

From the Top of the Mount of Olives You Can See Forever

by Dr. J. Vernon McGee



Published and distributed by
Thru the Bible Radio Network
P.O. Box 7100
Pasadena, California 91109-7100
(800) 65-BIBLE
www.ttb.org

Scripture references are from the *King James Version Bible*.
(This message is also included in the hardback book, *J. Vernon McGee On Prophecy*,
Copyright 1993 by Thru the Bible Radio.)

A great many thoughtful and knowledgeable people are wondering if we are approaching the end of this civilization as we know it. At the present time there is an unusual interest in what the Bible has to say about the conclusion of man's little day upon this earth. Any study which deals with these final events is incomplete without a careful examination of the words of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself during His earthly life. These are recorded in Matthew 24 and 25. We call these two chapters the Olivet Discourse simply because they were spoken by our Lord to His disciples while they were together on the Mount of Olives.

Now as we approach this study, it will help us to keep in mind that in the four Gospels we have the Lord Jesus Christ presented in the fourfold aspect of His glorious coming to this earth, and it takes four Gospels to present Him. The first Gospel, the Gospel of Matthew, presents Him as King. He was born a King and He is a King. In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus is presented as the Servant. Then in the Gospel of Luke He is presented as the Son of Man, and in the Gospel of John He is presented as the Son of God. So you have Him presented in this fourfold way. Therefore, when you are reading any one of these Gospel records, it is well to remember what the writer is attempting to emphasize.

Now in the Olivet Discourse Jesus is speaking of last things, events that have to do with His Kingship. It has nothing in the world to do with the church. Unfortunately, men have been attempting to read some nineteen hundred years of church history into the Olivet Discourse. They have been superimposing the church upon a discourse in which the church is not even mentioned and has no place at all. If you keep that in mind it will be helpful to you indeed. (See chart at the end of this chapter)

Moses mentioned the fact that God was going to raise up a prophet like himself. He said:

The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken. (Deuteronomy 18:15)

And God repeated it:

I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. (Deuteronomy 18:18)

The Lord Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of this prophecy. He is that Prophet, and Matthew 24 and 25 is His prophecy.

In Matthew 23 and 24 Jesus denounced the religious rulers, then He went out and wept over the city of Jerusalem. He had denounced them in scathing terms. He had censured them in a fashion that absolutely blanches your soul when you read the account. But this One who had spoken like that is the King, and He had exposed them with a broken heart. Now He says:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered by children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord. (Matthew 23:37-39)

You and I have no notion how literally that was fulfilled in A.D. 70. Clouds were hanging over the city of Jerusalem, and the Roman army made its attack on the city and destroyed it. The prophecy was literally fulfilled, fulfilled in such a way that the words of our Lord were carried out to the very letter.

Then our Lord turned His back on Jerusalem, and we pick up our study at this point.

And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to show him the buildings of the temple. (Matthew 24:1)

The Lord Jesus has just told His disciples that His Kingdom would be postponed and that the temple would be left desolate. The temple was made up of many buildings. This was the temple that Herod was having built, and the construction was still in progress. It was made of white marble, and at this time it was very large and very beautiful. The disciples are disturbed at the statement of Jesus that it is to be left desolate. So the disciples come to Him, wanting to show Him around the buildings.

And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verify I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. (Matthew 24:2)

“See ye not all these things?” The disciples think they see it, and they ask Him to take a look. So He says to them, “Do you really *see* it?” In our contemporary society, this is a good question for us to consider. Do we really *see* the world around us?

When my wife and I first came to Southern California, we spent every Monday, which was my day off, riding around looking at this fantastic place. And it *was* fantastic in those days before everybody in the world tried to settle here! As we marveled at one beautiful spot after another, I would say to my wife, “But we really don’t see it as it is. All of this is under God’s judgment. It all will pass away.” My friend, all these cultural centers, these great schools, these skyscrapers, these great cities which we see are going to pass away someday. It doesn’t seem possible, and that is how the disciples felt.

Jesus continued by saying, “There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.” If His first statement put them in shock, this must have traumatized them.

When I was at the wailing wall in Jerusalem several years ago, the tour director tried to call my attention to the way the stones had been worn away by the people who had come there over the years to weep. That was certainly worth noting, but the thing that impressed me was that the wall was constructed of many kinds of stones. History tells us that the wailing wall was made up of stones which came from different buildings in different periods. At the pinnacle of the temple, which evidently was the corner of the temple area, recent excavations reveal the same thing – there are all kinds of stones from different periods. What does that mean? My friend, that means that not one stone was left upon another – the builders had to go and pick up stones from different places because in A.D. 70 the Roman army under Titus really destroyed that city!

Although this is ancient history to us, it was a shocking revelation to the disciples. They talked it over, I am sure, then came to Him with three questions.

And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world? (Matthew 24:3)

1. “When shall these things be?” – when one stone would not be left upon another.
2. “What shall be the sign of thy coming?” The answer to this question is found in verses 23-51.
3. “What shall be the sign of the completion of the age?” The answer to this question is found in verses 9-22.

The Lord Jesus is going to answer these three questions, and we call His answers the Olivet Discourse because it took place on the Mount of Olives.

Jesus Answers the Disciples’ Questions

The first question, “When shall these things be?” – when one stone shall not be left upon another – is not answered in the Gospel of Matthew. We find it in the Gospel of Luke, and we find segments of it in the Gospel of Mark. Why is it not included in Matthew’s Gospel? Because Matthew is the Gospel of the Kingdom; it presents the King. The destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 has something to do with this age in which we live, but it has nothing to do with the distant future when the King is coming. Therefore, Matthew does not carry that part of the Olivet Discourse.

Let’s look at our Lord’s answer to the first question, as recorded in Luke’s Gospel:

And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto. For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. But woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck, in those days! for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled. (Luke 21:20-24)

Undoubtedly, many of those who heard the Lord Jesus say these things were present in A.D. 70 when the Roman armies surrounded the city, laid siege to it, cut it off from the rest of the world, then finally breached the wall and got in. What the Romans did was terrible. They demolished the city. It was the worst destruction in its history, more devastating than that conducted by Nebuchadnezzar over six centuries earlier. When the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in A.D. 70, the first part of the Olivet Discourse was fulfilled.

The next two questions asked by the disciples were these: “What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world [age]?”

The Lord is going to answer the disciples’ questions in their chronological and logical order. He will answer their last question first and their second question last. The first thing the Lord deals with is the sign of the end of the world, or more accurately, the end of the age. The world

will never come to an end. The old world will pass away and a new earth will be brought on the scene. It will be similar to trading in your old car for a new one. You don't say, "This is the end of the car age for me. I don't have a car anymore." You *do* have a car because you traded your old one in and got a new one. And the Lord is going to trade the old world in for a new one. The world will never come to an end. But it will be the end of an age, and that is the word the disciples are using in their question to the Lord Jesus.

In this Olivet Discourse when Christ speaks of His coming, He is referring to His return to the earth to establish His Kingdom. The church is not in the picture at all. In fact, by the end of the age the church will have been removed, and it will be the last days of the nation Israel. He is speaking about the Great Tribulation period and so labels it in this discourse.

Jesus Traces the Characteristics of This Age

And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you.
(Matthew 24:4)

The phrase "take heed that no man deceive you" is characteristic of this entire age. The Lord gives this word of caution because there will be much deception, especially during the Tribulation period when the Antichrist will appear. Peter warns us in 2 Peter 2:1,

But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.

We don't have to worry about false prophets because if anybody starts prophesying in our day, we Christians can pooh-pooh him right off the scene because prophets are not for this period. However, we are to beware of false teachers, and there are a great many of those around. We must test them by Scripture.

I received a letter once which illustrates this fact. It came from a woman who apparently had an important position in an insurance company, and she told of a well-meaning friend who introduced her to a cult. After going to her friend's church for one year, she heard our Bible-teaching radio program, and the Scripture alerted her to the error of the cult. Then she told how she and her entire family went to a good church in her area. My friend, we need to beware of false teaching. There is a lot of it around in our day. Our Lord warns, "Take heed that no man deceive you."

For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.
(Matthew 24:5)

Near the end of the age many people will claim to be Christ. We have such people present with us now. One man established a "holy city" in Northern California and expected any minute to be called to Washington, D.C. to solve the problems of the world. There are no "holy cities" on the face of the earth, but someday the Lord will come from the Holy of Holies in heaven to earth and solve the problems. It should be remembered that even now there are many antichrists,

but at the end of the age there will come *one* Antichrist who will oppose Christ and set himself up as the only authority.

I believe that our Lord, up there on the Mount of Olives, looked down to the end of the age and to the Great Tribulation period. But at the beginning of His discourse, He bridged the gap by giving us a picture of the present age of the church. I recognize that there are many good Bible teachers, much better than I am, who take the position that in verses 5-8 He is speaking of the Tribulation period also; so if you want to disagree with me you will be in very good company. However, it is my view that our Lord is not referring to the Great Tribulation until we reach verse 9 of this chapter.

And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. (Matthew 24:6)

Wars and rumors of wars are not the sign that we are at the end of the age, by any means. The Lord is bridging the gap from where the disciples are to the end of the age. It is easy to think of major wars as indicative of the fact that we are at the end of the age. They are not! There have been many major wars in the past few thousand years and only about two hundred years of peace. When I was a little boy at the end of World War I, I remember hearing my Dad and others talking about the books being printed declaring it was the end of the world. World War I caused this type of thinking. But after the war, we had a worldwide depression, World War II, and the atom bomb. By this time I was a pastor in Pasadena, and I told my congregation that a wheelbarrow load of books would come out saying that we were at the end of the world because of World War II. You know something? I was wrong! *Two* wheelbarrow loads of books were printed, and they were sensational.

We have come a long way from World War II, and the end of the age still has not come. We should listen to the Lord and stop listening to false teachers. We will hear about wars and rumors of wars, but we should not be troubled because all these things will come to pass, and still it will not be the end of the age. Friend, we should also keep in mind that man will never solve the problem of war. The League of Nations could not solve this problem, and the United Nations will not be able to solve it either. There will be no peace until the Prince of Peace comes.

For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. (Matthew 24:7, 8)

These are characteristics of the entire age and are therefore not signs of the end of the age, “but the end is not yet” (verse 6).

False christs, rumors of wars, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes characterize the entire church age, but they will apparently be intensified as we draw near to the end of the age. Right now the population explosion has the world frightened and rightly so. People are starving to death by the thousands and the millions. And this situation is going to increase. But the old black horse of famine (see Revelation 6:5, 6) hasn’t appeared yet, but at the end of the age the black horse and its rider will come forth. What we see today is just the beginning of sorrows.

The next verse begins with our first *time* word – “then.”

The Beginning of the Tribulation With Its Signs

Now the Lord begins to speak of the time of Tribulation. You and I are living in the “age of the church” or the “age of the Holy Spirit,” as some people like to speak of it. The Bible divides the world today into three groups of people: the Jews, the Gentiles, and the church of God (see 1 Corinthians 10:32). In this age God is calling out a people to His name from both Jews and Gentiles to comprise the third group, the church. It is this third group which will be taken out of the world at the time of the Rapture. Then the Great Tribulation will begin, and I believe that verse 9 speaks of this beginning –

Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. (Matthew 24:9)

“Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted” – who is the *you*? Obviously, He is not addressing the church but the nation Israel. The affliction He is talking about is anti-Semitism on a worldwide scale.

At this point let me inject an important fact for Christians in our day. As long as the true church is in the world, there could not be worldwide anti-Semitism because the church would resist it. No genuine believer in the Lord Jesus could hate the Jews; it is an impossibility. It is my feeling that the liberal wing of the church is presenting a false front to the Jews and that in the final analysis will turn against them. But as long as the true church is in the world, there won't be worldwide anti-Semitism; it will break out *after* the church has been removed at the Rapture.

And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many.
(Matthew 24:10, 11)

As we saw earlier, the church is warned against false teachers while Israel is warned against false prophets. So here, after the church has been removed, again the warning is against false prophets.

And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. (Matthew 24:12)

This is a *principle*, and there are many principles in this Olivet Discourse which we can apply to our own day. Not long ago I met a preacher who had been a schoolmate of mine. He has become liberal in his theology; he drinks his cocktails, smokes his cigarettes, and lives just like the rest of the world lives. He told me, “McGee, you don't fight city hall; you join it!” He told me about how sinful practices had gotten into his church and how he is not planning to fight them. When iniquity abounds, the love of many grows cold, and this will be even more true at the end of the age.

This next verse is very startling to some folk –

But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved. (Matthew 24:13)

The question is: who endures to the end? Well, when I study the Book of Revelation, I find that God will stop all the forces of nature and of evil and even the forces of good while He seals a

certain number of folk. So who is going to endure to the end? Those whom He seals at the beginning, of course. The Good Shepherd – in all ages – will bring His sheep through to the end. When He starts with one hundred sheep, He comes through with one hundred sheep.

When someone says to me, “So-and-so was very active in the church and has gone into sin. Is he saved?” I can only reply that I do not know. We will have to wait to see what happens. I tell people that the pigs will eventually end up in the pigpen, and the prodigal sons will all find their way back to the Father’s house. It *is* confusing to find a son in a pigpen and a pig in the Father’s house. Peter says, “... The sow that was washed [has returned] to her wallowing in the mire” (2 Peter 2:22). Let’s say that one of the little pigs went with the prodigal son to the father’s house, that he was scrubbed clean, his teeth brushed with Pepsodent, and that a pink ribbon was tied around his neck. But he wouldn’t stay in the father’s house. Sooner or later he would go back to the pigpen where he belonged. “He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.” You’ll just have to wait and see. Sometimes a son, a Christian, will get into a pigpen, but since he is a son, he will get out someday. Why? Because he has a wonderful Shepherd. “The same shall be saved.”

And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come. (Matthew 24:14)

The gospel of the Kingdom is what John the Baptist preached – “Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 3:2). The Lord Jesus began His ministry with that message – “From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 4:17). Also, He sent His apostles out with that message (Matthew 10). But in Matthew 11 we see that our Lord’s message changed to, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” In Matthew 20:28 He said that He had come to give His life a ransom for many. But during the Tribulation period, the gospel of the Kingdom will again be preached. It is not for our day because we are to preach the gospel of the grace of God.

Is the gospel of the Kingdom another gospel? No, my friend, it is not. It is the same gospel with a different emphasis. We have no right to say that the Kingdom of heaven is at hand because we don’t know. But when the Great Tribulation period begins, the people will know that they are close to the end, although they will not know the day nor the hour. Therefore, the message will be, “Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

Now let me answer our critics who say that we who hold the dispensational view of Scripture teach that there are two or more ways of being saved. No, God has never had more than one basis on which He saves men, and that basis is the cross of Christ. Every offering before Christ came looked forward to the cross of Christ, and every commemoration since He has come looks back to the cross of Christ.

To illustrate this, let’s go back to Genesis 4 and look at the offering which Abel brought to God. He brought a little lamb. If you had been there, you could have asked Abel, “Why are you bringing this little lamb? Do you think that a little lamb will take away your sins?” He would have said, “Of course not! I’m bringing this little lamb because God told me to do so. I am bringing it by faith.” Then you could have asked him, “Well, if it won’t take away your sins, why would He ask you to bring it?” Abel’s answer would have been something like this: “This little lamb is pointing to One who is coming later, the seed of the woman, my mother. That One will take away our sins. I bring this little lamb by faith, recognizing that I am a sinner and need a substitute.” You see, Abel was looking forward to the One who was coming.

John the Baptist not only said, “Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,” but he also said, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). John identified Him. Before the coming of Christ everyone who had come to God on His terms was saved by *credit*. And they were forgiven on the basis of the death of Christ. In the Old Testament God never saved anyone by Law. At the heart of the Mosaic system was the sacrificial system. They brought a lamb to God because the Law revealed that they were lawbreakers, that they were not obeying God, and that they needed to have a substitute to pay the penalty of their sins. The Law was given “that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God” (Romans 3:19). My friend, you and I are lawbreakers; we are sinners needing a Savior. The thing to do is to receive Christ as your *Savior* before He comes as the Sovereign of this universe when He will be your *Judge*.

Now, going back to the verse we have been considering, “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.” This does not mean that while the church is here in the world the end can’t come until the gospel of the grace of God is preached worldwide. I know there are those who use this verse to promote their Bible-teaching programs. While it is laudable to want to get the gospel to the ends of the earth, this is not the verse to use to promote it. You see, my friend, it is important to interpret Scripture in its context. Remember that our Lord is answering the question, “What is the sign of the end of the age?” He is speaking of that end time.

The Great Tribulation With Its Trouble and Sorrows

Now Jesus gives the sign that will identify this period of time.

When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand).
(Matthew 24:15)

What is the abomination of desolation? Well, Daniel tells us about two of them. One of them was Antiochus Epiphanes, the Syrian, who came down and destroyed Jerusalem. In Daniel 11:31 we read: “And arms shall stand on his part, and they shall pollute the sanctuary of strength, and shall take away the daily sacrifice, and they shall place the abomination that maketh desolate.” History bears out the fact that Antiochus Epiphanes came against Jerusalem in 170 B.C., at which time over 100,000 Jews were slain. He took away the daily sacrifice from the temple, offered the blood and broth of a swine upon the altar, and set up an image of Jupiter to be worshiped in the Holy Place.

However, our Lord is undoubtedly referring to the second abomination of desolation to which Daniel alludes (Daniel 12:11), and I believe that it will be an image of Antichrist which will be set up in the temple. During the Tribulation, the temple will be rebuilt and the nation of Israel will be back in Palestine. Obviously, our Lord is speaking of the temple rather than the church, because the church has no holy place. However, we cannot be certain that this is the abomination of desolation to which our Lord refers in the passage before us. This is just our surmising.

I am not looking for the abomination of desolation – I wouldn’t know it if I met it on the street. But the people in the last days will be looking for it because it will be the sign to prove that they are in the Great Tribulation period. Instead of our looking for Antichrist and his

abominations, we are told to be “looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13).

Our Lord says, “Whoso readeth, let him understand,” which means the people who are living at that time *will* understand. Since you and I won’t be there, He hasn’t given us many details.

Now we are given another *time* word. When the abomination of desolation appears, “then” –

Then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains. (Matthew 24:16)

You and I are not expecting to flee to the mountains of Judea. I live very near the San Gabriel mountains, and my neighbor tells me that if an atom bomb is dropped in Southern California, he is going to head for a certain canyon up there (and I may follow him!), but that will not fulfill this prophecy. In fact, it has nothing whatever to do with it. Rather, it has to do with people who are in Judea. Our Lord is giving that prophecy to those people, not to us.

Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house. (Matthew 24:17)

The housetop in Palestine corresponds to our front porch or our patio. Again let me emphasize the fact that our Lord is speaking to the folk in Palestine, not to you and me. This warning is not applicable to us; we don’t spend our time on our housetops!

Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes. (Matthew 24:18)

This refers to people engaged in agriculture. If a worker in the fields leaves his cloak at the end of the row in the early morning when it is cool, and the word comes that the abomination of desolation has appeared, he is not to go back and get his cloak, but he is to start running.

And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! (Matthew 24:19)

This reveals our Lord’s great care and concern for mothers and little children. It will be a time when one should not have children.

It is believed that there will be a great population explosion at the beginning of the Great Tribulation. The fact that this earth is becoming over-weighted with people in our day may be another evidence that we are approaching the end of the age.

But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath day. (Matthew 24:20)

Again, these are people who are observing the Sabbath day, which is Saturday. This is another proof that Christ is speaking directly to the Jewish people. I don’t go to church on the Sabbath but on Sunday because my Lord rose from the dead on that day.

For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. (Matthew 24:21)

“For then shall be great tribulation” – in Revelation 7:14 the literal translation is “the tribulation the great one,” placing the article before both the noun and the adjective for emphasis. In other words, this Tribulation is unique; there has been nothing like it in the history of the world, and there will never again be anything like it. Notice that our Lord is the One who labels the end of the age as the Great Tribulation. (If you want to find fault with it, talk to Him, not to me.)

“Such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.” Since that is true, believe me, people will know it when it gets here! I hear people today talking about the church going through the Tribulation, and they don’t seem to realize how severe it will be. In fact, some folk say that we are in the Great Tribulation at the present time! Well, things are bad in our day, I’ll grant that, but this period can be matched with many other periods in history. When the Great Tribulation gets here, there will be nothing to match it within the past or in the future.

And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened. (Matthew 24:22)

We read in the Book of Revelation that during the Tribulation one-third of the population of the earth will be destroyed. On another occasion one-fourth of the population will be destroyed. It is absolutely unique. Using the simile given to us in Revelation 6, the red horse of war, the black horse of famine, and then the pale horse of death will ride during that period, and the population of the earth will be decimated. There was a time when this seemed to be an exaggeration. Even some good commentators considered it hyperbole. However, now that so many nations of the world have nuclear capabilities which could destroy the population of the world, it no longer appears to be exaggerated.

There is comfort in this verse – “But for the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened.” God will not let mankind commit suicide. That is the reason this will be such a brief period.

Jesus Assures Them Concerning His Coming Again

Now we come to what will be the sign of His coming.

Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before. (Matthew 24:23-25)

Don’t miss what He is saying here. The ability to work miracles in our day should be looked upon with suspicion because the next great miracle worker will not be Christ; he will be Antichrist and his false prophet.

“If it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.” Who are the elect? In the Scriptures there are two elect groups: the elect of the nation Israel and the elect of the church. We have to use common sense to determine which group is meant. Who has our Lord been talking about up to this point? Israel. All right, Israel is the elect in this verse also. Jesus is not talking about the church. You can fool some of the people all of the time. You can fool all of the people some of the time. But you cannot fool God’s children all of the time. It just can’t be done. I have read many letters which testify of this. A recent letter is from a woman who has come out of a

religious cult. She listened to our Bible-teaching radio program for months before she could see the error of the cult's teaching. It isn't possible to fool God's children all the time. They will come out of a cult eventually.

Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not. For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. (Matthew 24:26, 27)

When He comes, there will not be any John the Baptist to announce Him. But when He comes, the whole world will know and it will be as public as lightning. Those of you who live in the Middle West know that a lightning storm is a public affair. When it comes everybody knows about it, and sometimes it is a frightful experience. The Lord's second coming to the earth will be like that. No one will need to announce it. When our Lord comes the second time to establish His Kingdom on earth, everyone will know He is coming. And remember that His second coming to earth does not refer to the Rapture.

For wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together. (Matthew 24:28)

This is the most difficult verse to understand in the entire Olivet Discourse. After speaking of His coming in glory like lightning out of heaven, then to speak of carrion-eating birds seems strange indeed. But I believe it refers to Christ's coming in judgment because Revelation 19 tells us about an invitation that went out to the birds to come together for a great banquet:

And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God; that ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great. And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army. (Revelation 19:17-19)

The birds that feed on carrion seem to be agents of divine judgment. When the Lord comes again, He will come in judgment.

Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken. (Matthew 24:29)

Notice that this is to be "immediately *after* the tribulation of those days." My understanding is that all of these things will take place at Christ's second coming to the earth.

And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. (Matthew 24:30)

“Then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven.” What is that sign? Again I will have to speculate. Back in the Old Testament the nation Israel was given the glory, the shekinah presence of God. No other nation or people has ever had that, nor does the church have it. The shekinah glory rested over the tabernacle and later the temple at Jerusalem. But because of Israel’s sin, the shekinah glory left the nation. When Christ came the first time, He laid aside, not His deity, but His prerogative of deity, He laid aside His glory – although John says, “We beheld his glory” (John 1:14) because there were times when it broke through. However, at His second coming, I believe that the shekinah glory will hover over the earth before He breaks through, and that will be the “sign of the Son of man in heaven.”

“They shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.” This is His return to earth to set up His Kingdom.

And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. (Matthew 24:31)

The “elect” spoken of in this verse is still the nation Israel. The prophets in the Old Testament foretold a miracle that would bring the Jews back into their land. This is not the church which is going to be caught up out of this world to meet the Lord in the air. Angels are not connected with the Rapture. The Lord will come in person to receive the church with the sound of a trumpet, and His voice will be like that of an archangel. He will not need any help to gather His church together. He died for the church, and He will bring it together. When He says that the “angels ... shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other,” we can be sure that He is talking about the nation Israel – ministering angels have always been connected with Israel.

The Sign Parables

Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: so likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. (Matthew 24:32, 33)

I do not see how the fig tree could represent anything other than the nation Israel (for example, see Jeremiah 24 and Hosea 9:10). There are certainly fig trees growing in abundance in Israel even in our day after all that has happened to that land. I was impressed with the fig orchards north of Jerusalem and the vineyards south of Jerusalem. The area south of Bethlehem is filled with vineyards. Fig trees and grapevines identify the land, and I believe that our Lord is using the fig tree as a symbol of that land.

Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled. (Matthew 24:34)

“This generation” – the Greek word can mean race and refer to the nation Israel. Or it could refer to the generation that will be living at the time these predictions come to pass. A generation is reckoned to be about twenty years, and certainly the predicted events of this section will take place in a much briefer time than twenty years. My feeling is that it could refer to either one, but I much prefer the interpretation that it refers to the preservation of the Jewish race. Haman was not able to destroy them, neither was Pharaoh, nor did Hitler succeed in his attempts. And no dictator in our day will be able to exterminate these people – God will see to that.

Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away. (Matthew 24:35)

He says, “You can just underscore what I’ve said, because heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not.” Heaven and earth will pass away and there will be a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21:1), but He will not change His Word. It will stand throughout the eternal ages.

But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only. (Matthew 24:36)

Although they will know that this period is drawing near, they will not know the day nor the hour. Since there have been so many folk in our day who have tried to pinpoint the time of Christ’s return, I’m of the opinion that in that future day there will be some folk who will try to figure it down to the very hour. But no one will know either the day or the hour. And He will use the illustration of Noah –

But as the days of Noe [Noah] were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. (Matthew 24:37)

Christ will come in a day which will be like the days of Noah.

For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe [Noah] entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. (Matthew 24:38, 39)

Now, the days of Noah were characterized by gross immorality – every thought and imagination of man’s heart was only evil continually (see Genesis 6:5). But our Lord says that His coming will be in days like the days of Noah, and He mentions that they were eating and drinking. Is there anything wrong with eating and drinking? No, we are told that whatever we do – whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do – we are to do all to the glory of God (see 1 Corinthians 10:31). However, the people in Noah’s day were not eating and drinking to the glory of God. In fact, they were living as though God did not exist.

A little boy was invited out to dinner for the first time in his life. He was just going next door, but to him it was a big event. So when the time came to go, he made a beeline for the house next door. When they sat down to the table to eat, the boy automatically bowed his head to offer thanks for the food because he came from a Christian home. Suddenly he realized he was the

only one with a bowed head and the rest of the folks were passing food back and forth. He opened his eyes and, not having any inhibitions, said, “Don’t you thank God for your food?” There was embarrassing silence for a moment, and then the lady of the house said, “No, we don’t.” The little fellow thought for a moment and then said, “You’re just like my dog – he just starts right in!”

In our day, while millions are starving to death, multitudes of people receive a meal that comes from the hand of God three times a day, and they never think of thanking God. And in that future day they will be right on the verge of the coming of Christ, and they will be living as though it will never take place.

Also, the people of Noah’s day were “marrying and giving in marriage.” Certainly our Lord is not saying that marriage is wrong. His point is that they rejected so completely God’s warning through Noah that they went ahead and had their weddings – maybe even “church” weddings – right up to the day that Noah entered into the ark. They lived as though God did not exist. They did not believe that He would judge them and scorned the warning that a flood was imminent. “And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.”

Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.
(Matthew 24:40, 41)

I can hear someone saying to me, “Well, preacher, you have finally painted yourself into a corner. You said the church and the Rapture are not in the Olivet Discourse, but here they are. Two shall be in the field; one shall be taken, and the other shall be left.”

Well, my friend, He still is not talking about the Rapture. After all, what is our Lord talking about here? “As it was in the days of Noah.” Who was taken away in the days of Noah? “They knew not until the flood came, and took them *all* away.” They perished in the flood. This is not referring to the Rapture when the church will be taken out of the world. Rather, this pictures the removing from the earth by judgment those who are not going to enter the millennial Kingdom.

Watch therefore; for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. (Matthew 24:42)

“Watch” is the important word, and it has a little different meaning from the watching that a child of God does now in waiting for the Rapture. Today we have a comforting hope. In that future day, it will be watching with fear and anxiety. In the night they will say, “Would God it were morning,” and in the morning they will say, “Would God it were evening.” Today we are to wait and long for His coming. In that future day they will watch with anxiety for His return.

You may think that I am splitting hairs, but I’m not. I looked up the Hebrew word for *watch* and found that it had about seventeen different meanings. Although in English we have only the one word, it has several different meanings also.

Let me illustrate this by a man who goes deer hunting. Every year this man goes into the woods and to about the same spot. He puts up camp, and early in the morning he goes over the hogback on the hill and sits down by the trunk of an old tree and waits. After a while he hears a noise in the brush and thinks it might be a deer. He lifts his rifle and waits. He is watching for a deer.

Two weeks later you meet this same man down on the main street corner of town, and you see that he is looking intently down the street. You know that he is waiting for someone. You walk up to him and say, “Who are you watching for?” He replies, “I’m waiting for my wife; she is forty–five minutes late.” He is watching for a dear again, but it is a different dear and he is watching in a little different way.

A month or two later you go to the hospital and you pass a room and see this man and his wife sitting by the bedside of a little child. The child has a burning fever, and the doctor has told them that the crisis will come about midnight. They are watching. My friend, that is a different type of watching than watching for a deer or waiting for a wife on the corner. This is watching with anxiety. And I think it will be somewhat with the same feeling that folk will watch for our Lord’s second coming.

But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh. Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? (Matthew 24:43-45)

What our Lord does in the remainder of the Olivet Discourse is to give parables to illustrate the attitude of folk to His coming and what will happen when He does come.

Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods. But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to smite his fellow-servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; the lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 24:46-51)

This parable reflects the attitude of some folk in that future day. They shall say, “Well, the Lord delays His coming – so I’ll just go on living carelessly.” When Christ returns, He will judge that person.

This is a great principle which is applicable to every age. You and I ought to live our lives in the light of the fact that we are to stand in the presence of Christ. Note that I didn’t say in the light of the *coming* of Christ but in the light of the *presence* of Christ. Regardless of whether Christ comes one hundred years from today or a thousand years, you and I will stand in His presence. Whether you are saved or lost, you will stand in His presence. If you are saved, you will have to give Him an account of your life to see if you receive a reward. If you are lost, you will stand there to be judged. Therefore, every person should live his life in light of the fact that he is to stand in the presence of the Lord. This is the great emphasis in the Olivet Discourse. Therefore, it has applications to us, although the interpretation is specifically to folk living at the time of Christ’s return as King.

Now chapter 25 enlarges upon the answer of Jesus to the question, “What shall be the sign of thy coming?” There is the parable of the ten virgins, which tests the genuineness of the faith of

Israel; the parable of the talents, which tests the faithfulness of His servants; and the judgment of the gentile nations, which tests their right of admission into the Kingdom. This chapter shows the significance of the coming of Christ as it relates to these groups that shall then be in the world. A close analysis of each group will reveal that it can be stripped down to a personal attitude and relationship to Jesus Christ.

Parable of the Ten Virgins

The parable of the ten virgins is the basis for those who believe in what is known as the partial Rapture, where only some will be taken out of the world. The “partial Rapture” group is made up of very fine people. When I first became pastor in Nashville, Tennessee, there was a wonderful Bible class there, and they supported me in getting Bible conferences into Nashville. From the beginning, the class had been taught by a teacher who believed in a partial Rapture. Candidly, I feel that the partial Rapture theory ministers to spiritual snobbery. I never met one of that group who didn’t think that he was with the five wise virgins. In fact, I have never in all my life met one who thought he was classed with the foolish virgins! I was a young preacher in those days, and as I worked with them I had the feeling that they were not sure that I was one of them. I suspected that they classified me as one of the foolish ones.

I thank God that when the Rapture takes place, every believer is going out. And we won’t be going on the basis of merit. All of us will be leaving because of the grace of God. He saves us by grace; He keeps us by grace; He will take us out of this world by grace; and when we have been there for ten million years, it will be by the grace of God.

The ten virgins do not refer to the church; they refer to the nation Israel. My friend, we need to let our Lord answer the questions of these men who were His apostles. They had asked Him the questions. If we try to make out that He is talking to us about something altogether different, it is as though we are interrupting Him. Let’s just listen and know that, although He is talking to someone else, we can make application of these wonderful parables to our own lives.

Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. (Matthew 25:1)

To better understand the customs in Israel during the New Testament period, we refer to the Peshitta, which is a Syriac version of the Bible. Although it is not a text to be recommended, it does shed light on some of the customs of the day. The Peshitta translation of the verse before us indicates that the virgins went forth to meet the bridegroom *and the bride*, which means that the bridegroom is coming from the marriage to the marriage supper. It is my understanding that although the marriage of Christ and the church takes place in heaven, the marriage supper takes place on this earth. A passage in the Gospel of Luke substantiates this. As our Lord is giving warnings and parables, He says,

Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately. (Luke 12:35, 36)

You see, the wedding has taken place, and if He is coming from the wedding, obviously the bride is with Him; no man ever went on a honeymoon by himself – if he did, it wasn't a honeymoon!

So here in the parable of the ten virgins, Christ, pictured as the Bridegroom, is bringing the bride with Him, and the believers on earth are waiting for Him to come. While the Great Tribulation has been going on upon the earth, Christ has been yonder in heaven with His bride, the church. Then at the conclusion of the seven years of Tribulation, He comes back to earth with the church.

This, now, is the attitude toward His coming on the part of those on earth –

And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. (Matthew 25:2-4)

Oil is symbolic of the Spirit of God. In that day I think there will be phonies as there were at His first coming. Jesus called them hypocrites. They will have lamps but no oil.

While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. (Matthew 25:5-7)

Notice that *both* the wise and the foolish virgins slept. The difference in them was that some had the Holy Spirit (represented by the oil) and some did not – because they were not genuine believers.

Our Lord concludes this parable with a warning –

Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh. (Matthew 25:13)

Notice that it is “the day nor the hour” rather than the century or the year, as His coming is from our perspective. The attitude for His own during this future period is to *watch*. That is the important thing for them to do.

Parable of the Talents

This is another parable for that future generation that will be waiting for our Lord's return to earth.

For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey. (Matthew 25:14, 15)

Notice that the master gave to his servants responsibilities according to their individual abilities.

Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. (Matthew 25:16, 17)

The “talents” were sums of money. They do not represent “talents” in the sense of the natural endowments of a person, such as a musical talent. The application to us is that whatever God has given to us, we are to use for Him.

But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord’s money. (Matthew 25:18)

All were given a certain sum of money and told to use it profitably. But one buried the talent he had been given. He was not faithful to his master.

After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them. And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: and I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is time. (Matthew 25:19-25)

The response of his master was this –

His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 25:26-30)

There is a great principle in this parable for us. And it was given in light of the fact that all of us – you and I included – are going to have to stand in the presence of God and give an account of how we have used what He has given to us. The Lord is not going to ask us how *much* we have done for Him but how *faithful* we have been to that which He wanted us to do.

For the child of God there are two important things: (1) find out what God wants us to do. We must determine what the talent is that He has given us, and then (2) be faithful in the use of it. To some of us God gives a very small ministry, and that may be upsetting to us, but if we are one-talent people, God expects us to be *faithful* with that.

Judgment of the Nations

In this chapter our Lord is alerting God's people to the fact that we are to ready ourselves for His coming. This is certainly true in the next few verses.

During the Tribulation period all nations will have the opportunity to hear and receive God's message. The gospel of the Kingdom will be preached among all nations, we are told. But some will reject God's messengers, Christ's brethren, and thereby reject Christ.

When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory. (Matthew 25:31)

The polarization of all of the Olivet Discourse is moving toward the placing of Jesus Christ on the throne of this world. This is the message of the Gospel of Matthew – in fact, it is the message of the entire Word of God.

Now we will see that the nations will be judged. You may ask, "Doesn't it mean individuals?" Yes, you can consider it as individuals composing the nations. But nations are responsible to God.

And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. (Matthew 25:32, 33)

Now notice what the test is –

Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. (Matthew 25:34-40)

The 144,000 Jews sealed at the time of the Great Tribulation will go out over the entire world to preach the message of the gospel of the Kingdom, which is to receive Christ as the sacrifice for their sins and to be ready for His immediate coming. Some nations will reject Christ. Antichrist will have God's people butchered and slain, and anyone who would give them a cup of cold water will do so at the risk of his life. To hand out a cup of cold water has little value in our day,

but in the Great Tribulation it will have tremendous value. It will mean taking a stand for Jesus Christ.

The basis on which the nations will be judged is their acceptance or rejection of Jesus Christ. Because the messengers were representing Him, He says “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.” That will be the way people will evidence faith in the message that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand and that they have repented and turned to Christ to be saved.

For those who reject Him there is only judgment:

Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal. (Matthew 25:45, 46)

Entire nations will enter the millennial Kingdom. Out of these will be some individuals who will reject Christ. But the judgment of the nations at the second coming of Christ is to determine what nations are to enter the millennial Kingdom. This judgment is separate and distinct from all other judgments.

It is important to keep in mind that this judgment of the nations will take place at Christ’s second coming to the earth when He will actually set up His Kingdom and bring to this war-weary world one thousand years of peace – which we call the Millennium.

“But,” you say, “the reign of Christ on the earth is somewhere out there in the future. What about today? Can our nation or any nation bring peace to the world?”

Multitudes are thinking today that we can have peace if we could just meet around a conference table. That is the method that liberalism has been preaching for years, and it is the reason we are in such a muddle in this country. We are being told that if we could just get the heads of state to sit down together around a conference table, they could settle everything. Oh, my friend, they can’t settle anything because men’s hearts have to be made right. To think otherwise is just a pious wish that has no scriptural foundation at all. This is the reason the United Nations has proven to be such a miserable failure. We cannot bring peace on the earth through that medium. God has a better plan. God’s method is to *change* human hearts. The only thing in the world that can change the human heart is the Word of God, and by that Word we can be made new creatures in Christ. We can become children of God, and peace among men is possible only through that method in this present hour.

Christ is going to bring peace on this earth when He returns, coming in great power and great glory. As we have seen, all four of the Gospel writers set forth the Lord Jesus in some aspect of His character, and all of them see Him coming again. Matthew sees Him as the King and presents His coming as the King, which is the reason Matthew gives us this part of the Olivet Discourse. Mark shows Him as the suffering Servant, obedient to the Father; Luke sees Him as the Man, the Shepherd who went out and found the lost sheep; John sees Him as the Son of God, the Savior of the world. All see Him as the resurrected Christ, the ascended Christ, and coming again to this earth to establish His Kingdom.

There are those who are looking for Him in great anticipation. Also, there is the businessman, more interested in the stock report than he is in the coming of Christ; there is the student, more interested in his future than he is in the coming of Christ; there are those who have other absorbing interests. But there *are* those who are concerned about His coming for His own.

My friend, you could not possibly be interested in His coming for His own or His coming to establish His Kingdom unless you have a relationship with Him based on the fact that He came about two thousand years ago and died on a cross for our sins.

May I say that our business today is not to try to establish a kingdom, and our business is not to try to make this world a better place. As Dr. George Gill used to say, some men are trying to make this world a better place for men to go to hell in. Someone else said that our business is not to clean out the fish pond but to *fish* in it. We today are trying to get men and women to turn to Christ.

You may recall that after the luxury liner, the *Morro Castle*, burned at sea, the captain was accused and arrested, charged with negligence. He was tried and exonerated. The court found that he had done everything that he could have done. I was using this illustration in a message when I was speaking in either Michigan or Minnesota, and the nephew of that captain came to speak to me after the service. He told me that his uncle, the captain, was a wonderful Christian. He said to me, "I thank you for what you said about my uncle because there are many people even today who still think he was guilty." He was not guilty, friends; he did everything that a captain could possibly do.

But suppose that when that ship caught fire and it seemed sure that it was going down at sea, the captain had called the crew together and said, "Now, let's not wake up any of the passengers. We want them all to get as much sleep as they can tonight. I want you fellows to get out the mops and swab the decks and polish the brass. I hate to see a dirty ship go to the bottom of the ocean! I want it to go down polished and shined. And we certainly don't want to disturb the passengers." Had the captain said that, he would have been guilty of negligence. But he didn't do that. The facts came out that he immediately aroused the passengers and told them, "Your lives are in danger. This ship will either go down or it will be grounded. We have to put you in the lifeboats if you are going to be saved!" He tried to get them all to safety in lifeboats, never giving a thought about polishing the ship or swabbing the deck.

There are two types of churchmen in our contemporary society: those who are trying to polish up the old boat, and those who are trying to get the passengers into the Lifeboat, which is Christ.

God says that He has no intention of saving this civilization, marvelous though it is. It is godless, and God has judged it. The torch will be put to it one of these days.

Some of us believe that helping folk get into that Lifeboat is our business. We are not trying to straighten out the world. Rather, we beseech you in Christ's stead to accept the salvation which He has provided for you.

CHART OF OLIVET DISCOURSE

