

GOD WITH US

Part 8: JESUS

Message 26 – ALPHA & OMEGA: The Second Coming Sermon

Introduction

The last book of the Bible, Revelation, is a book of prophecy concerning the end times and the 2nd coming of Christ. It opens with these lines:

“Look, He is coming with the clouds,” and “every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him”; and all peoples on earth “will mourn because of Him.” So, shall it be! Amen. “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “Who is, and Who was, and Who is to come, the Almighty” (Revelation 1:7,8).

Alpha and omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. When Jesus says He is the Alpha and Omega, He means that He is the beginning and end of human history. It all began with Him, when He created everything (Genesis 1), and it will all end with Him with He re-creates everything (Revelation 21:5).

Revelation ends with this same Alpha and Omega declaration:

“Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with Me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End” (Revelation 22:12,13).

During His final week in Jerusalem, Jesus delivered a major sermon from the Mt. of Olives on His second coming (the fullest version is found in Matthew 24 and 25). This sermon, commonly called “The Olivet Discourse,” along with material from 1 & 2 Thessalonians, the book of Revelation, the O.T. book of Daniel and other key passages, shapes our understanding of “eschatology” (the doctrine of the end times). In this sermon, Jesus gave to His disciples the broad outline of end-time events. He never intended for us to be consumed with the details concerning the timing of His return. (Note Acts 1:7 where Jesus specifically said, “It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father has fixed by His own authority.”) Jesus spent more time telling His followers to be ready than He did giving details and signs (37 lines about the

events to watch for; 90 lines about the need to be ready). Thus, the central message of the Olivet Discourse is this: *I AM coming back. Be READY!*

Temple destruction predicted: Matthew 24:1,2

And Jesus came out from the temple and was going away when His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him. And He answered and said to them, “Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here shall be left upon another, which will not be torn down” (24:1,2).

It took Herod the Great more than 40 years to build the glorious Jewish temple. Now Jesus said it would be torn down. In the context of the previous chapters, it is clear that the destruction of Jerusalem was a judgment of God for their rejection of His Messiah. Note Jesus’ words to this effect at Matthew 23:37,38 at the end of His sermon denouncing the religious leaders: *“Behold, your house is being left to you desolate!”* In 70 A.D. the Romans invaded and destroyed Israel because of a Jewish revolt. They tore the temple down stone by stone.

Jesus’ words about the end of the temple led to a wider discussion about the end of the world and His 2nd coming. He and His disciples walked about 1,000 yards and sat down on the Mt. of Olives. There, He answered the questions burning in their hearts.

Do not be deceived: Matthew 24:3-5

And as He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?” Jesus answered and said to them, “See to it that no one misleads you. For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will mislead many” (24:3-5).

The first issue Jesus warned about was *deception*. False Christs will appear and will *mislead* many. These false “messiahs” (influential people, leaders, teachers, spiritual guides, charismatic figures) will point the way to a bright and glorious future for humanity. The way to guard against the deception of *false* Christs is to have a clear understanding of the *true* Christ – i.e., to be deeply rooted in the biblical Person and Work of Christ. Those who know the true Jesus closely will not be deceived.

False messiahs arising and people easily following them. Why? Because deep inside, everyone is searching for fulfillment, peace, health, and answers to life's most difficult questions. How about you? Are you getting to know Jesus more and more? Are you spending time in His Word? Are you doing life with Him day after day? Do you recognize the voice of the true Shepherd so well that it is easy for you to spot a false shepherd? Jesus said that His sheep will flee from the voice of strangers (John 10:5).

The beginning of birth pangs: Matthew 24:6-8

“You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but that is not yet the end. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pangs” (24:6-8).

Like a woman going through early labor pains, so the earth will begin to experience unusually challenging times. International conflict will increase, along with natural disasters, leading to widespread human tragedy. Yes, these things have always been present in our world; but in the last days, they will be present at an *unprecedented level*. But those are just the “beginning” signs that the end is near. Jesus even said, *“Do not be alarmed.”*

JESUS becomes THE issue: Matthew 24:9-14

“Then they will deliver you up to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations on account of My name. And at that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise, and will mislead many. And because lawlessness is increased, most people’s love will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end, it is he who shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come” (24:9-14).

The world will begin to divide over JESUS. All nations will *hear* the name of Jesus, and people from all nations will *hate* the name of Jesus. As a result, persecution will come upon His followers. And, because of persecution, people who are “Christian by religion” (but not truly in a personal relationship with Jesus) will disassociate from His name in large numbers. (See 2Thess.2:3 and 1Timothy 4:1 on the end-times apostasy – “departure” from faith.)

*“Lawlessness will increase, and people’s love will grow cold.” The natural human love for one another will grow cold. Human life will be cheap. It will be easy to kill without a conscience. I think about this prediction every time there is another mass shooting or act of terrorism. Or, every time another T.V. show, movie or video game portrays graphic violence and death as if it means nothing. The human conscience is becoming numb to evil . . . numb to love. Jesus said that this would happen . . . **and it is happening.** It will get worse, not better, before Jesus returns to usher in an age of righteousness. This is why the LOVE that Christians show is always the distinguishing mark of His disciples. This kind of LOVE will be incredibly rare and unusual in the last days.*

The increase in *chaos and lawlessness* on earth will create the perfect environment for Satan to arise to install his version of a Messiah who will bring everything under control.

Satan’s attempt to install his own Christ: Matthew 24:15-18

“Therefore, when you see the Abomination of Desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains; let him who is on the housetop not go down to get the things out that are in his house; and let him who is in the field not turn back to get his cloak” (24:15-18).

Daniel was the first to give this prophecy of the “*abomination that makes desolate*” (Daniel 9:27; 11:31; 12:11). A preview happened in the days of the Syrian ruler Antiochus Epiphanes (170 B.C.) who desecrated the Jewish temple, erecting an altar to the Greek god Zeus and sacrificing a pig on the altar dedicated to Yahweh. He proclaimed himself to be god. That event foreshadowed what will happen in the last days when Satan sets up his own “abomination of desolation;” his own world leader who claims to be the Messiah.

From other prophecies we get this picture: In *the last 7 years* before the 2nd coming of Jesus, a ruler will arise who will usher in a time of world-wide peace. By so doing, he will win the support and admiration of the world. People will talk of him as if he is a messiah for a new age, one who can take us where we want to go, not as individual nations, but as a world race. There will be much talk about a global society, a global economy, a global government, a global police force. And all of this will call for the

centralization of power. This world ruler is the anti-Christ, the instrument of Satan to bring his kingdom to rule the world.

Jesus said: When you see this kind of “abomination of desolation,” you can know for sure that the birth pangs are about to give way to final stages of intense labor. That period of severe labor is called, “the great tribulation.”

The Great Tribulation: Matthew 24:21,22

“. . . for then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall. And unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days shall be cut short” (24:21,22).

God answers Satan’s activity with an outpouring of divine wrath on the earth and on Satan’s kingdom. There has never been a time in human history that can compare to the pains that the earth and its inhabitants experience here. The book of Revelation speaks of seven trumpets and seven bowls full of the wrath of God. These divine judgments will increase in severity as the return of Christ draws nearer. The earth will reel under the weight of divine judgments while Satan and his false messiah struggle to keep things under control. All of this will likely occur during the last 3-1/2 years of the 7-year tribulation period. (Chapters 4-19 of the book of Revelations give many details about this period of time.)

More false Christs: Matthew 24:23-27

“Then if any one says to you, “Behold, here is the Christ,” or “There He is,” do not believe him. For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonder, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. Behold, I have told you in advance. If therefore they say to you, “Behold, He is in the wilderness,” do not go forth, or, “Behold, He is in the inner rooms,” do not believe them. For just as the lightning comes from the east, and flashes even to the west, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be (24:23-27).

Even as severe judgments fall from heaven, Satan will continue to put forth counterfeit Christs – anything to keep people from turning to Jesus and looking for His return. But the return of Christ will not be like some voice in the wilderness; rather, it will

be like a lightning bolt that flashes from one end of the sky to the other. It will be dramatic; not secret. When it happens, *everyone will immediately know that it is happening!*

The return of Jesus: Matthew 24:29-31

“But immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other” (24:29-31).

Jesus gives just a few lines describing His actual return to earth. Yet, His few words are clear and powerful. Never-before-seen cosmic wonders will immediately precede His sudden appearance on the clouds of the sky, *“with power and great glory.”* Some take the view that modern technology will make it possible for everyone, everywhere to witness the return of Jesus to earth. This could be; but I believe that His return will be *so huge and glorious* that it will be visible everywhere, to everyone, without the need for technology to make it visible to us. It will be something bigger than if our sun suddenly exploded in the sky.

Here is how the apostle John saw the return of Jesus in a vision:

And I saw heaven opened; and behold, a white horse, and He who sat upon it is called Faithful and True; and in righteousness He judges and wages war. And His eyes are a flame of fire, and upon His head are many diadems; and He has a name written upon Him which no one knows except Himself. And He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood; and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses. And from His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may smite the nations; and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. And on His robe and on His thigh, He has a name written, “KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS” (Revelation 19:11-16).

It is interesting to note that Jesus described His return while sitting on the Mt. of Olives. According to the O.T. prophet Zechariah, the Lord will return to this very mountaintop at His 2nd coming:

“In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is in front of Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split in its middle from east to west by a very large valley, so that half of the mountain will move toward the north and the other half toward the south” (Zechariah 14:4).

After Jesus described His return, He moved to an extended grouping of parables all intended to send one message: *BE READY!* Matthew loved groups of 7 (7 parables in ch.13; 7 woes in ch.23). It is no surprise that he records 7 parables of Jesus about being ready for His return.

1. Parable of the Fig Tree: Matthew 24:32-36

Jesus used this parable to say that we *won't know the exact day or hour of His return; but we can watch for the signs that signal we are in the 'season' of His return.* This is the very reason Jesus gave a general outline of signs of the end times – so that His followers could watch for these signs and know that He is near (while not obsessing over specific 'day/hour' predictions).

2. Parable of Noah's day: Matthew 24:37-42

Noah was told that the world would be judged with an immense flood and he warned his world about it. Yet, no one took Noah's warnings seriously over the more than 100 years it took him to build the ark. *They were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away.* It was business as usual, until it was too late. This same “it will never happen attitude” will be present in the world prior to the 2nd coming of Christ. People will laugh about this, and ignore what Jesus said completely, right up until the end . . . until it's too late.

3. Parable of the Thief in the Night: Matthew 24:43,44

Just like people are unprepared for a thief in the night, people won't be ready. Instead, they will be 'sleeping.' Jesus says: *You better be expecting Me. You better be on the alert, otherwise My coming will overtake you like a thief in the night. So, stay alert and watching for My arrival at an hour you do not expect it.*

4. Parable of the Two Servants: Matthew 24:45-51

One servant reasons that his master will *never return*. So, he ends up slacking off and not being a responsible worker. He does not take the promise of the master's return seriously. The other servant lives as if his master will *return at any moment*. He works hard to faithfully fulfill the duties assigned to him by the master. So, Jesus says, *I will return and reward faithfulness and judge people who disregarded My words concerning My return.*

5. The Parable of the Ten Groomsmen: Matthew 25:1-13

In that day, the attendants of a bridegroom were supposed to abandon all other duties to ensure that they were ready to make the bride and groom happy on their wedding day. Yet, 5 of these attendants failed to even get oil for their lamps ahead of time. This would be like groomsmen today failing to get gas in their car and running out on the way to the wedding. They get stranded on the side of the road and then miss the entire ceremony. Five attendants were ready for the coming of the bridegroom; five were not (meaning, that the 5 who were not really did not care enough to be prepared). Jesus says: *Live as if your Bridegroom might appear on the horizon at any moment. Have "oil in your lamps" and be ready!*

6. The Parable of the Talents: Matthew 25:14-30

A wealthy man went on a long journey away from his estate. Before leaving, he called in three servants and entrusted them each with a certain number of "talents" (a unit of money equivalent to 15-years wages for a laborer) so that they could do business for him while he was away. Two of the servants invested the money in ways that made a 100% return for their master; yet the third servant buried his master's money in the ground. When the master returned, and called each servant to account, the first two were commended for faithfully using the master's resources to make a profit. The third servant was condemned for *doing nothing* with the master's resources. So, Jesus says: *His servants should be wisely investing their time, talent and treasure (which is really HIS) so that when He returns He can celebrate the fruit that has come because of their wise investment.*

Time, talent, treasure. It all comes to us from God. No two people have the same entrustment from God. The question is: How are we investing these divine allotments for the glory of God? What kind of fruit is being produced IN you (character fruit)? What kind of fruit is being produced THROUGH you (fruit in the lives of others)? What "return-on-investment" will you give back to the Master when He returns?

7. The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats: Matthew 25:31-46

The final parable is decisive in many ways. 1) It shows that there will be a final judgment of all humanity when Jesus returns. 2) It also shows definitively that it is JESUS Who will exercise divine judgment over all humanity. (This is something that Jesus repeatedly said. See John 5:22,23 for example.) 3) It teaches that *faith in Jesus* will be manifested through *works done in the name of Jesus*. A "sheep" is a person who has a true relationship with Jesus, demonstrating this relationship through their good works done in His name. A "goat" is a person whose actions fail to demonstrate a true life-changing connection to Jesus.

Discussion Questions

1. What strikes you most about Jesus' description of the "signs of the end?" (24:1-28). How do you see some of these signs in the world today?
2. How about His description of His actual return (24:29-31)? What hits you the most here?
3. He gave 7 parables about being watchful, responsible and alert. Which parable speaks the most to you? Why?
4. Stepping back from this sermon on the 2nd coming, how does it impact you? What does the truth of the 2nd coming of Jesus do for your soul? Does it move you to change anything in your life?
5. This is our final study in the life and teachings of JESUS. Is there anything you would like to share concerning your understanding of Jesus, or your relationship with Him?

STUDY AHEAD

Mother's Day: "Life-giver"

On Mother's Day we will be looking at several women who acted as "life-givers" in the story of Moses. The name of the first woman, "Eve," means "living one" or "source of life." Survey the following women in the story of Moses to see how they were life-givers to him (and to others as a result).

1. Exodus 1-2. Study the background for the story.
2. Shiphrah and Puah (Exodus 1:15-22). What life-giver qualities do you see in these two women? What was the result of their life-giving activity? What would have happened if they had failed to be life-givers?
3. Jochabed (Numbers 26:59; Exodus 6:20; Exodus 2:1-3; 2:9,10). What qualities do you see in Moses' mother, Jochabed? She had two older children – Miriam and Aaron. All three played key roles in the early life of the nation Israel. How was Jochabed a life-giver to the nation? Even to us?
4. Miriam (Exodus 2:4,7). How was Miriam, the older sister of Moses, a life-giver to her brother? How was she a life-giver to the whole nation (Exodus 15:1,20). There was one incident where she failed to be a life-giver – Numbers 12:1-16. What got in the way of her life-giving in this incident?
5. Pharaoh's daughter (Exodus 2:5-10). This life-giver had to defy the orders of someone very powerful. Who? Are there other qualities you notice in this woman?
6. Think of ways that you have opportunities to be a life-giver today. Who might you influence? In what ways might your world be better because of *your* life-giving?