

I. Set up

A. Good Morning. Welcome. Special welcome to those who are new... My name..... Last week we considered some of the implications of Christ's last big policy address – what some refer to as the Olivet Discourse. We are going back for another look. It's a very important and very famous section of the Bible – one in which Jesus talks about what is going to happen in the future.

B. Right now....

II. Intro

A. **Pictures of various optical illusions.** What do you see? Which perspective dominates? This is a question I am going to circle back to.

III. Review

A. Jesus and the disciples were leaving the temple on Wednesday of Holy Week – about 24 hours before they would be celebrating the Last Supper, which leads into Judas's betrayal and Jesus arrest and a rapid-fire series of events that end up with him beaten and crucified.

B. As they are leaving the Temple courtyard where he has been teaching, one of the disciples made a comment about the temple itself. He commented on how impressive it was – which it was. Herod the Great had up to ten thousand men working on it at a time and it took 83 years to complete. It was grand and ornate on a scale we can hardly imagine.

C. The disciple says, "This is impressive." Jesus responds by saying, "It's overrated and it's not going to last. Soon it will be reduced to a bunch of rocks.

1. Which it was happened not too long after Jesus's death. Today all that is left of the building is **PICTURES 1, 2 & 3 of Wailing Wall**

2. Jesus was replacing the Temple – he was the new ground zero. He was the new place where God and Man met on earth. He was the new place you went to for the forgiveness of sins.

3. And so he doesn't want his followers to be wrapped up in a building. And so He notes it's upcoming destruction. He says, "Not one stone will be left on top of the others." And that is what happened when Rome destroyed the Temple in 70 AD. Because they burned it and the gold melted and dripped down from the roof, people pulled to stones apart looking for any gold that might have fallen into the cracks between the massive stones.

D. Last week I noted that Christ's statements about the destruction of the Temple were:

1. Spot on. He was a prophet of God and so he was one hundred percent right in what he claimed would happen.

2. They were loaded with meaning. There was some prophetic foreshortening going on – which means that he was speaking about events close at hand (the destruction of the Temple in 70AD and the end of the world). It's worth noting that his comments about the destruction of the Temple might also be referring to his upcoming crucifixion.

- E. We walked through the entire chapter and then I ended by saying:
1. This is complicated – our understanding of exactly how the last events will unfold is limited because of:
    - a) The nature of prophecy
    - b) The other passages that we fold in – much of Revelation and parts of Daniel and elsewhere lead us down certain paths, we make assumptions about the millennium and other concepts
  2. Hold your views with some humility – understand that when it comes to the return of Christ we are on the welcoming committee not the planning committee.
  3. And at the same time, be assured that the Bible is clear on the most important points. (The name for this doctrine is the perspicuity of Scripture). And when it comes to Christ’s return we know: it’s going to happen. He will return – as King.
  4. I called a brief time out here to say – we do not know when and be leery of those who claim otherwise, because for 2,000 years someone has always been saying, “times up. He’s coming back tomorrow, or next Thursday.”
    - a) Christians are not the only ones who head down this path. There has always been a fascination with the future and anyone who can tell you about it. That’s why people go to psychics, read their horoscope and why there was such fascination with the Mayan calendar. Hey, I wrote a book about the future. I get it. But we have been told not to set dates.<sup>1</sup>
  5. Finally, I then ended saying, “Jesus wins.” Jesus wins. You can base your life on that certainty. Good will prevail. God will triumph. He has everything under control. You can be as confident about his return as you are that the Cubs won the World Series.
    - a) Watching the reruns may cause some angst, but the outcome is certain
  6. We know how things end. And as a result we should cultivate an eternal perspective.

IV. Today we revisit the Olivet Discourse. Just for kicks I am going to read a section from what Matthew recorded instead of Luke. Matthew 24:1

A. Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. 2 “Do you see all these things?” he asked. “Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; everyone will be thrown down.”

B. 3 As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. “Tell us,” they said, “when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”

C. 4 Jesus answered: “Watch out that no one deceives you. 5 For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Messiah,’ and will deceive many. 6 You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. 7 Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. 8 All these are the beginning of birth pains.

D. 9 “Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. 10 At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, 11 and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. 12 Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, 13 but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. 14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

E. 15 “So when you see standing in the holy place ‘the abomination that causes desolation,’ [a] spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand— 16 then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. 17 Let no one on the housetop go down to take anything out of the house. 18 Let no one in the field go back to get their cloak. 19 How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! 20 Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath. 21 For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again.

F. 22 “If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened. 23 At that time if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Messiah!’ or, ‘There he is!’ do not believe it. 24 For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. 25 See, I have told you ahead of time.

V. We spent a fair bit of time last week walking through this address and trying to understand it – I want to consider a few of the implications today.

A. There are four big ideas here

VI. Number One: History is headed somewhere.

A. Many say that Christians are on the wrong side of history. I would contend that just the opposite is the case.<sup>2</sup> But this is not the prevailing view at the moment.

B. When it comes to how things are progressing, there are a few ideas being bantered about.

C. One of them is based on secularism or materialism. It holds that there is no plan.

1. We are alone. All we can be certain about is that eventually there will be heat death. What you see is all there is. Life is an accident. The right chemicals mixed together in the right amounts at the right time and when they were warmed by the sun, life happened. And at some point, through mutation and blind chance, things progressed.

2. I would argue two things here.

a) First, it takes faith to hold this view. If you are into watching YouTube lectures, Tim Keller gives a good talk on this to the staff at Google. His point is that it takes faith to not believe in God. Quite a bit as it turns out. In recent years, as we have come to understand just how finely tuned the universe needs to be to hold together. As we have come to realize how remarkably fine-tuned the earth is to sustain life – a number of scientists have become theists.

b) Second, if you hold that there is no God, then it doesn't make a lot of sense to say, "So, live a good life. Be kind. Help others."

c) There was an article in The New York Times not too long ago. Most secular people I meet have humanistic values. They think people should be treated with respect and care.

(1) This value makes sense if you are a Hindu and believe that you will be reincarnated until you live a good enough life to advance to bliss (nirvana). And it makes sense if you are an orthodox Jew or a Christian and you believe that you were made by a loving God and should strive to be like him and love others.

(2) If you hold to those views then being kind to others makes sense – it is consistent. However, if you are secular and do not believe that there is a god or any supernatural aspects to life, then it doesn't make sense.

(3) Here is a letter from the Times:

(4) "There are 30,000 galaxies over 13 billion years old, with many trillions of stars and many, many more trillions of inferred planets. So, how significant are you? You are not special. You are just another piece of decaying matter on the compost pile of this world – nothing of who you are and what you do in the short time you are here will ever matter. Everything short of that realization is vanity – therefore, celebrate life, in every moment – admire its wonders and love people without reservation.

(5) What? That doesn't follow. That is a huge step in the opposite direction. As Nietzsche said, "if there is no God then claw your way to the top. If you are alive only because your ancestors survived the evolutionary bloodbath by killing weaker beings, then that is the way forward, being nice is not what a really secular person should do."<sup>3</sup>

3. If you are in this camp then what you say is, I am alive for a moment on an insignificant speck near an unremarkable star on the edge of a galaxy that is randomly drifting among billions of others. And my life doesn't really have any meaning.

4. Every movement of history—both its triumphs and tragedies—are undirected and ultimately meaningless. Someday this accidental universe will grow cold and dark and empty.

D. A second view is held by a growing number who argue that life as we now know it is probably a computer simulation program.

1. Elon Musk - boy genius behind PayPal, Tesla, SpaceX and a few other things – has said that he thinks the odds that what we are experiencing is reality are only one in a billion.

2. We are part of the matrix.

E. There are many others who think history is curricular.

1. This is the view coming out of the East. I was surprised to hear it get some positive press recently.
- F. The Olivet Discourse is just one place where we see that history is linear.
  1. It is headed somewhere.
  2. The claim behind what Jesus is saying is:
    - a) There is a god who made everything. Time is marching towards his return. He will rule and reign.
    - b) And you have been made in his image and can be adopted into his family. As a result, everything about you matters.
    - c) The God who created a trillion galaxies with hundreds of billion stars, did that as a statement of his own glory. He is amazing at levels we cannot comprehend – and He knows and loves you.
    - d) And history itself is marching toward peace, justice, and a flourishing future full of light and power beyond any we can imagine.
- VII. Number Two: We are told that between now and the time Jesus will return things will get rough.
  - A. Matthew 23:9 reads: "...you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me."
    1. This text speaks of the persecution and martyrdom that comes our way because of our identification with Christ.
    2. There are some other passages that also speak about this, such as, ????, "Do not be surprised when you encounter various trials..."
    - 3.
    4. .
  - B. And then there are other passages that talk about general trials and struggles in a broken world:
  - C. And, then, we have the record of history.
    1. Christian persecution began in Acts 4, not long after Christ's resurrection, and it continued for the next three hundred years.
    2. Or,
    3. Many suffer for their faith right now.
  - D.
  - E.
  - F. Don't miss this. It's important.
  - G. And it's different than what some promise. Some preachers say that if we follow God things will be easy. If we only have enough faith or give enough money (always to them) that God will protect and provide and we will have an easy life.
    1. That is not what Jesus says. That is not what the Bible says. That is more like karma than anything else.
  - H. In fairness to them, we are told that there is an order to the universe.
  - I. And we are given Laws that help us understand how things generally work
  - J. The Law – think The Ten Commandments and more – serve three purposes:

1. They serve as a mirror. They point out what God’s standards are so we get that we cannot live up to them. (And if there was any doubt before Jesus gave the Sermon on the Mount and interpreted them, there is not any after that).

2. They help restrain evil – help society function

3. They help us understand the heart of God. The Law of God grows out of the character of God.

K. What this means is, if we keep the law things will go better for us. If we do not lie and develop a character of being trustworthy, that will help our life work. If we honor our marriage vows we are likely to have a much better marriage.

L. The Law helps life work. But, the Law is not enough. It not only cannot save us in terms of eternal life, it cannot guarantee us that this life will be smooth sailing.

M. We should expect to get knocked down. And know this, it’s much easier to get knocked down if you expect it.

N. I am so thankful that when I got taken down by a dissection and then my Dad got cancer that I had moved past the idea that I had a deal with God – I would believe in him and in return I’d have an easy life. I did believe that for a while. Against what Jesus taught in passages like this, I thought: if I am nice and go to church and don’t swear, I can call in favors.

O. Now, we not only have a chance to avoid some of them by trying to follow the Law. We also have the assurance that God is great enough to use the bad things that happen to us for our own good.

1. He will never tempt us with evil. That is not his style.

a) But he will discipline us for our own good.

b) And he can use bad things for good.

P. That’s a different sermon. Right now, here this. Point one: history is headed somewhere glorious for those who are in Christ; point two, between now and then we should expect some whitewater.

#### VIII. Number Three: We do not have to be anxious.

A. In Luke 21:34 we are told:

1. Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap.

B. Other passages tell us that we do not have to get bogged down in worry, perhaps most prominently, Phil. 4:6:

1. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

C. We might have to fight for peace, but there's an antidote to the anxiety of our age.

1. Please understand, the antidote is not an easy life.

2. In Ps. 23 we see King David rejoicing that God had led him “beside still waters.” David did not have an easy life.

3. God isn’t saying, “Take it easy. Do your best to avoid all stress.” No, he is saying, “find your peace in me. Learn to trust me. Place your confidence in me.”

D. In Thomas Kelly's classic A Testament of Devotion, we read: "Deep within us all there is an amazing inner sanctuary of the soul, a holy place, a Divine Center, a speaking Voice, to which we may continuously return. Eternity is at our hearts, pressing upon our time-torn lives, warming us with intimations of an astounding destiny, calling us home unto Itself."

E. We need to learn to hear this Voice. We need to order our lives in order to hear it.

F. We need to start there – not squeeze it in. But it starts there.

G. During the week between Christmas and New Years I did my annual review. Spent more time than normal reflecting. And I wrote down the things I learned. And one of the things I learned was that I needed to spend more time writing down the things I was learning.

H. That may not be the way you are wired. But you have to figure out how you are wired. Because we are told to not be anxious.

IX. Number Four – Number three – we do not have to be anxious. We should avoid this. Number four, we are expected to share the Gospel.

A. If you go back and read the Olivet Discourse for marching orders. You come away with a number of things:

1. Do not trust in the Temple of Stones
2. Do not be deceived by those
  - a) Claiming that the world is about to end
  - b) Or that they are the Messiah
3. Do not worry
4. We are told to stand faithfully to the end – to keep the faith
5. We are told to keep the watch, to remain aware that Jesus will return

B. And Matthew's account – 24:14 – makes it clear that we are to work towards that day by sharing the Gospel.

1. We are told that before Christ returns "this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations."

C. Men and women, this is part of our assignment

1. For over the last year a team of elders, deacons and staff have been working on a strategic plan.
2. Lots of meetings and study and prayer and study and meetings and prayer.

D. The good news is that lots of things are going well. I just spoke at an event where I was pulling together various metrics – and it was very encouraging.

E. I noted that when I came back from my sabbatical six years ago I highlighted four things:

1. We have to think more about young families. We are a multigenerational church and we like that, but we have to do more to think young
2. We need to get out of debt. At the time we owed a couple million dollars on about \$16M in assets. We are down to about \$700K on \$30M.
3. We need to focus more on small groups. The bigger we get the smaller we need to be.

4. We need to reach out more.
  - a) We then set out to think more missionally. That led to a move to multisite – which has worked.
- F. I also noted that there is lots of service going on:
  1. There are a lot of good things going on that we do not know how to talk about
    - a) The Matthew Homes – where we are securing homes for around \$20K and may have some given to us. And we are using volunteer labor and lots of donated materials and then we are selling them to families that want to have a missional approach, financing them with non-interest loans.
    - b) The Jobs Initiative. We have a dozen business people mentoring business owners in North Chicago. Our goal is job creation. It is working.
    - c) The Justice Center that now operates out of the Grayslake campus.
      - (1) It's not legal advice, it is advice about whether you need legal advice or how to best proceed.
      - (2) And it's prayer support and encouragement
    - d) There are other programs
      - (1) We are working in the Public School in North Chicago
      - (2) We are working with PADS and Love INC
      - (3) Our prison ministry is vibrant
    - e) Locally we are donating 20,000 hours per year
  2. We are involved with wonderful projects globally
    - a) Medical and education aid and church planting in Ghana
    - b) Helping widows be trained in job skills in India and get microloans to start businesses, alongside disaster relief and orphan care and church planting
    - c) Caring for Muslim refugees in Istanbul – providing supplies for life, offering job training and doing church planting.
  3. And then there are ongoing – week in and week out things happening here
    - a) Tuesday we kicked off Alpha at LF – with 79 people there
    - b) Wednesday we started Financial Peace with 50 some
    - c) Last night was the new Th PM service at the remodeled lobby at HP.
      - (1) It's a millennial service with thirty some twenty-somethings. Same sermon but shorter and they ask questions.
- G. There are really good things happening. Thank you for your support.
- H. I am encouraged on many fronts. But we are not where we need to be when it comes to sharing Christ with others. We're just not.
- I. And so we are refocusing – and will be restating our mission and vision to help us continue doing what we're doing well, but drill down where we are not.
- J. We have state this as Proclaiming the Good News and Engaging in Good Works. We've done more of the second than the first. So, stay tuned.

- X. Finally, Number Five: Eternity Changes Everything
- A. I'm highlighting five points today from the Olivet Discourse
1. History is headed somewhere
  2. We should expect things to be tough
  3. We do not have to be anxious
  4. We are expected to share the Gospel. The message needs to go out before Jesus returns
- B. Jesus tells us about the future – and the good things coming to those in Christ – so that our todays are shaped by tomorrow.
- C. If you are living for today, you will live very differently than if you live today in light of the fact that we are going to live forever.
- D. Eternity changes everything. This life is short. Eternity is not. We need to invest our lives – the time, talent and money we have been entrusted with right now – in ways that reflect Gods eternal kingdom.
- E. When it comes to eternity, among the things we learn is that
1. We should fear eternity apart from God – which leads us to His Son
  2. And we should look forward to eternity with him.
  3. And we should live today as if we are going to live forever.

XI.

XII.

XIII.

XIV. Next Week – an important sermon.

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<sup>1</sup> People send me emails – there is going to be a blood moon, and the planets are aligning and the number in the UN security council is eight and you need to preach about this. Jesus is going to return very, very soon. Read this book. Go to this web site and it will all be explained. I do not preach on these because I have read too much history and I know that that for 2,000 years people have been pretty certain everything was lined up. Jesus tells us not to get anxious over these things and that no one knows the hour or the day. He notes that there will be endless speculation, virtually all of it wrong, and then he tells us to be faithful.

<sup>2</sup> Some surely are. They baptize a cultural moment and try to hold on to it. But in the grand scheme, all of history is headed towards the return of Christ, his rule and reign and his grand coronation in heaven.

<sup>3</sup> By the way, if you do decide to embrace humanistic values in spite of their disconnect from your core convictions, I'll be happy about that! But you are doing so as a matter of faith.