

The Olivet Discourse Part 4

Text: Mark 13:28-37

Introduction:

1. In our previous lesson we looked at the great tribulation (second half of tribulation) and the second coming. We will now study the concluding exhortations of the Olivet Discourse.
2. Review of outline so far:
 - I. The setting of the discourse (Vs. 1-4).
 - II. The present age (Vs. 5-7).
 - III. The beginning of sorrows (birth pangs) (Vs. 8-13).
 - IV. The abomination of desolation (mid-point of the tribulation) (Vs. 14-18).
 - V. The great tribulation (2nd half of the tribulation) (Vs. 19-23; matt. 24:21)
 - VI. The second coming of Christ (Vs. 24-27)

VII. THE CONCLUDING EXHORTATIONS (VS. 28-37)

A. The Exhortation to Discern (Vs. 28-29)

1. The Picture of the Fig Tree (Vs. 28) The sprouting of the fig tree is a sign of the impending summer. Luke adds “and all the trees” (Lk. 21:29) so the reference appears to be to the literal tree and not to the fig tree as a symbol of Israel (See Hos. 9:10; Nah. 3:12 & Zech. 3:10). The fig tree is seasonal (unlike the evergreen Olive) and so conveys the lesson Christ intended to teach.
2. The Point of the Fig Tree (Vs. 29)
 - a. The fulfilling of “these things” (the events described in Vs. 14-23) is a sign of the impending return. The phrase “at the doors” is “a common figure to denote nearness. The word ‘at’ is the word ‘epi’ meaning ‘upon’. It pictures the subject so near as in fact already located on the doorstep.” (Hiebert)
 - b. “In the same way that one can predict the coming of summer based on the arrival of tree leaves in spring, so believers at the end of the age will be able to anticipate Christ’s return when they witness “these things” – namely, the catastrophic events Jesus had just predicted would mark the future tribulation.” (Macarthur)

B. The Exhortation to Believe (Vs. 30-31)

Christ now impresses upon his hearers the certainty of His predictions. There are two statements Christ makes to that end. He speaks of...

1. The certainty of the prophetic events (Vs. 30) Question: What ‘generation’ is referred to in Vs. 30? Clearly it cannot refer to the generation of the disciples as all the things Christ predicted were

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not fulfilled in their lifetime. It must therefore refer to the generation living at that future time of the tribulation.

2. The certainty of the prophetic words (Vs. 31)
 - a. Heaven and Earth will pass away (Vs. 31a) The same word translated “pass away” is also found in the following two verses:
 - i. 2 Peter 3:10 “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall **pass away** with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.”
 - ii. Revelation 21:1 “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were **passed away**; and there was no more sea.”
 - b. God’s Word will not pass away (Vs. 31b)
 - i. This is true of the Word of God generally. Psalm 119:89 “LAMED. For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven.” Psalm 12:6-7 “The words of the LORD *are* pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever.”
 - ii. This is true of the Olivet Discourse specifically. Remember the context of this statement. Christ’s words concerning the future WILL be fulfilled in every detail just as He said. He will come just as He said He would!
 - iii. There is nothing more sure, certain and permanent in the entire universe than the Word of God. The Bible is God’s indestructible Book.

C. The Exhortation to Watch (Vs. 32-37)

1. The Imminence requiring Watchfulness (Vs. 32-33)
 - a. Only the Father knows the timing of Christ’s coming. This verse clearly forbids the practice of date setting for the return of Christ! (e.g. The date setting of the JW’s – 1914, 1918, 1925, 1975)
 - b. Historical snapshot: The imagery is based on the Eastern marriage customs of Christ’s day.
 - c. Question: Does this statement diminish the deity of Christ? Notice the emphasis on “no man”. This statement must be understood in the context of Christ’s humanity. Christ is equal with the Father (Phil. 2:6) but he voluntarily laid aside some of His Divine prerogatives when He took on human flesh and lived as perfect man in total dependence on the Father. We do not read another statement like this after Christ’s resurrection and glorification. David Sorenson writes, “Jesus denial of knowing the time does not preclude His Deity. Rather, it reveals His humanity and His voluntary limiting of some of His prerogatives

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(e.g., Omniscience) in His earthly tenure. That, however, has been fully restored in His glorification.”

- d. “Take ye heed, watch and pray” = the required attitude for the believers in light of the fact Christ could return at any time. The word ‘watch’ means “to be spiritually awake, alert and on the lookout for danger.” (Hiebert)
2. The Illustration regarding Watchfulness (Vs. 34-36)
 - a. The picture is of the master of a household taking a long journey. He delegates responsibilities to his servants and commands the porter (warden of the door, door keeper) to keep watch for his return.
 - b. The master’s servants are to faithfully fulfil their duties in their master’s absence, being always ready for his return.
 - c. “The Roman twelve-hour watch from 6pm to 6am consisted of four three-hour periods. Those intervals were generally identified by when they ended: the evening at 9pm, midnight at 12am, the time when the rooster crows at 3am (dawn) and morning at 6am. Jesus point was that His return could occur at any time, even in the middle of the night.” (Macarthur)
 3. The Instruction reiterating Watchfulness (Vs. 37)
 - a. The principle of watchfulness is clearly not only for the future tribulation saints. It is to be the spirit that is to characterize believers in every age.
 - b. We need to interpret these verses accurately in their context and see how they apply directly to the tribulation saints of the future but let us not miss the challenge that is there for us. This spirit of watchfulness is also to characterize the church age saints (you and me) as the following Scriptures demonstrate:
 - i. Romans 13:11-14 “And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time **to awake out of sleep**: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.”
 - ii. 1 Thess. 5:6-9 “Therefore let us not sleep, as *do* others; but let us **watch** and be **sober**. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be **sober**, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the

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- hope of salvation. For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ.”
- iii. Titus 2:13 “**Looking** for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ;”
 - iv. 1 Peter 4:7 “But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and **watch** unto prayer.”
 - v. 1 Cor. 16:13 “**Watch** ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong.”
 - vi. Col. 4:2 “Continue in prayer, and **watch** in the same with thanksgiving;”
- c. Challenge/application: As we wait for the rapture of the church, we are to serve as Christ has commanded, ever watchful and waiting for His imminent return. When Christ comes, will He find you sleeping or watching? Would you want to be raptured now in the state you are in spiritually? Would you want Christ to come for you whilst you are watching your favourite show on T.V.? Would you want Christ to come for you while you are at that compromised function?

Conclusion: The challenge of this message is to watch, pray and serve, motivated by that spirit of expectancy for the imminent return of Christ.