

Matthew 24E

- Today we will move into the climactic section of the Olivet Discourse and to a topic that is all about having eyes for eternity
 - Before we get into that, let's regain our bearings...we're in the middle of a discourse that Jesus delivered to His men 36 hours before He died
 - He's seated on the Mt. Of Olives, which is why we call this teaching the Olivet Discourse
 - And He's explaining how the future events of the end times will play out in response to questions asked by His disciples
 - Altogether, Jesus explained four things:
 - When will the temple destruction take place and what will be signs of it's coming destruction?
 - What are the signs of Jesus' coming
 - What a signs of the end of the age
 - And what events should not be considered signs of anything
 - The disciples asked their questions in a somewhat random order, so Jesus reordered His answers in a chronological sequence
 - First, what are not signs because they happen all the time, then secondly, what are the signs of the end of the age
 - The signs of the end of the age happen over centuries so they will be our first indications that the end is near
 - Next, Jesus gives the signs of His Second Coming which happens at the very end of the age after the seven-year Tribulation
 - Then Luke inserted a sidebar about the Temple destruction between the signs of the end of the age and Jesus' return
- Last week we completed Jesus' final answer of the signs of His return, but there was some unfinished business we must cover before moving to the next topic
 - Jesus gives us a footnote for all His answers...one, final overarching sign that starts and finishes the entire sequence of end times events

[Matt. 24:32](#) “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;

[Matt. 24:33](#) so, you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door.

[Matt. 24:34](#) “Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.

[Matt. 24:35](#) “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.

- Through out this discourse, Jesus has been giving signs that announce certain events like the end of the age or His return
 - But at the very end He sums up everything with one major sign that will tell us when the end times are set to begin
 - And He also adds a promise to assures us that these events will complete as promised
- He starts with a parable of a fig tree coming out of it's dormant phase at the end of winter, when it appears dead because it has no leaves
 - It is not truly dead, of course, but to our eye it appears as good as dead – until the leaves emerge in Spring
 - And when the leaves show up, we know that means summer is right around the corner and fruit will be found on it soon
- In that way, the leaves of a fig tree could be considered a clock of sorts
 - Even if you had no idea what month it was, you could tell summer was near by watching a fig tree blossom
 - Jesus chose to use a fig tree for this parable because a fig tree is a classic representation of Israel in the Bible
- So Jesus is saying Israel will serve as God's clock to tell us when the end times are here
 - For a time Israel will appear lifeless, because the nation will be outside its land for centuries and many will conclude it is dead
 - But when Israel come back to life, so to speak, then we can know that the end times are approaching
 - In effect, Israel's return as a nation on the world stage is the first sign that the end has come

- And I'm not just talking about the formation of the modern state of Israel in 1948
- The establishment of the nation came about as a result of years of work by the Zionist Congress to establish the nation
 - The Zionist movement started at the end of the 19th Century, and continued through the first half of the 20th Century
 - The 1948 declaration of independence merely formalized what had been already true for decades: Israel was back from the dead
 - And in this parable, Jesus connects the nation of Israel's return to life with end time events by an unique promise found in v.34
- He says that this generation will not pass away until "all these things" take place
 - This promise has been a source of considerable confusion and misinterpretation in the Church
 - A common interpretation for a time said that once Israel became a nation, the end times would play out within a generation
 - But it's been over 100 years since Zionism began and 80 years since Israel became a nation, which is far too long
- A second interpretation says Jesus was speaking of the generation alive in Tribulation, that this generation will not die out before the end
 - But that's a pointless statement, since Daniel already told us Tribulation is seven years, far less than a generation
 - There would be no reason for Jesus to give us this promise if He were merely repeating Daniel's timeline
- There are two keys to properly interpreting Jesus promise
 - First, Jesus said "all" the things He described would come to pass while this "generation" existed, not just some of the things He described
 - So from the start of the Zionist movement in the late 1800s through the world wars and other signs of the 1900's & 2000's...
 - To the very end of Tribulation at Jesus' return...ALL these things are the signs that tells us the end is upon us

- And all these things must take place without this generation passing away
- Clearly, Jesus isn't referring to a single human generation, for no human generation lasts that long
 - Which leads us to the second key to interpreting Jesus' words: we notice that Jesus said "this generation" not merely "a generation"
 - Jesus was referring to something specific, something He had already mentioned: the fig tree
- The fig tree represents what Jesus means by "generation" and we understand the meaning by looking at the Greek word in v.34
 - The word can also be translated as family, kind or tribe, so by the context, that's how we should interpret the word
 - Jesus was speaking of the entire nation as a new generation of Israel, not merely one birth generation
- We know this by the context because of the parable of the fig tree, which we know represents Israel re-emerging on the world scene
 - So Jesus said "this" generation, meaning "this nation of Israel," won't pass away until all these things come to pass
 - When we see the nation of Israel returning to life, a new generation of Jews living in the land, then know the end is near
- That's the promise Jesus is making here...Israel is God's clock telling us that the end times events have started
 - And once that clock has started, there is nothing in the universe that can stop the events that follow
 - Jesus adds that Heavens and Earth shall pass away as a result of the end times events, but Jesus word will not pass away
 - You can be sure that when you see Israel return, everything else Jesus said was coming will in fact arrive
 - So think about that...the seemingly unshakable earth and the vast, immeasurable universe surrounding us are here today, gone tomorrow
 - Yet the simple words printed on the page in front of you are more permanent, more certain than anything in Creation

- Remember that when you're gazing at a huge mountain or across an immense ocean or staring up at the countless stars
- If those things leave us in awe now, imagine how we would feel watching them disappear in a blink of an eye
 - That's how the world will experience the judgments to come
 - They will find everything they trusted in suddenly gone
 - Then out of darkness Jesus, the Word of God, will appear and remain forever
- Never forget what is worthy of your dependence and trust and what is not
 - In times when your world is shaken or your peace is broken, when you feel like you're losing control, that's a great time to remember v.35
 - The things of this world that we often trust in for security or stability only have the appearance of certainty
 - A stable job or a comfortable house or good health or a faithful spouse or a secure retirement plan or even a civil society...
 - All these things appear certain and sure...until they aren't, and then we wonder where can we find security in this world?
 - And the answer we find in the Bible is that security or certainty is never found in the world because the world is passing away
 - And when you see the signs that tell you the end of the age is upon us, that's the worst possible time to seek your security here
 - As James scolded the church:

James 5:1 Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you.

James 5:2 Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten.

James 5:3 Your gold and your silver have rusted; and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure!

- James says it is a sign of biblical ignorance when we live in ways that witness to a trust in this world rather than a trust in God's word
 - And in Matthew Jesus has told us look for signs, to recognize them, and when you see them, to know He is near, at the door

- The first and foremost sign is to know that when Israel returns, the end is coming, and that day has already come
- So we can be sure that this world will pass away before all is said and done, and Jesus' words will be fulfilled, every last one
- This truth brings us a fifth, and perhaps the most important, reason we study prophecy: because it changes the way we live and serve Jesus
 - When I was growing up, my parents would leave us at home in the evenings sometimes while they went out for dinner
 - And like most parents, they would issue instructions and perhaps warnings to us before they left
 - Do your homework, clean the kitchen, don't fight, etc.
 - But immediately after they were gone away, we would ignore their instructions and do what we pleased more or less
 - But as the night progressed, our thoughts would turn to the inevitable, knowing we didn't want to be caught by surprise when they returned
 - So as the time passed, we eventually did our chores and our homework so we would be ready for their return
 - But sometimes they would surprise us with an early return, and the result wasn't so happy
 - If only we had a warning to know they were near, we would have been ready sooner
 - In a sense that's what study of prophecy should do for all who endeavor to learn it properly...it motivates us to be ready
 - The world has already seen sign and sign announcing that the end of the age is upon us
 - But even if you don't know prophecy, you wouldn't know that word wars or earthquakes or famines or plagues were signs
 - But Jesus says you only need to know one sign, really, because this one sign is enough to tell you that the end is near
 - As you learned today, Israel emerging on the world stage again is the primary sign to know the end of the age began ticking

- So we are like children put on notice that our Father is coming back soon, and we need to think about how that moment will go
 - In my experience, those who study prophecy carefully and think about it properly will be better prepared to live obediently
 - It's the same feeling you get when you look at the kitchen clock as a child and you realize your parents are due home any minute
 - You race to finish cleaning the kitchen or to jump into bed or to do whatever you know they expected of you
 - Of course, you should have done those things earlier, but still it's better to have done it late than to have never done it at all
 - And because you don't want to be found lacking when they arrive – and because you can read a clock – you get ready
 - And that's another reason we study the prophecy: because it leads to a sense of urgency and to a fear of the Lord
 - Which has its ultimately good purpose in causing us to obey Christ more fervently and more consistency
 - And it's all made possible because you learn how to read the "clock" (i.e., the signs) that Christ gives us in prophecy
- We will come back to this idea of being ready later in our study of this discourse, because Jesus comes back too
 - But with that we reach the end of all the signs Jesus gives in this discourse,
 - But last week in our study of the signs of Jesus' return, I skipped two verses in the text
 - I didn't read vs.27-28, and to today we will cover them as a transition into the next section of the discourse and a new topic

Matt. 24:27 "For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be.

Matt. 24:28 "Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.

- In describing His return to earth, Jesus describes His bright appearance in an otherwise pitch black universe as like lightening

- Lightning is fiercely bright, intense and quick, in fact, we might say it is *lightning fast*
- So Jesus' return will not be like at the slow landing of a helicopter settling down on a landing pad
- But Jesus will flash across the sky like lightening
- And notice He comes in a certain direction, from east to west, reflecting Jesus' movements at His Second Coming
 - We learned in our Revelation study that Jesus' first appearing on earth will be at a place called Botzrah in Souther Jordan
 - Botzrah is southeast of Jersusalem, so as Jesus comes to earth, He moves from east to west, like lightening
 - And as He moves, He leaves behind corpses, because as Jesus returns He's simultaneously saving some while destroying others
- And like all the signs in this discourse, Jesus is describing the way He will appear from an earthly perspective
 - And the Bible says that there will be three principle groups involved in witnessing the Return of Christ
 - And they will experience His return in different ways
 - First, there will be those on earth who have believed in Jesus and are joyful at His return, because He has come to save them
 - Secondly, there will be unbelievers on earth who view Jesus' return as an unmitigated disaster, and they will mourn
 - Paul describes these two groups and their respective responses in a single passage in 2Thessalonians

[2Th. 1:6](#) For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, [2Th. 1:7](#) and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, [2Th. 1:8](#) dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. [2Th. 1:9](#) These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, [2Th. 1:10](#) when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed – for our testimony to you was believed.

- Notice in v.7 Paul says that when the Lord is revealed from heaven, He will come delivering retribution for those who are unsaved
 - Paul calls them those do not know God nor obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus
 - These have persecuted the believers throughout history, and now they will see the tables turned on them
 - They will pay the penalty of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord, Paul says
- Back in Matthew 24, Jesus addresses the fate of this group in v.28 where He mentions vultures gathering for the corpses
 - God calls the birds of earth to gather and eat the bodies of all those killed at Christ's return, which will be a great number
 - In Revelation 19 we're given the details

Rev. 19:17 Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and he cried out with a loud voice, saying to all the birds which fly in midheaven, "Come, assemble for the great supper of God, Rev. 19:18 so that you may eat the flesh of kings and the flesh of commanders and the flesh of mighty men and the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them and the flesh of all men, both free men and slaves, and small and great."

- But also on the day Jesus comes in glory, Paul says in 2Thess 1:10 that Jesus will be marveled at by believers waiting for Him on earth
 - Those who have believed the testimony of the Gospel, both Jew and Gentile, will watch in amazement as the Lord comes in glory
 - Back in Matthew 24:31 we read how angels will gather the elect from the corners of the earth bringing them to Jerusalem
 - This great assembling of believers must take place so that all are present at the the inauguration of the Kingdom
 - So while the unbelievers are being made corpses and left for birds, the believers are being escorted by angels to Jerusalem
 - But there is a third group involved in the return of Christ, but this third group doesn't experience any of these signs on earth
 - Because this group *participates* in Jesus' return coming down with Him from Heaven

- Earlier I told you about this group when we read a description of Jesus' return in Revelation 19
- That third group are the saints of the Church who accompany Jesus, and Paul mentions this moment also

1Th. 3:13 so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.

- Paul says that at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ all the saints (meaning the whole Church) are with Him
 - But this begs a question...how did the Church move from the earth and into Heaven prior to Jesus' return?
 - We find part of our answer in 2Cor 5, where Paul teaches that when a believer dies, his/her spirit enters Heaven with the Lord
 - So these saints that accompany Jesus at His return include all believers who died prior to Jesus' Second Coming
- But Revelation 19 told us the entire Bride of Christ has been "made ready" for Her marriage to the Lamb prior to the return of Christ
 - The Bride being made ready is a reference to the entire body of Christ present with Jesus, no Church saints will be missing at that time
 - Which tells us that it isn't just the believers who have died who accompany Jesus at His return...all Church saints will be there
 - So when and how does the *entire* Church, both dead and living saints, end up in Heaven prior to Jesus' return?
 - That's a question Jesus' disciples never thought to ask Him, because that's a scenario they never considered, I'm sure
 - In fact, it's an event that is only whispered about in the Old Testament through various pictures
 - But it turns out this is the most important answer the disciples need to know, so Jesus moves to addressing that question now

Matt. 24:36 “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.

Matt. 24:37 “For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah.

Matt. 24:38 “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,

Matt. 24:39 and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be.

- When you reach v.36 of the Olivet Discourse, you come upon a very important but often overlooked transition phrase... “but of that day...”
 - Now that phrase suggests a day that Jesus has already been speaking about earlier in the discourse because He says “that” day
 - But we know from the context that Jesus has abruptly transitioned to speaking of something entirely new and different
 - He’s not talking about “that day” in the sense of a moment He previously mention
 - Rather, He’s talking about “that day,” as in a specific and special day no one had heard about before
 - How do we know this? Because of what Jesus says about that day in the rest of v.36
 - Jesus says this is a day that has no signs whatsoever, and in fact the day is so lacking in advance notice that not even He knows it
 - We’ll address why Jesus doesn’t know the timing of this special day at a later time, but for now consider the implications of this
 - Jesus is saying there is an event in God’s plan for the end times, a “day” He calls it, which has absolutely no advanced warning, no signs at all
 - That’s how we know Jesus is speaking about a new and different day rather than one of the events He previously described
 - All the previous events, whether the destruction of the temple of the end of the age or even His return, have warning signs
 - But of “that day” there will be no signs to anyone and no way to know it’s coming
- So what is this day that Jesus wanted His disciples to be aware of though we can’t know when it’s about to happen?

- Jesus calls this day “the coming of the Lord” and obviously that phrase suggests the Second Coming of the Lord and the start of the Kingdom
 - But we know that Jesus isn’t talking about that coming of the Lord here, because the circumstances of this day are so different
 - And if we keep reading we see confirmation of this conclusion, beginning with the next verse
- In fact, we’re going to study this unique day in three parts as Jesus teaches us about
 - First, we’re going to learn the circumstances of this special day
 - Secondly, we’re going to learn the details of the day itself, including who is for and how it unfolds
 - And thirdly, we’re going to learn the purpose of the day, or why it exists at all
- We start today in v.37 with the circumstances of the day, and by these circumstances we can see clearly it’s not Jesus Second Coming
 - Jesus gives us a reference point from the story of Noah
 - Jesus says the circumstances surrounding this future day to come will be “just like” the days of Noah
 - Of course, the days of Noah is a reference back to the days prior to the flood God sent to destroy the earth some 4,500 years ago
- So what do we know about the days of Noah?
 - First, Jesus said it was a time when life felt normal to the world, and there was no sense of impending doom
 - Jesus says people were eating, which implies they were planting and harvesting
 - Which means they expected the normal routines of life to continue
 - Secondly, they were drinking, which refers to the drinking at a party or feast or other festive occasion where people celebrate daily life
 - That suggests people had no reason to worry or to panic

- More than that, it implies debauchery and excess, a world unafraid of God
- Finally, Jesus said marriages were happening, and marriage is an inherently optimistic choice
 - People marry because they are looking to the future, to a life together, to making a family having a home, etc.
 - So the world expected daily routines to continue, celebration and to continue, and a future that wouldn't change
- But in Noah's day, these impressions were very wrong, because the Lord had already determined to flood the earth after a period of waiting
 - He told Noah in Genesis 6 God told Noah that He would bring an end to all life on earth in 120 years
 - And in the meantime, God directed Noah to use that time to construct an ark by which he could save himself and his family
 - So while the world assumed the future was bright, the reality was it was about to come crashing down suddenly
- In v.39 Jesus says the world simply didn't understand that a flood was coming to take them all away, even as they could see Noah preparing an ark
 - So the circumstance of the coming of the Lord will be two things, primarily
 - First, there will be a complete lack of awareness by the unbelievers that a day of reckoning is coming for them
 - But secondly, the people of God will be aware of judgment approaching and will be prepared by God to escape it
 - Already we see Jesus is talking a day very different than His Second Coming, because these circumstances are the complete opposite
 - Earlier we learned that Jesus returns at the end of a seven-year Tribulation
 - And throughout those seven years, the world will be rocked by signs that announce the return of Christ is near
 - And life during that time will be anything but ordinary...people will not be eating, drinking and the like without worry

- On the contrary, Revelation tells us seas are turning to blood, mountains are falling, and people are living in caves
- So when Jesus says “that day” will come during a time like the days of Noah, He must be talking about a day other than His Second Coming
 - He’s talking about a day that will surprise everyone, a day that has no warning signs at all
 - That’s a very different day, even though Jesus also refers to it as the coming of the Lord
 - It’s a type of return yet one that is different than the one that ends the age
- It’s a return to rescue the Church, to bring us to Heaven prior to the onset of the judgments of Tribulation
 - It’s similar to the way God protected Noah and his family, making a way of escape shortly before the flood waters arrived
 - We’ll come back to the Noah analogy next time as we move into the second part of this day: how it unfolds
- For now, let me encourage you to consider that the fast changes times in which we are living today are proof to us all of how close we are to the end
 - The world is in upheaval, and if it seems like we’ll never find our way back to normal, let me assure you the world will find a new normal
 - Jesus said they will...they will return to eating, drinking, marrying and the like
 - They will return to optimism and an expectation of regular life again
 - The world will return to that attitude, but we can’t
 - The believer is on notice that normal is an illusion and there are great and terrible things coming for the world
 - Maybe it starts tomorrow or maybe it’s a hundred years away, but it’s coming and Jesus assures us of that
 - These are the days of Noah so now is not the time to pretend all is normal
 - Now is the time to prepare spiritually speaking for what follows