

Sermon to the Saints which are at Topeka, Kansas -- Sunday, December 20, 2020

I've been considering the words of Christ regarding His second advent. Three of the four synoptic gospels ... Matthew, Mark, and Luke ... made a record of what he said in response to the question he was asked: ***"what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" (Matthew 24:3).*** I've received a decent number of questions of recent about what these Apostles wrote on these matters. I've had starts and stops in examining the words of Christ in this sermon of His, but have felt too limited in understanding the gospels generally that I continually hit roadblocks that stymied my progress. My spirit is compelled to it, so I'm hopeful that ***"the faithful witness" (Revelation 1:5)*** will by my advocate with the Father to strengthen me in seeking this out.

It will take some unpacking to set framing to Christ's words, so we will take these examinations methodically. I want to begin by getting the context of the engagement as clear as Scripture makes it. The words of the three authors articulate two different events immediately preceding Christ's discussion regarding eschatology. I believe it is important to help us in understanding why the discussion was held when and where we find it. Those who sew confusion about this blessed Word make much of apparent incongruencies in the text. Therefore, lest any conclude that this fact makes the reports in any way invalid, we should look at those events to get ourselves set.

"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 23:38-39)

The Lord Jesus Christ informed the Jews who lived in the time of His first advent that because of their endless rejection of His plain and blessedly simple admonitions, He was rejecting them. He was declaring their religion false, bloody, murderous, and utterly without relationship to God ... it was ***"desolate"***. Then, He told them that until His return ... when He would call out a remnant of that nation ... He would not be seen *in their comforting company*. We know He was technically "seen" of them more, because they otherwise could not have ***"taken, and by wicked hands [] crucified and slain [Him]" (Acts 2:23)***. So He clearly meant that they would not have His comforting spirit and His light and His grace to guide, teach, and stay them, as their actual Messiah ... their Passover Lamb.

In the account of Matthew, this is the last thing recorded before ***"Jesus went out, and departed from the temple [and made His way to where] he sat upon the mount of Olives"***. (Matthew 24:1, 3). In his analysis of this language that opens Matthew 24, Dr. Gill says: *"He not only went out of it for that time, but took his final leave of it, never to return more to it"*. As much as if to say, "I'm done with YOU, I'm done with this abominable RELIGION, and I'm done with this pretentious TEMPLE", as was prophesied: ***"[W]oe also to them when I depart from them!" (Hosea 9:12)*** Now I like this. I like it particularly because those words from Christ have symmetry. They line up with Him then

discussing the larger picture of eschatology. He will not be seen again until the Day of the Lord, because that is when the Jews will finally say ***“blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord”***, after the 144,000 of them are sealed. So, Christ making this declaration lines up with His sermon on Mt. Olivet shortly thereafter. That’s why I like Matthew’s sequencing on the subject.

The last event that Mark records prior to the engagement by Christ on the questions of eschatology, regards the widow who ***“threw in two mites, which make a farthing”*** (Mark 12:42) into the temple treasury, causing Christ to comment to His disciples ***“this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasure [because she] did cast in all that she had, even all her living.”*** (Mark 12:43-44). While this is a spectacular instruction to us all regarding how we should invest ourselves into service to God, presenting our ***“bodies a living sacrifice”*** (Romans 12:1), it doesn’t segue as smoothly into discussions of eschatology.

Matthew does not specifically discuss Christ’s comments about the widow’s mites, but he covers much more of Christ’s engagement with the Scribes and Pharisees than we find in Mark’s account. Luke’s account helps to see the relationship between the sequencing in Matthew’s account and that of Mark. We find that he also records Christ’s words about the widow casting in the two mites, and gives a context to His words. Christ making note of the widow follows hard after He scolded the Scribes and Pharisees, to wit:

“Beware of the scribes, which desire to walk in long robes, and love greetings in the markets, and the highest seats in the synagogues, and the chief rooms at feasts; Which devour widows’ houses, and for a shew make long prayers: the same shall receive greater damnation.” (Luke 20:46-47)

Matthew also recorded this part of Christ’s words to the Scribes and Pharisees in chapter 23:13-14, and then continues to document how Christ further chastised them with seven distinct additional woes, concluding that he was leaving them and their human-worshipping religion. It was clearly in the midst of these chastisements that Christ ***“looked up, and saw the rich men casting their gifts into the treasury [and] a certain poor widow casting in thither two mites”*** (Luke 21:1-2) and made His comment to His disciples, as recorded by Mark and Luke. So, while the three accounts are not identical in how much detail they report, they are clearly in sync and clearly legitimate. Furthermore, it is evident that the final and closing remarks by Christ were about His leaving the Jews, as Matthew reports. So our context is intact. Let us move to the next engagement.

The next part of the dialog leading to Christ’s sermon is consistently reported by all three of these Apostles, to wit:

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

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“And as he went out of the temple, one of his disciples saith unto him, Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!” (Mark 13:1)

&

***“And as some spake of the temple, how it was adorned with goodly stones and gifts, he said”.
(Luke 21:5)***

The work to do with this passage is first to understand the energy with which these utterances came, and then to work at being clear why such an energy was present. As we see in Matthew’s and Mark’s accounts demonstrate, this question came to Christ ***“as he sat upon the mount of Olives” (Matthew 24:3; Mark 13:3)***. This is instructive, as Dr. Gill helpfully articulates:

*“[And as he sat upon the Mount of Olives,] Which was on the east of the city of Jerusalem, **“over against the temple,”** as Mark says [v.3], and where he could sit and take a full view of it; for the wall on the east side was lower than any other, and that for this reason; that when the high priest burnt the red heifer on this mount, as he did, and sprinkled the blood, he might have a view of the gate of the temple. It is said {b },*

“all the walls which were there, were very high, except the eastern wall; for the high priest, when he burned the heifer, stood on the top of the mount of Olives, and directed himself, and looked to the gate of the temple, at the time he sprinkled the blood.”

This place, very probably, our Lord chose to sit in, that he might give his disciples an occasion to discourse more largely with him on this subject”.

The discussion, Christ very well knew, was going to be about the temple. As Luke’s account intimates, this included ***“how it was adorned with goodly stones”*** and therefore Christ intended it to be in fullest view to them all. If He is to address the passions that are in their human frames, part of that includes no subterfuge. It is notable that in Mark’s account, the imperative question ends with an exclamation point! There is energy in the question ***“see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!”*** What manner indeed?

Gill: *“The Jews give very great encomiums of the second temple, as repaired by Herod; and it was undoubtedly a very fine structure. They say {p }, that he built the house of the sanctuary, ‘an*

exceeding beautiful building'; and that he repaired the temple, in beauty 'greatly exceeding' that of Solomon's {q}. They moreover observe {r}, that

'he who has not seen the building of Herod, has never seen 'a beautiful building.' With what is it built? says Rabbah, with stones of green and white marble. And there are others say, that it was built with stones of spotted green and white marble.'"

With the language used and the historical lens given, we can clearly discern that the Apostles were themselves quite animated about it. But why? Had not Christ already seen the temple in detail, as he specifically charged those who came to seize him: ***"I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on me." (Matthew 26:55)*** We clearly cannot attribute a pedestrian motivation to the disciples in pointing it out to Him. There's a purpose in this work, and I believe it is intimately tied into the ensuing discussion about eschatology.

Expositors suggest one motive for underscoring the magnificence of the temple is to seek Christ to temper His declaration that the ***"house is left unto you desolate"***, as though His words in that statement were aimed at the physical city and temple. But we know that is not His intent with that declaration, but that the Jewish religion – directed to be centered in that city and temple – was desolate and would be left in that miserable state until they are spiritually revived. It cheapens the magnitude of the declaration, and makes light of the sobriety with which His disciples attended to His Word and work. Are we to believe that they would hear Christ say He's abandoning the Jews and then plead with Him on the basis of the beauty of a building?

"Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord:"
(Acts 7:49)

And it cannot be in the way of pleading for Christ to reconsider the complete destruction of the temple ... because He tells them of *this* destructive prophecy *in response to* their showing Him the buildings, as if explanation of why they are out of focus with their attention on *that* temple. I don't believe we've sounded the depths of what we have going on here with this passionate engagement by the disciples of Christ. Consider this analysis of Dr. Gill on the later verse regarding ***"what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?"*** (v.3):

"Which two are put together, as what they supposed would be at the same time, and immediately follow the destruction of the temple. That he was come in the flesh, and was the true Messiah, they firmly believed: he was with them, and they expected he would continue with them, for they had no notion of his leaving them, and coming again. When he at any time spake of his dying and rising from the dead, they seemed not to understand it: wherefore this coming of his, the sign of which, they inquire, is not to be understood of his coming a second time to judge the world, at the last day; but of his coming in his kingdom and glory, which they had observed him some little time before to speak of; declaring that some present should not die, till they saw it: wherefore they wanted to be informed, by what sign they might know, when he would set up his

temporal kingdom; for since the temple was to be destroyed, they might hope a new one would be built, much more magnificent than this, and which is a Jewish notion; and that a new state of things would commence; the present world, or age, would be at a period; and the world to come, they had so often heard of from the Jewish doctors, would take place; and therefore they ask also, of the sign of the end of the world, or present state of things in the Jewish economy: to this Christ answers, in the latter part of this chapter, though not to the sense in which they put the questions; yet in the true sense of the coming of the Son of Man, and the end of the world;”

This is getting to what I believe was driving the whole of the discussion with the disciples, and specifically what motivated them so passionately to point out the glories of the temple across the valley. If Christ’s kingdom is at hand, in the sense of it being literally unfolding in front of their eyes, then it stands to reason that the seat of that kingdom is across the valley in that beautiful temple! What a magnificent center for Christ’s earthly throne! He just roundly chastised the Jews who were promulgating a false religious system – filled to the full with arrogant, hypocritical leaders **“teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.” (Mark 7:7)** What better time to take His seat in that beautiful structure and set all things in order?

This is helpful in two ways. First, it makes the ensuing dialog between Christ and His Apostles much clearer and altogether consistent with the myriad prophecies that preceded it and followed it. Second, it humbles us. We need to be sober about this question, seeking as intently to adhere only to what Scripture teaches as we are zealous in our searching out and preaching His blessed Word. God dwells in eternity ... we are (pitifully) limited to that portion of the created timeline appointed to us in this life. God opens His Word and closes His Word on His direction. Men cannot pry into things not appointed to our understanding. The patriarch Job said **“I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not.” (Job 42:3)** We should loath to find ourselves dealing lightly with these deep matters of eschatology; but rather to wait for God to show us when He has appointed us to know.

The next portion of this engagement that needs some treatment respects Christ’s response to the frenetic energy coming from His disciples about the glories of the temple. Here is what the three authors wrote:

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

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“And Jesus answering said unto him, Seest thou these great buildings? there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.” (Mark 13:2)

&

“As for these things which ye behold, the days will come, in the which there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.” (Luke 21:6)

Much has been written and said about the destruction of Herod’s temple in 70 AD. The expositors all address the obvious parallel with the historic account to these sober words, and John Trapp adds some interesting tidbits in anchoring this point of our analysis with some flare:

“This was afterwards fulfilled, when the temple was so set on fire by Titus’ soldiers, that it could not be quenched by the industry of man. Titus (it is said) would have preserved the temple, as one of the world’s wonders, from being burnt, but could not; such was the fury of the soldiers, set to work by God doubtless. And when, upon the taking of the city and temple, the army saluted him emperor, and many others by way of congratulation sent him crowns and garlands, he, by a memorable example of modesty, refused them, saying, that he had done nothing more than lent his hands and help to God, who declared his fierce wrath against that sinful people.”

I think this is satisfactory to establish a well-known point about these passages. We should also keep in mind that Christ wasn’t simply declaring a prophecy for the sake of the prophecy. He was answering an implied question from His disciples. The historical outcome – as amazing and renowned an event it was – is almost *more an underscoring* of His answer than anything else. They believed He was going to use that structure to set up His kingdom in the earth. That was not the case, and could never be considered to be the case. So far from that ***ever being*** appropriately in the mind of humanity, the whole of it would be deconstructed so severely that it could no longer be known exactly where it stood! Dr. Gill says that after burning the temple as much as fire could consume it, they used plows to dig up the stones and laid the earth flat again so as never to illicit speculation about where it had previously stood. In a sermon dated April 9, 2017 I discussed some additional historic information about the confusion on the location of that temple.

Furthermore, it was this amazing judgment of God upon that people that still resides rent free in their collective mind! It is their arrogant, human logic that compels the conclusion that they are required by God to construct themselves *another* temple. God never directed them to do so! The complete oblivion of that former structure – that was to underscore God’s emphatic rejection of that people – has no scripture-based neogenesis. The only new temple authorized in God’s establishment of Christ in earthly and heavenly splendor is that which opens up in heaven (Revelation 15:5) and descends to the earth (Revelation 21:10). No man-made temple will be part of Christ’s earthly reign, and nobody anticipating that event should ever make the mistake of attributing a human-made structure to that glorious event.

Having brought us to the point in this exchange on Mt. Olivet, between Christ and His disciples, where the negative is established – that Christ’s earthly reign was not at hand and would certainly not be in that structure across the valley – the time comes to draw a sharper point about the question.

“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)

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“And as he sat upon the mount of Olives over against the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled?” (Mark 13:3-4)

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“And they asked him, saying, Master, but when shall these things be? and what sign will there be when these things shall come to pass?” (Luke 21:7)

I’ve read the expositors’ words on these three passages ... even Joseph Seiss, to the extent that he gathers snippets of Christ’s words into his analyses, as he relates the writings of the Revelation to them. There is an assumption in their writings that there are three distinct questions being raised, variably, in these passages:

1. When will be the destruction of the temple?
2. What sign will they have that Christ is “coming”?
3. When is the end of the world appointed to arrive (such as they understand those words)?

I submit to you that is an incorrect analysis. It is grounded in the notion that while the Apostles may have originally been focusing on when Christ’s earthly reign was to occur – once Christ told them the temple was going to be destroyed, they suddenly became infatuated with learning when *that* event was scheduled. We are expected to believe that an eternity-focused discussion is reduced to a fascination with the details of when Christ will dispose of a temporal structure? Again, we’ve slipped into a disregard for the fire that burns in the bellies of those dear saints – like that burning in our own bones. For example, other than a temporary contextual preaching point, what care do the souls in this church have for how and when the twin towers were disposed of?

An important point here is that the dialog moving forward from this point is no longer with the larger group of persons, identified as “disciples” or followers. This is a more private conversation that is

engaged with between Christ and the Apostles present. The question is, as Mark intimates, raised by **“Peter and James and John and Andrew”**, who **“asked him privately”**.

I think to help us see what the genuine focus is here, we need to place the emphasis of the questions on a different subject. If we do that, we'll not only better understand where the discussion is going ... we will be able to square up the three separate passages. Let me explain. Matthew's language seems to be distinguishing the discussion into three components. First, let's discuss when this whole “destruction of the temple” thing is going to happen, then tell us when you're “coming” and then tell us when the world is going to be ended. Under that analysis, the other two are only singling out the first of the three questions **“when shall these things be?”** This disconnect is only present if we are focusing on the idea that **“these things”** references the destruction of the temple. As if Christ said “the temple is going to be destroyed” and they responded, “tell us when that's happening? And while you're at it, tell us what sign we'll see that it's about to happen?” But I suggest to you that the questions are not focused on the destruction of the temple, or anything about that.

First of all, if Christ was answering that question – when the temple is going to be destroyed – every thing he says following that question has to then come into the framework of answering *that* question. That is, *none* of the things Christ said are about the second advent of Christ ... only about when He's going to come and destroy the temple and end the Jewish economy of things (the end of the world as they know it). It's a dastardly approach to reading the words of an eternal God, and it is a happy work to help you avoid doing so.

Instead, consider the exchange as continuing to be focused on what the Jews were focused on at the outset of the discussion – Christ's earthly reign. Think of it flowing like this:

Disciples: “You've told the Jews in the temple that they're so corrupted, they will not see you again until they've owned you as their Messiah. Are you going to now set up your kingdom, centering it in those beautiful buildings of the temple?”

Christ: “No. Those buildings are not going to be where I set up my temple and my reign. Those buildings will be utterly destroyed so that structure will not even be remembered.”

Apostles: “Then, when are you going to establish your kingdom? When are you going to come forward to do so? Since we know that will be the concluding of this world's affairs, when will that happen and how will the saints know you're coming?”

Now you have a framing of the matter that matches the questions and properly opens the discussion to a full and glorious display of Christ as the King who comes once to suffer and die for His saints (His **“suffering”**) and comes again to claim those saints and be established in His earthly throne to rule for a thousand years (**“the glory that should follow”**) (1 Peter 1:11) and then **“deliver[] the kingdom to God, even the father”** (1 Corinthians 15:24). Now we can avoid getting wrapped around

a question that doesn't even get answered – “when will Herod's temple be destroyed?” Now we can settle into a discussion of how Christ informed His Day and learn what we should be looking for – since we're no longer grinding over petty events inside a single period of time that we know from history was merely 40 years. Now we can proceed to understand the eschatological words that follow.

As we begin the responsive sermon from Christ, the opening words shift voice. For the rest of the dialog, the engagement described is between the elect and the non-elect ... those with saving faith and those without. Those with faith will be tested from within, to purge those who are false professors. Those with faith will be tested from without to purge those whose faith is feigned and therefore insubstantial. It is the description of warfare on a world stage; hence the question asking of **“the end of the world”**. That warfare will go from a generations long ... centuries long ... maturation of the church militant to a crucible generation when the terrorizing state will bring pity for one who is with child or gives suck to a newborn. The warnings are for those who must maintain faith through their whole lives, and for those who will be blessed to see the coming of Christ in person. Christ is talking to all His saints in all of those generations and circumstances. It is our duty to discern when the generational warnings transition to the signs of His return so we will rightly divide this profound Word of truth coming from the mouth of the Messiah.

“And Jesus answered and said unto them, *Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.*” (Matthew 24:4-5)

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“And Jesus answering them began to say, *Take heed lest any man deceive you: For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.*” (Mark 13:5-6)

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“And he said, *Take heed that ye be not deceived: for many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and the time draweth near: go ye not therefore after them.*” (Luke 21:8)

From the beginning of the human race in Eden, the deceiver has been at work. He's the father of lies who **“from the beginning [] abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him.” (John 8:44)**. So the warning **“be not deceived”** may strike you as a pedestrian instruction, if it were not in the opening words of Christ on the subject of eschatology. Here we have the Messiah prophesying the way of the world for centuries to follow Him. This is a unique expression of satanic deceit – for

it is all and only about Christianity. The lies here referenced are lies about Christian doctrine – not the more obvious deceits among the pagan religions of the world. This is describing what we in this generation can look backward on and testify to the absolute and amazing truth of it!

On the day that the New Testament Church was born, the brazen deceit and stripes and offshoots and variations of offshoots began. They were yet in their embryonic state, but they grew and flowered the world over. Call the roll, and the whole lot of them will look you in the face ... and point to some humanistic depiction of the Holy Messiah that is declaring ***“I am Christ”***. Be not deceived.

And this is not the only passage where this phenomenon is discussed in relation to the Revelation of Jesus Christ. The whole of chapters two and three in the Revelation are about the treachery of false Christianity possessing – more and less – the churches through the relevant history over the past two millennia. Consider the ways in which false Christian doctrines have been propagated in the very body of the Bride of Christ. The church of Ephesus is commended because they have ***“tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars” (Revelation 2:2)***, which is nothing more than the introduction of a false doctrine pretending to be Christ. The church of Smyrna wrestles with ***“the synagogue of Satan” (Revelation 2:9)***. The church of Pergamos was in danger of both the ***“doctrine of Balaam [and] the doctrine of the Nicolaitans” (Revelation 2:14-15)***. Thyatira had in their midst ***“that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess” (Revelation 2:20)*** tearing at her and draining her spiritual life blood. While the church in Sardis has no name for what doctrinal horrors infect her, it is evident that her members are in danger of losing the candlestick because Christ has ***“not found [her] works perfect before God.” (Revelation 3:2)*** Philadelphia is given praise for her members’ love for each other and that they have prepared themselves to have those restored Jews ***“worship before [their] feet, and to know that [Christ has] loved the[m].” (Revelation 3:9)***. Finally, the lukewarm religiosity of the church of the Laodiceans has caused them to follow after false Christs, making her members in desperate need of tried gold, white raiment, and eye salve to restore her faith.

Though I have a urgent sense that we are coming to the close of this articulated period of Christian history, at present we stand in the place of all those spiritual brethren. Our church is in need to be purged of all those spiritual and physical indecencies articulated in those churches, so that we will not be deceived and chase after a false Christ. The warning in this portion of Christ’s sermon is to those generations of Christians through the centuries who were required to watch and wait while they lived, and when their change came were put within that rank of souls in white robes awaiting – staged for, if you will – the Day of the Lord. In Christ’s words, that day then ends, and another much more sinister period opens.

I want to end this part of the discussion with drawing a sharp distinction between this passage and one we will see later within Christ’s sermon. He describes a time in this trajectory from His first advent to His second advent when men will say ***“Lo, here is Christ” (Matthew 24:23; Mark 13:21)***.

That is a more specific behavior that is engaged in when the earth is on the cusp of Christ's return. That is a specific deceit, creating the danger that we presently live in where myriads chatter about Christ's return – when, where, how, for whom. We will discuss that in more depth when we've travelled through this sermon to that point.

We will next examine the state of things in the final accumulation of generations in preparation for the intense and terrifying days that sprint to Christ's ***“coming, and the end of the world.”*** I hope I have helped to set this structural stage so that we have a better lens to begin the work of searching Christ's own words about His coming. As always, I invite engagement and when I have light, I will share it with any who wish to have it. I love you all. Amen.