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**Day 316 - November 12**

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## **Jesus the Christ (5 BCE-30 CE)**

### ***Discourse on Future Events***

**Readings: *Matthew 24:1-51; 25:1-46; Mark 13:1-37; Luke 21:5-36***

#### ***Reflections:***

- Just as many of the religious leaders and Israelites were obsessed with end times prophecies of the Old Testament, so today many people are obsessed with the prophecies of the New Testament. Most scholars agree that this entire section of Jesus' teaching focused on predicting the destruction of the temple in 70 CE when the Roman's destroyed Jerusalem. Some scholars believe this is a two-part prophecy that deals with both the destruction of the temple and then looks to the more distant future about the end of time. Then a third group sees this entire prophecy as simply having dual meaning. It would make sense based on how Old Testament prophecy was fulfilled that many of the prophetic references here would have an immediate and practical fulfillment (70 CE events) and also provide some insights into more timeless spiritual principles as well as point towards later events. God seems to be able to maximize the truth he packs into prophetic words. Now having said this, virtually nobody really understood what God was saying until they looked at it in hindsight and so we should always take a very humble approach.
- Temple to be destroyed: This first announcement of Jesus could not be any clearer. Some debate if the biographies of Jesus were written before or after these events. In light of how the writers handle other current events, it would make sense that they would have acknowledged within the text the time and place that these events were fulfilled. In light of there being no reference to the actual events taking place, a large number of scholars believe that this supports early dates for Mark, Luke and Matthew's biographies (written after 50 CE and before 70 CE).
- Disciples ask questions: Four of Jesus' closest disciples now ask two questions. First, when will the temple be destroyed? Second, when should they look for your coming and the end of the age? This second question is interesting in that it implies they are somehow anticipating Jesus' return and yet they don't even believe he is going to die. At first we may wonder if the writers are playing a bit with the story line. If Jesus talked about his return it is hard to imagine the disciples initiating the conversation with such a question. Yet, as we look back just a bit before these section, we see that these four are probably connecting the destruction of the temple with what Jesus had just said in Matthew 23:39, "For I tell you,

you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'" They are trying to piece together what Jesus is saying.

- Jesus tells of signs: Many of the first things Jesus says are actually fulfilled within a few decades following his life. In many ways the book of Acts records virtually everything Jesus predicts. The description of the destruction of Jerusalem is very accurate and again if the account was written after the fact, no doubt Matthew, Mark and Luke would have indicated this as it would have been strong evidence in support of Jesus' ability to know the future and therefore confirm his uniquely divine status as God's son. We see Jesus warn of false Messiahs appearing. We also see indications of miraculous help given by God to spare lives, particularly of the most vulnerable. Although we do not know the exact events of the destruction of Jerusalem, most scholars believe that all the essential elements of Jesus' prophecies were fulfilled including the escape of Christians who were reading the signs of their times. Some conservative scholars reject this fulfillment and suggest Jesus is looking past these events to his final coming but this seems to miss the obvious in order to preserve a theological bias. The coming of the Son of Man should be translated "on the clouds of heaven" not the clouds of the sky. The term "coming on the clouds" was a war image of a king riding across the plains and the chariots stirring up the dust. In this way a king would come on the clouds. So Jesus is portrayed as coming on the clouds of heaven, or as coming with the armies of heaven to do battle against Jerusalem. As we saw in Ezekiel, God's judgment is executed through the foreign armies. It was not Titus who ruled the Roman armies but rather the Son of Man. This reminds us that God has ultimate authority. The key for the Christians was to keep their eyes open for these signs and when they saw them to run like crazy (which they did). This is a good reminder that when judgment falls, God wants us to run and hide. God does not want martyrs for martyrs' sake.
- Exact times unknown: Jesus now uses the story of Noah to help the people get a sense of how things will be. We should note that many Christians have thought that this whole passage is about the end times and that what Jesus is saying is that Christians will be miraculously taken up to heaven and saved from the final judgment. This has been called the rapture. If we actually read the text and follow the logic of the story of Noah, it is actually the wicked that are swept away but a small remnant of true believers who are rescued and remain. This is what happened. The Christians ran and hid and as result, were saved. The wicked remained and were wiped out. The ones who were taken are those who were killed and didn't see it coming.
- Jesus urges watchfulness: Jesus calls the people to spiritual vigilance and watchfulness. These were very dangerous times and the early Christ-followers needed to be ready and watching. He first tells the story of a Master on a long trip and servants who use his absence for self-centeredness. We see the connection here between being selfish and hurting others.

- Wise and foolish virgins: Jesus tells another story to encourage attentiveness. The image of the lamp would have reminded the early Christ-followers to keep their spiritual passion (oil a symbol of the Spirit) ignited and ready.
- Parable of the talents: Jesus tells a parable similar to one he has told in the past. Again the one who hides what he has been given, in the end loses it. The one who is a wise steward and has a big impact, is given more. The challenge is to make the most with what God has given you with the time you have.
- Concerning last judgment: Jesus concludes this teaching with the parable of the sheep and the goats. The images of sheep and goats were commonly understood images for the faithful of God (sheep) and the wicked (goats). The deciding factor here in the final judgment is not having said the sinner's prayer or having completed some spiritual ritual. It is not even having perfect spiritual knowledge as those being saved did not even realize how they were fulfilling his will for their lives. The key was to have an active relationship with Jesus by loving those in need. When we love and care for those in need, we are relating to Jesus. Now with this said, is Jesus thinking about caring for the poor outside the church or for the poor inside the church? He uses the phrase, "the least of these brothers of mine." The focus here as in other places is on those who are most vulnerable and so most likely we should see this as more inclusive than exclusive. Also, some may wonder if Jesus is suggesting that people are saved just by doing good works. It is important not to build one's entire theology of salvation based on one parable. The point of this parable is that there are those that truly have a relationship with God because they are living it and relating to him all the time as they serve those in need. There are others who say they love God but don't live for him and as a result, have no relationship with him. If a person says a prayer or goes through a ritual, it doesn't mean they have a trust based, love focused relationship with God. It just means they went through a religious ritual. Now beyond the warning we also have the strong encouragement that to serve people in need is to be close to Jesus and to love him. For anyone who really loves Jesus it is awesome to know that you can get close to him by reaching out and loving people. We don't have to go on a prayer retreat to connect with God. He is right here with us hanging around those in need of friends, help or love.