.

Group Discussion: The disciples mixed several questions together: when the temple would fall, the sign of Jesus' coming, and the end of the age. Why do you think we are so eager to know the timing of future events, and what does Jesus seem more concerned that His followers focus on instead?

Personal Reflection: Jesus warned His people about a coming judgment so they would be ready and not be deceived. Where in your life are you living as though the future is far off and unimportant, and what would change if you truly took Jesus at His word about what is coming?

Read Matthew 24:1-35

Study Questions

1. Jesus foretells that the temple will be completely destroyed, not one stone left on another (vv. 1-2). How does the precise fulfillment of this prediction in AD 70 strengthen our confidence in everything else Jesus says about the future?
2. Jesus repeatedly warns, "See that no one leads you astray" (vv. 4-5, 11, 23-26). Where are you most vulnerable to being deceived or alarmed by false teaching, sensational claims, or fear about the future?
3. Jesus describes wars, famines, false christs, and persecution as the birth pains leading up to Jerusalem's fall, yet says "the end is not yet" (vv. 6-8). Why is it a mistake to treat ordinary calamities and rumors as proof that the final end has arrived?
4. Jesus says that because lawlessness increases, "the love of many will grow cold," but "the one who endures to the end will be saved" (vv. 12-13). Where do you feel your own love for Christ in danger of cooling, and what would endurance look like for you?
5. Jesus tells His disciples that when they see the signs around Jerusalem they must flee without delay (vv. 15-20). What does this practical, urgent warning show us about God's care to protect and prepare His people before judgment falls?
6. Jesus says the gospel will be "proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations" before the end comes (v. 14). How does the spread of the gospel in your own life and circles fit into God's larger purpose, and where might He be calling you to take part?
7. Jesus uses dramatic language of the sun darkened and the Son of Man coming on the clouds (vv. 29-30), the same kind of imagery the prophets used for God's judgments on nations.

How does understanding this Old Testament way of speaking help us read this passage rightly?

8. Jesus says to learn the lesson of the fig tree: when you see these things, know that it is near (vv. 32–33). What in your life tends to make you spiritually drowsy, and how can you stay alert and discerning instead?
9. Jesus declares, “Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place” (v. 34). How does this statement help us tell the difference between what Jesus said would happen to Jerusalem within that generation and His one final return, and why does this guard us against date-setting and false predictions?
10. Looking back over the whole chapter, Jesus says, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away” (v. 35). Name one specific way you will take Jesus more fully at His word and live more ready this week.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Luke 21:20–24, Jesus naming armies surrounding Jerusalem as the desolation He foretold; Daniel 9:26–27, the prophecy of the destruction of the city and sanctuary; Matthew 22:1–7, the king sending troops against the city that rejected his invitation; 2 Peter 3:3–13, the certainty of the Lord’s final day and the call to holy living; Hebrews 10:24–31, the seriousness of falling away from the living God.