

Gospels Study and Discussion Questions

Lesson Nine: The Olivet and Upper Room Discourses – Matthew 24-26, John 13-14

Read Matthew 24.

- 1) What surprising announcement did Jesus make (verses 1-2) and what two questions did His disciples ask in response? Herod the Great had greatly expanded the Temple so that it was considered one of the wonders of the world. Directing His disciples' attention to it from the vantage point of the Mount of Olives (a great view), Jesus announced that the Temple complex would be destroyed (24:1-2). Following this surprising statement, the disciples asked when this would occur *and* what would be the sign of His coming and the end of the age (24:3). They almost certainly expected these events to be concurrent.
- 2) How did Jesus answer these questions (give as much information as you can from Matthew 24)? Jesus was more concerned with preparing His disciples for the events than explaining the details. Nevertheless, He did give a number of signs: false christs (verses 5, 11, 23, 24, 26), wars and rumors of wars (verse 6), famines and earthquakes (verse 7), persecution of believers (verse 9), an increase of wickedness (verse 13), an "abomination that causes desolation" (referencing Daniel 9:27, 11:31, 12:11), standing in the "holy place [the Temple]" (verse 15), great distress, unequalled up to that time in history and never equaled again (verse 21), shaking of the heavenly bodies (verse 29), and a "sign" in the sky (verse 30). He also said that preceding the end, the gospel will be preached in the whole world (verse 14). Scholars greatly disagree about the *manner* in which Matthew 24:4-51 answers the disciples' two questions. One opinion is that verses 1-35 refer to events that were fulfilled at the time of the destruction of the Temple in AD 70, and that Jesus' words from verse 36 forward refer to His "parousia" (second advent). If this is the correct view, then Jesus answered the "when" of the Temple's destruction by saying within "this generation" (verse 34, speaking of His own generation), and with regard to His "parousia," that "no one knows except the Father" (verse 36). A second opinion is that verses 1-35 give a jumbled list of signs, some referring to the Temple destruction (for example, verses 4-28) and some referring to the parousia (for example, verses 32-51). This view allows the "when" question to be answered just as it was in the first position described (the Temple would be destroyed within Jesus' generation). A third opinion is that all the events Jesus described ultimately refer to the great period of Tribulation, preceding His return (rather than referring to the time of the Temple destruction). Those who take this last position view "this generation" (verse 34) as a reference to the generation of people who will be alive when the signs begin. They argue that, while "no one knows that day or hour" (verse 36) of Jesus' return, He will *not* return until after all of these events occur. The chapter concludes with three illustrations (verses 37-51) that emphasize the need to be prepared for the unexpected event(s).
- 3) Reread Matthew 24:3, 32-33, 42-44. How much effort have you put into understanding the signs of Christ's second coming and the end of the age? If you think an adjustment needs to be made, what steps will you take to make such an adjustment? Understanding the Scriptural teachings concerning the end times and paying attention to current events (world news) is important, *but not as important* as preparing for Christ's return in the way we live our daily lives. Personal sharing

Read Matthew 25.

- 4) What lessons can be gleaned from the parables and teaching in Matthew 25? Those awaiting Jesus' return should prepare! Those who do not will be surprised to find that once He returns, they no longer have the opportunity to repent. God gives all people resources He expects them to use wisely. Those who do will be rewarded. Those who fail to use them, out of self-centeredness or hostility, will have proved that they are not truly God's servants and will be eternally punished. A testimony of the lips alone does not prove one belongs to Christ. We must show evidence in the way we live our lives, especially with regard to our treatment of His disciples.

- 5) *Specifically*, what do you need to begin doing or do differently in case Jesus returns this year? **The parables of Matthew 25 emphasize the importance of faithful stewardship. Personal sharing**

Read Matthew 26:1-35 (verses 6-13 parallel John 12:1-8, covered in Lesson 8).

- 6) How are the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the Passover celebrations related and what is their significance (see Exodus 12:3-20 and Leviticus 23:4-8)? **The Passover celebration commemorates the night the Lord passed over (spared) the firstborn sons of Israel from death and Israel fled Egypt. At the Lord's command, the Israelites took the blood of a lamb and brushed it on their doorposts. Seeing the blood, the angel of the Lord "passed over" their households. In preparation for their flight, the Israelites hurriedly prepared and ate the first Passover meal for sustenance (bread without yeast and the slaughtered lamb, roasted with herbs). The Lord commanded Israel to annually celebrate the Passover feast as part of a weeklong "Feast of Unleavened Bread," in which all yeast was removed from their homes and only unleavened bread was eaten).**
- 7) Read Isaiah 53:7 with Luke 24:26-27, John 1:29, Acts 8:30-35, 1 Corinthians 5:7, 1 Peter 1:18-20, and Revelation 5:6-13, 7:9-10. What does the Bible teach about the ultimate fulfillment of the Passover symbolism? **Jesus is the completely innocent Passover Lamb who was slaughtered on the Cross in order that we might be passed over in the final judgment. His death occurred at the time of the Passover, exactly as it was foretold.**
- 8) Compare Matthew 26:18b and 26:26-29 with Jeremiah 31:31-33 and 1 Corinthians 11:25-26. What is the significance of the celebration of Communion (the "Lord's Supper") for the church of Christ today and how does it relate to the Passover? **Communion is a commemoration of Jesus' death, instituted by Him at the Last Supper (a Passover meal). He identified the bread and wine of the meal as symbols of His body, which was broken in His death on the Cross, and His blood, which was spilt out at His death on the Cross. Communion is also a symbol of God's New Covenant with His children, a covenant of grace rather than law. The Passover pointed to the death of the Lamb of God and the Communion celebration (instituted at Passover) also commemorates His death. In a sense, the Lord's Supper is a replacement (fulfillment) of the Old Testament Passover celebration.**

Read John 13.

- 9) The apostle John is believed to be the only apostle who lived a long life, giving him much time to ponder the meaning of Jesus' words and actions. Consider John 3:16, 12:24-26, 13:34, 35 and 1 John 3:16 with Jesus' washing of His disciples' feet. Then read Matthew 20:26-28, Luke 22:24-27 and Philippians 2:5-7. Use all of these passages above to explain how greatness and service are related for those who have Christ-like thinking. **According to John, love motivates service. God the Father and Jesus His Son served humanity out of love by personal sacrifice. Those who likewise serve out of love are truly great. While the world tells us we *ascend* to greatness by pushing others out of our way or climbing over them, the Bible teaches just the opposite. True greatness is achieved by loving others enough to *condescend* to serve them.**
- 10) John concludes his description of Judas' betrayal of Jesus with the words, "And it was night" (13:30b). Why would John have included such a detail (see John 3:19 and 11:9-10)? **John included a small factual detail that also serves as a spiritual commentary on Judas Iscariot's betrayal of Jesus. Earlier, Jesus' disciples were concerned about His safety in returning to Judea. Jesus commented that He was walking in light, not darkness, and therefore He would not stumble (John 11:9-10). He was referring to the security of remaining in the will of God (the light). By contrast, Judas acted in darkness (a symbol of evil [John 3:19]).**

- 11) Peter emphatically declared that he would never deny Christ (Matthew 26:33 and John 13:37). Yet Jesus said that, before the rooster crowed, Peter would disown Him three times (John 13:38). Skim Matthew 26:69-75 to see the fulfillment of Jesus' prediction. Then read Acts 1:15; 2:14, 38; 3:1, 4; 4:13, and 5:15, 29, noting the leadership Peter displayed after Jesus' resurrection. With regard to which failure in your own life does this picture of Peter's later life encourage you? **Peter had good intentions regarding love, faithfulness and service in Jesus' name. He failed miserably, as Jesus predicted, yet later he went onto to lead the cause of Christ boldly and bravely in its days following Christ's ascension. Personal sharing**

Read John 14.

- 12) What promise did Jesus make in John 14:3, 28 and Matthew 16:27 that is the foundation of a key Christian doctrine? **Jesus promised to return to earth again.**
- 13) Try to summarize Jesus' answer to the questions of Thomas, Philip, and Judas. **Thomas asked how to know the way to where Jesus was going. Jesus told him He Himself was the path of salvation, the way to heaven (John 14:6, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."). Philip asked Jesus to reveal the Father to them. Jesus answered that He and the Father were one; to see Him was to see the Father (verse 9). He told Philip to believe and to consider His miracles as evidence that He is indeed God. Further evidence, He said, would come in the future, at which time His disciples would do even greater miracles than He had done (verses 12-14). Judas asked why the world would not see Jesus in the same way that those who love Jesus do. Jesus responded that He and His Father make their home with those who love and obey them. Those who do not love Jesus have no interest in obeying Him; therefore (implied) they will not see Him as those who love Him do. Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would be the vehicle through whom those who love Jesus continue to see Him, because He would remind them and teach them about Jesus' words.**
- 14) In response to the questions of Thomas and Philip, Jesus gave two essential truths (doctrines).
- What exclusive claim did Jesus make, according to John 14:6? **He is the *only* way anyone can come to God.**
 - What important claim did Jesus make with regard to His identity in John 14:9-11? **Jesus claimed to be God.**
- 15) Record the promises of Jesus in John 14. Which promise encourages you the most today and for what reason? **Regarding our future: Jesus is preparing a place in heaven for us (verse 2). He is coming back to get us (verses 3, 18, 28). We can get to God through Him (verse 6). Regarding the present: If we ask Him for anything in faith and in His name, He will do it for us (verses 13-14). He will give us a Counselor to be with us forever and that Counselor (the Holy Spirit) will teach and remind us of Jesus' words (verses 16, 26). He and the Father will make their home with those who obey and love Him (verse 23). He will give us peace (verse 27). Personal sharing**