

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; fools despise knowledge and instruction.

There is no greater motivator for doing right in the present like knowing a little bit about what's going to happen in the future. Teenagers become experts in the art of doing their chores in under 15 minutes when they get that phone call from mom saying: "I'll be home in 15 minutes." Mortal human beings become more responsible self-evaluators, more apt receivers and dispensers of forgiveness, and more receptive to the message of salvation from their bed at the VNA Hospice House than any other location in Vero Beach, FL because they know their final days are upon them. And those who follow Jesus are more inclined to follow Him a little closer than they did the day before after they read: "the day of the Lord will come at any moment" with their morning coffee. For doing right in the present is, more times than not, directly tied to being certain about things that are sure to come.

The prophets of old had a lot to say about the future. Some of it was good. Some of it was not so good. All of it was to inspire the people of God to do right in the present. Unfortunately, most of the time, the people of God didn't listen. Trouble had come to the disciples throughout Jesus' public ministry and increased with the temple cleansing and with each rebuke of the temple leaders. Now was the time to listen. So, on Thursday of Passion week, one day before his death, Jesus thought it was a good idea to make his last private sermon to the disciples one where he gives them a glimpse of the future. It's called the Olivet Discourse, one of the greatest prophecies in the Bible. It's an apocalyptic prophecy. That means it not only applied to the disciples. It also applies to us. And concerns the full consummation of the Kingdom of God. Jesus had one goal in it. It was not to tell them about what was going to happen in the future just for the sake of it. It was to inspire them to do right – to be faithful – in the present. He was about to die. And he penned his hopes for all of humanity on these 12 individuals to do right – to be faithful – under the power of the Holy Spirit. He could not afford to let them fail the way their forefathers did. In time, 11 out of 12 would succeed.

So, today, I want you to do me a favor. I want you to imagine you are one of those original 12 disciples on the Mt. of Olives listening to our Lord Jesus Christ. And as you are listening to him talk about the future – some of which is very frightening – one question pops into your head. It is this: How does what my Lord is saying about the future impact my life right now? Do that, and you'll have an idea of why Jesus thought it was necessary to utter one of the greatest prophecies in history just to twelve ordinary individuals like you and me. We see the first part of it in Mark 13:1-13.

And as he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!"² And Jesus said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down."³ And as he sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?"⁴ And Jesus began to say to them, "See that no one leads you astray.⁵ Many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray.⁶ And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet.⁷ For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. These are but the beginning of the birth pains.⁸ But be on your guard. For they will deliver you over to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them.⁹ And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations.¹⁰ And when they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit.¹¹ And brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death.¹² And you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.¹³

How Do the Lord's Words about the Future Impact My Life Right Now?

1. What God is Doing (1-2)

- **J.L Hudson Department Store:** (1) In 1998, a Guinness Book World Record was set for the largest building ever imploded. It was the J.L. Hudson Department Store in Detroit, Michigan. It was a staple in the community but had run its course. And all 2.2 million square feet of it imploded down to rubble in about 14 seconds. (2) But after its implosion, something interesting occurred. The vacant area became an area for gatherings, including church gatherings, for years. (3) One building was brought down and replaced with a different one: the human heart.
- **Main Idea:** God brought the temple down because he wanted to replace it with a new one not made with bricks and mortar. But with the human heart. He wants our hearts all to himself. And he will tear down things that prevent that from happening.
- **The Disciples Were Basking in the Glory of the Temple:** (1) We see that in v1: "what wonderful stones and buildings." (2) But, oh, what a difference between what the disciples saw and what Jesus did. They were basking in beauty of the temple. Jesus saw just construction materials. They thought it full of beauty on the outside. Jesus saw it empty of truth on the inside. They saw it covered in gold. Jesus saw it concealing corruption. They saw it busy with activity. Jesus saw it idle in worship.
- **But What the Disciples Couldn't See Was That the Destruction of the Temple Had Already Started Before the Prophecy:** (1) On Sunday, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. (2) On Monday, He cleansed the temple. (3) On Tuesday, he contrasted the small faith of the temple leaders with the widow who gave everything she had. (4) On Wednesday, we don't know what happened because the Bible doesn't tell us. (5)

But here, on this Thursday, Jesus is saying to his disciples “all that’s left is for the building to crumble.” (6) Why? Because Jesus is going to build a new house where his presence will live. That is in your heart.

- **App:** To experience the goodness of God in our lives, we can expect a tearing down to take place. He wants our hearts all to himself because our hearts are the new place where God wants to reside. It’s the one place that can’t be destroyed and isn’t defined by bricks and mortar.

2. What We Should Be Doing (3-5)

- **Quote about Faithfulness:** “When faithfulness proves difficult, that is when faithfulness is most necessary.”
- **Main Idea:** Jesus’ message to the disciples was clear: Faithfulness will prove to be difficult when your world is turned upside down. But that’s when it is the most necessary. And for Jesus, faithfulness began with the commitment not to be lead astray. That’s what we should be doing.
- **The Peter and John Ask Jesus Two Questions, The Same Ones We Ask About the End of Times:** (1) Both are recorded in v4: (a) When will these things be? (b) What will be the sign that these things are about to be accomplished? (2) Both questions are important because there are many who say the Olivet Discourse only applies to the immediate historical context of the disciples. They argue that Jesus was prophesying the destruction of the temple that took place in 70 AD and only that event. (3) The problem with that view is the second question: when will all of these things be? The disciples equivocated the destruction of the temple with the literal end of the world. (4) So, Jesus is prophesying about both (a) the event of 70 AD and (b) subsequent events that follow until the coming of the Son of Man.
- **But Instead of Answering Their Questions Right Here, He Redirects Them to the Present:** (1) He tells them: “See to it that no one leads you astray.” (2) Phrases like this in the Olivet Discourse define the substance of the whole message. (2) We see it in v9: “be on your guard.” And in v23: “be on your guard.” And in v33: “be on your guard.” And in v37: “stay awake.”
- **App:** When faithfulness proves difficult, that is when faithfulness is the most necessary. It’s easy to be lead astray when faithfulness proves difficult. That’s why you don’t need to be led astray. It’s easy to let down your guard when faithfulness proves difficult. That’s why you don’t need to let down your guard. It’s easy to go fall asleep when faithfulness proves difficult. That’s why you need to stay awake.

3. What We Should Not Be Doing (6-11)

- **Our Lamaze Class:** (1) Before Miller was born, my wife and I took a Lamaze class. (2) I took it seriously. I learned all about the proper breathing and comfort techniques. The problem came, however, when I came up with the bright idea to tell my wife to remember her techniques while she was in labor. (3) To which she responded, “Derrick, be quiet. You are not the one in labor.”
- **Main Idea:** We must not be led into panic over every contraction that happens in the universe. For the images that Jesus sets forth here are birth pains. Signs that a birthing process of the end has begun. We just don’t know when it will come about.
- **In This Series of Verses, Jesus Gives a Series of Images That Are Signs that the Birthing Process Has Begun:** (1) False messiahs (v6); (2) Wars and rumors of wars (v7); Nations rising against nations (v8); Earthquakes and natural disasters (v8); Famines; Persecution of the People of God (v9-10). (2) But these birth pains serve a purpose: they are the vehicles God uses to proclaim the Gospel to all nations. (3) When do people think the most about Jesus in the present? When they have a glimpse of the future. And the birth pains are the vehicles God uses.
- **Then He Anchors These Birth Pains with Two Statements About What They Should Not Be Doing:** (1) One occurs in v7: “Do not be alarmed.” That’s interesting, isn’t it? He’s just laid some of the darkest images imaginable and he tells them not to be alarmed. (2) The other occurs in v11: “Don’t not be anxious beforehand.” Interesting, again because Jesus has just told the disciples they will be persecuted.
- **App:** The point Jesus makes here with the disciples is something we all need to understand. Part of being a Christian is learning to live with soberness and patience, not in fear. He wants them to live in the knowledge that they will be exposed to some of the worst things imaginable. But that exposure to those things is no justification for living without soberness and patience and choosing fear instead. We can’t do that.

4. What We Can and Cannot Stop from Happening (11-13):

- **Presbyopia:** (1) For those of us who have had reading glasses for a long time and those of us who are new to the party, there is a medical condition that defines us. It’s called presbyopia. (2) It occurs when our eye lenses become less flexible, making it difficult to focus on close objects. (3) In our 30s and 40s, we knew presbyopia was coming for us. (4) But at 50, we’ve recognized there was nothing we could do to stop it.
- **Main Idea:** There were things in the disciples they could not control. They were coming. But there was one thing they could stop: the tendency to want to escape the trial just to experience the glory. It didn’t happen this way for Jesus, nor would it for the disciples.
- **What We Can’t Stop:** (1) We can’t stop the fact that persecution will happen (v11). We need to rid ourselves of the utopian fantasy that the end times will be radically different from how Christians and Jews were treated in biblical times. (2) We can’t stop the fact that some of the greatest manifestations of evil will come from the highest of places and offices (v11). (3) We can’t stop the fact that following Jesus will divide some families (v12).
- **What We Can Stop:** But we can stop the tendency we have to want to escape the trial and only experience the glory. Jesus says it doesn’t happen this way. That’s why he closes with “the one who endures to the end will be saved.” The word saved here carries a slightly different connotation that the “saving grace” of God we speak of. The word “saved” here denotes glory. It denotes a crown.
- **App:** When faithfulness proves difficult, that is precisely when faithfulness is most necessary. That time is right now. For there is no greater motivator in life for doing right in the present like knowing a little bit about what is going to happen in the future.