

**Lesson 24. . . Signs of the Close of the Age  
Gospel of Matthew**



**Notes From the Podium**

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**These notes are intended to augment your own reading and study of the lesson.  
Please use as an aid to help document the main message of the lecture.**

**Matthew 24:1-51**

- I. The Olivet Discourse
  - A. The “Little Apocalypse”
    1. In a sense it is a compressed version of the entire book of Revelation.
    2. “Apocalypse” - a description of when the bride is unveiled at a wedding.
      - a. This unveiling, takes place when the bridegroom has wedded his bride.
      - b. Both the book of Revelation and the “Little Apocalypse”, are about the unveiling of the bride and the way in which she will be wedded to the bridegroom.
  - B. In Matthew 23, we spoke about the wedding feast; In Matthew 24 we will discuss what the bride must endure.
- II. Like St. Paul’s writings, this “unveiling” is multi-layered.
  - A. St. Paul teaches us that:
    1. Yes, we *were* saved – past tense
    2. Yes, we *are* being saved – present tense
    3. Yes, we hope *to be* saved - future
    4. When St. Paul speaks of salvation, past, present and future tense are included.
      - a. In the past, we were baptized and this was a definitive act by which we became part of the bride.
      - b. At the present moment, we can turn toward God or away from Him.
      - c. The future we put into the hands of divine providence and pray that we do not turn from him.
  - B. When our Lord reveals (unveils) the bride and what’s going to take place past, present, and future events are all involved.
    1. It can be difficult to know what “tense” our Lord is referring to and that’s one of the great challenges of interpreting the book of Revelation.
    2. In the book of Revelation our Lord uses persons, places, and things as types of those things to come so we would know what to look for.
    3. You see the types repeat themselves, for example:
      - a. The Lamb
        - i. There is a lamb associated with Abraham and later with Moses in the Old Testament and neither of them are a definitive end in themselves, both are types that point to something else.
        - ii. In the New Testament, Christ is “the lamb of God” but even this is not the definitive end.
        - iii. It is the “lamb standing as though slain” that we read about in Revelation that is the definitive end.

- iv. Each time a type of the lamb is revealed to us throughout that long history, our Lord is unveiling more of the meaning behind that “lamb standing as though slain” who is “the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world”.
- b. The Temple
  - i. There is the actual temple in Jerusalem is a type.
  - ii. In the anagogic sense, the actual temple is a “type” that points forward to the heavenly Jerusalem, that heavenly city adorned as a bride prepared to meet her husband.
  - iii. It is a “type” of the Church.
- 4. These things always have the same rhyme scheme beginning with the historical, moving toward the present and the future.
  - a. This pattern that is found throughout Sacred Scripture allows us to see what will be by virtue of showing us what has been and what is now.
  - b. We cannot take the individual types and interpret them as being definitive, an end in themselves.
    - i. For example, it would be incorrect to think that the “mark of the beast in Revelation” refers to the red birthmark on Gorbachev’s head
    - ii. The “mark of the beast” is not definitive, it points to something else.
- 5. The endpoint of Revelation is the marriage feast of the lamb and until that takes place the meanings of all the other images are multilayered (polyvalent).
- 6. So, as we read this “Little Apocalypse”, we shouldn’t think that the end is here just because it seems to be describing much of what is happening in our world today.
  - a. Of course, it may be going on right now and this may be the end because we can know with absolute certitude that sooner or later this world will end, but most likely not right now.
  - b. We read this text to learn the way in which the bride is supposed to respond when the Bridegroom comes and not for the purpose of trying to find out *when* the He will come.
  - c. This is a text about endurance, about running the race, and about being faithful in times of trial.

### III. Matthew 24

- A. “Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple.”
  - 1. Remember, Jesus has been there at the temple some time.
  - 2. Jesus has just said to the disciples that their house is desolate and is forsaken.
  - 3. The disciples are remarking about the grandeur of the temple, known far and wide for its beauty.
    - a. It was even gilded with gold on the outside of the stone, designed to be the picture of heaven.
    - b. It’s almost as if the disciples are pleading with Jesus telling Him to look at the beauty of the temple.
  - 4. Jesus answers, “...Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”
    - a. Historically, this came to pass.

- i. When the temple building was burned in 70 AD, all of that gold on the exterior melted into the cracks of the stones.
    - ii. Gold diggers, like scavengers, turned over every stone to that gold; every stone was thrown down.
- B. “As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?”
  1. From the vantage point of the Mount of Olives, looking down on the temple, Jesus answers the disciples.
  2. His answer is given in that multi-layered style we discussed earlier.
- C. “Take heed that no one leads you astray.”
  1. He begins by telling them to be faithful, to endure and to not be led astray.
  2. The Book of Revelation
    - a. In the book of Revelation there are two beasts that are given the power of Satan.
      - i. Heresy - destroys the nature of the revelation of truth.
        - Heresy literally means “to take something away”. So when we take part of the faith and run with it, it corrupts and leads to error.
        - Faith is a whole cloth, you cannot just take a thread, either you are wrapped in the mantle of the entirety of the faith or you don’t have the faith at all.
        - You cannot just take the Bible, the episcopacy, or just baptism.
        - He gives the whole cloth to clothe His bride, the entirety of faith and charity.
      - ii. Blasphemy is the other beast.
    - b. These two beasts roam around and tear at the church causing dissension, error, and false teaching.
      - i. This is what St. Paul warns about when he says “hold fast to what you’ve been ...”
      - ii. St. Paul implores his readers to preach what was handed to them in its integrity and faithfully.
      - iii. When the truth is over simplified (parts taken away) in an effort to make it easier to understand, error and blasphemy result.
      - iv. Error and blasphemy are like a right and a left hook that can cause many to falter and go astray.
    - c. It is the job of the two beasts in Revelation to lead them astray, to strike the shepherd and scatter the flock.
      - i. The shepherd can no longer be struck but the sheep can be led astray, coaxed by things that tantalized them.
- D. “And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not alarmed; for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation...all this is but the beginning of the birth-pangs.”
  1. Our Lord once said that when a woman is in labor she cries out in her agony but when she holds that life in her hands, she forgets her pain and is filled with love.

- a. Our Lord is, no doubt, merciful to women in allowing them to forget rather quickly the pain that is endured in giving birth.
  - b. Immediately in the bonding between a woman and her child, that sense of love begins to wipe away the remembrance of suffering.
  - c. So it is with all suffering that ends in love, in communion.
    - i. Often we hear of people enduring great trials, who have cared for a sick spouse for years and then the spouse dies. They miss that communion such that their trial seems only to have been short a time.
    - ii. Things seem like they last forever when we're suffering and yet when it ends in love it seems the suffering was nothing.
    - iii. In an instant, one stroke of grace wipes away all past sufferings in terms of our recollection and those sufferings becomes nothing in the face of the one we love. So too will heaven be.
2. The church will continue to endure these birth pangs (sufferings) as she has from the beginning, in the wake of her Master. "If it did this to the green wood what will it do to the dry?"
- a. Each and every Christian will have to go through sufferings individually, in the corporate body of the church, but also the church at the end of time.
    - i. We have moved back and forth between the individual Christian that lived before and those of us living now.
  - b. Each individual endures suffering, not just as an individual but as a member of the body of Christ and suffering for the good of the body of the church.
  - c. The church will suffer greatly in the form of the master at the end of time.
3. Where are we at right now?
- a. All that matters is that you make up in your flesh, the sufferings that are lacking for the sake of the body of the church.
  - b. Endure, persevere, and suffer the birth pangs because you will give birth to life and be in communion with the one you love.
- E. "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation, and put you to death; and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake."
- 1. Certainly, the apostles would be the pillars of the church, the saints.
  - 2. Jesus is here speaking of generations to come.
- F. "And then many will fall away, and because wickedness is multiplied, most men's love will grow cold."
- 1. Like the church of Ephesus in the book of Revelation, they had fallen away from their first love and grown cold...
  - 2. In reality, love should *grow* when wickedness is multiplied.
    - a. If we're willing to suffer, that suffering stretches our heart to plant more grace such that we are capable of giving more than we had before.
    - b. Each trial brings the possibility of more love.
- G. "But he who endures to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, and then the end will come."
- 1. One thing is for certain, we have not gotten to that point yet.
  - 2. Not every nation on earth has heard the gospel.
- H. "So when you see the desolating sacrilege spoken of by the prophet Daniel,"

1. Refers to when a statue of Zeus is placed in the temple.
  2. Throughout history, many sacrileges have taken place whereby something is set up as a god and worshiped as only the one true God is to be worshiped.
    - a. The French Revolution
      - i. Liberty, government, state, and reason was worshiped in the cathedrals.
      - ii. Altars were cast down and 1000's of priests and religious were slain.
      - iii. Faithful Catholics chose reason, the state, and democracy over God.
    - b. In our own time, sanctuaries are desecrated and the worship of self takes place in them.
  3. Often the heart of the faith becomes the very place where other gods are worshiped.
    - a. It took place in Daniel's time.
    - b. It took place during Jesus' time on earth.
    - c. It takes place in our time.
    - d. It will happen at the end of time.
- I. "Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains; let him who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house."
1. The "road of roofs" - In Jerusalem, you could actually walk on top of the houses, to get around instead of going down into the streets.
  2. This reference speaks directly to Jesus' contemporaries – meaning when the Romans invade, if you are on the roof, don't go down to get your stuff but run.
  3. This became a sign for Christians. (Mt 24:15, "...let the reader understand.")
    - a. Matthew, the narrator, is speaking to us who are reading the text.
    - b. This is like code language; when you see this take place, head for the hills.
  4. In 70 AD the Romans destroyed the holy city of Jerusalem and the temple.
- J. "... And alas for those who are with child and for those who give suck in those days!"
1. Church fathers have said that this is what is behind Jesus' statement to the women who were weeping on the way of the cross.
  2. Jesus says to the women, "weep not for me but for your children..."
  3. Those children would grow up to be the adults that experience the destruction of Jerusalem which would be burned in fire.
- K. "Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath."
1. On the Sabbath you were limited to taking a limited number of paces.
  2. So it better not be on a Sabbath lest you break the Sabbath law.
- L. "For then there will be great tribulation, ... false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, ... For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of man."
1. Many will come and proclaim that they are the Christ.
    - a. There is an old poetic adage: *If Christ appears to you look for his wounds because the angel of light, Lucifer ... who is himself the Antichrist... will never show a sign of weakness and love.*
    - b. In the wounds are written His authenticity.

- c. Recall St. Thomas (doubting Thomas) who said, “Let me put my hands into his side, my fingers into those nail prints.”
- 2. Jesus is saying that we won’t have to guess whether or not it’s Him,
  - a. He came once in humility, as a lamb, humble, meek and riding on an ass.
  - b. But when He returns it will be different, it will be like lightening that “comes from the east and shines as far as the west”.
  - c. He will fill the sky with His glory, in the second coming.
  - d. “It will do no good to lie down when you can no longer stand up.” -C.S. Lewis
  - e. It will be as described in Daniel when the son of man comes in glory on the clouds of heaven.
- M. “Wherever the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together.”
  - 1. The word used here for “body” actually means cadaver, a dead body.
  - 2. A gryphon vulture has a head like an eagle and followed the Roman armies because in their wake would be lots of dead bodies.
- N. “... the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken; ...they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory;” -You can’t miss that!
- O. “...From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near.”
  - 1. Recall the fig tree that Jesus cursed because it didn’t bear any fruit.
  - 2. The fig tree was the sign of the old Israel, it was not bearing fruit and so He caused it to wither.
  - 3. Now in referencing that fig tree, Jesus promises a new sprout/branch.
    - a. Like the heat of the sun makes the branch tender, the heat of suffering will cause the branch that is the Church tender.
    - b. The Church thrives in suffering for her Master on the wood of the cross made that hard wood tender.
    - c. With His blood, He makes that branch a life giving tree whose leaves never fade.
    - d. Every Christian, should they endure suffering, will produce life.
- P. “Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away till all these things take place...” -This is true for the particular destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.
- Q. “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.”
  - 1. He speaks only what He hears from the Father, i.e. He only reveals that which He hears from the Father. (The Father and the Son are truly one)
  - 2. What is given to us is the encouragement to endure.
  - 3. If we are certain of *when* He’s coming, we can be certain that we are wrong.
- R. “As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of man, ...they did not know until the flood came and swept them all away, ...Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.”
  - 1. This warning is repeated in Revelation 3.
  - 2. “... like a thief in the night, the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”