

## Olivet Discourse, Part 3

Mark 13:14–27

There are challenges in interpreting this passage and dealing with both the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy in that generation when the temple was destroyed in 70 AD, and a long-term fulfillment that is yet to be realized. Most of my teachers through my teens interpreted this as future fulfillment. As we understand Jesus words and see church history unfold in the 1st century, it is clear that we do not have to leave the 1st century to see these things fulfilled. One's interpretation of this passage may be greatly influenced by whichever view of eschatology you embrace. Apologists for every position can point to something in this text to make their point. There seems to be a bit of a warning, then, that we need to be careful about using this passage as the primary framework for a singular position. Observing that warning myself, it is not my intent, to convince you of a particular end times perspective, but to point us all to the deity and grace of Lord Jesus who **predicts** real persecution for his followers, **prepares** them to stand in that terrible day, **protects** them in the midst of it, and ultimately **prevails** over all the demonic and sinful powers that have arrayed themselves against his eternal rule and reign. Concerning persecution of believers, it is clear from the teachings of the Lord Jesus and the apostles — and their lived experiences — that persecution is both part of God's plan to sanctify and mature believers, and to proclaim and display the Gospel. **All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.** (2 Timothy 3:12) Let's read our text.

**Mark 13:14–27** — <sup>14</sup>“But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where he ought not to be (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. <sup>15</sup> Let the one who is on the housetop not go down, nor enter his house, to take anything out, <sup>16</sup> and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. <sup>17</sup> And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! <sup>18</sup> Pray that it may not happen in winter. <sup>19</sup> For in those days there will be such tribulation as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, and never will be. <sup>20</sup> And if the Lord had not cut short the days, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he shortened the days. <sup>21</sup> And then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘Look, there he is!’ do not believe it. <sup>22</sup> For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the elect. <sup>23</sup> But be on guard; I have told you all things beforehand.

<sup>24</sup>“But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, <sup>25</sup> and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. <sup>26</sup> And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. <sup>27</sup> And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

**PRAY****Jesus Predicts — vv 14–23**

Who or what is the abomination of desolation? The prophet Daniel in 11:31 predicts a king coming from the north who will desecrate the temple. Antiochus IV fulfilled this prophecy in 168 BC when he set up a pagan altar in the most holy place and sacrificed a pig. Jesus uses this language of the fulfilled prophecy in Daniel to predict what will happen again in 70 AD when the Roman general Titus will destroy the temple in the war that Rome waged against the Jews. Will there be a future fulfillment of the prophecy? It is possible, and certain end time views require it. You do not have to leave the first century, however, to see the fulfillment of what Jesus predicts.

The abomination of the temple serves as the dreadful climax for all the violence and hostility that the rebellious world and demonic forces of Hell. They enter what has symbolize the dwelling Place of God himself and destroy it. It's an assault on his throne. While it represents the pinnacle of the war on God, it is not all that Jesus predicts. The rebellion against God includes rebellion against his people. In v 19 Jesus says the tribulation that his followers will be subjected to in that day will be worse than anything that has been seen to that point, or ever will be. He tells us that there will be those who attempt to deceive people and lead them astray, claiming they, or someone else is a christ. But it's not all bad news. He also predicts his triumphant return with great power and glory.

In Jesus' predictions we must see and be bolstered by this faith-building truth: He is eternal. Our God is from everlasting to everlasting. When he predicts what will happen you can be certain that it will. Because he inhabits eternity, he knows and ordains what occurs for all eternity. As God proclaims in **Isaiah 46:8–11** — “Remember this and stand firm, recall it to mind, you transgressors, remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,’ calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it. His prediction is one more pointer to his deity, one more compelling reason to worship him.

**Jesus Prepares His Followers — vv 14–19**

Jesus never tells us he is going to remove us from difficulty. He prepares us to be faithful to him in the middle of that difficulty. He equips us spiritually, supernaturally, to stand firm through the Holy Spirit when we are hauled before wicked rulers. He will gives us words to declare the Gospel. (We

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saw that in v 11.) He prepares us through warnings and predictions, so that we will not be surprised. Do not be led astray. Do not be alarmed. Do not be anxious. Be clear minded. He lets us know, as we have already seen, that he has not lost his sovereign grip on his creation. We do not need to worry. But he also equips us through his commands, both small, and great.

RC Sproul, in his typical grasp of almost everything, notes that Jesus prepares his followers to escape the murdering Romans in their siege of Jerusalem. What at first glance may seem like just a poetic warning is actually a life-saving command. Look at the end of **v 14** — let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. In the 1<sup>st</sup> Century when invaders and hostile forces were approaching, the conventional wisdom was to flee to the cities. City walls that were thick and tall. There were robust gate. Cities were defensible — the safest place you could be in an attack.

However, when the Roman armies came against the Jews and Jerusalem, they laid siege, and entered the city in what could well be called the first holocaust. Josephus records that 1.1 million were slaughtered. The Romans spared no one. Neither children or the elderly. The list of those who were killed are primarily Jews, and some others. There is virtually no mention of any Christians being killed. How is that? Jesus instructed that those who were in Judea were to flee to the mountains. That was counterintuitive to them. That went against conventional wisdom. They were saved, not by evaluating things as they thought best, or according to the prevailing wisdom of the day, but by obeying the very word of God.

How does one stand in this day? Take heed to obey all that God has said. Are there any areas where you have disregarded what you think is a negotiable command and replaced it with your own wisdom, or preference, or comfort? Jesus told his followers to flee to the hills. He told them not to go back and trifle with earthly possessions. He told them to pray for his compassionate timing about when these difficulties would occur: not when mothers are nursing, not in the winter months. It occurs to me that God was preparing his people to stand faithful in the massive test by giving them daily assignments that equipped them to quickly obey when times were incredibly hard.

I never liked classes where teachers gave daily grades. I tested well and preferred that my final grade be based on the two or three big tests that were given. But I do appreciate what teachers endeavor to do through daily assignments. They are trying to help students grasp the material one bite at a time.

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It's a way of preparing for the big test without being overwhelmed by the difficulty of it. You put in place what is required line upon line, layer upon layer.

How are you doing in preparation for persecution? Are you walking in obedience to God's word when conventional wisdom or your preferences are at cross purposes? Are you obeying the 10 Commandments or moderating God's instruction? What about the greatest commandment to love God with all of your heart? In a busy and demanding culture, or perhaps, with an aging body, is your strength and intellect being directed towards serving God, or securing comfort? Are you denying yourself by smashing personal preferences and idols? Do you actively love your neighbor as yourself? How is your obedience to the Great Commission — are you making disciples? Praying? Are you putting to death fleshly temptation and the deeds of the sinful nature? Is this evident in your browser history? Do you consider the members of the body of Christ more significant than yourself so that you serve them rather than waiting to be served? Are you submitting to the pastoral leadership that God has set up over the church? Is the word of God dwelling in you richly?

Day in, and day out, Jesus's commands prepare us to stand in the Dreadful Day. Would you say you are sharpened by, and sensitized to God's instruction so that even when it doesn't make sense to you, or seems less than necessary to you, you deny yourself and obey what God has said? It seems unlikely that the student who does not work to master the daily assignment, is very unlikely to pass the final exam. It seems unlikely that the professed Christian who blends conventional wisdom and personal opinion with some palatable things of God will stand when the forces of hell and the hatred of the world are arrayed against them. Today is the day to prepare. Today is Boot Camp. Do not sit under the teaching and preaching of God's word in order to audit it. Submit yourself to the teaching and preaching of God's word and obey it.

### **Jesus Protects — v 20**

The Son of God who sits outside of time in eternity and predicts what will happen, who prepares us to stand in the difficult day, also provides what we need in the midst of the persecution and tribulation. As he opened the Red Sea for his children and made a way of escape from the sword of Pharaoh, as he limited Satan's attack on Job, as he intervened in the lions' den, delivering Daniel from deadly scheme of a pagan king, so v 20 tells us he sustains and saves his own: ...for the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he shortened the days. This sounds, doesn't it, like the large-scale outworking of 1 Corinthians 10:13 — No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful,

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and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. This is what we would assume that Jesus would do, since he gave life to save those who come to him in repentance and faith. He does not lose any of his rescued sheep — the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. No one will snatch them out of his hand. While we would assume it, it is bracing to hear him say it directly. *I will intervene. I will not allow Hell and the enemies of your soul to claim you, or whither you into abandoning your faith. The days of tribulation will be terrible, but they will not destroy your immortal soul. That is mine. I love you too much, I have paid too high a price to redeem you. You will not be lost. Fix your eyes on your Savior. He delivered from the dominion of darkness. He will carry you home.*

### Jesus Prevails — vv 24–27

In v 20, the language shifts from the hard conflict to his victorious return. The language of the sun being darkened, the moon not shining, the stars falling... This is language that Old Testament prophets used to describe God's day of judgment.<sup>1</sup> In that Great Day the Son of Man, King Jesus, is coming with great power and glory. He is the conquering king. The protection that he provides in the midst of the tribulation is fulfilled as the Savior prevails and gathers in the elect. As certain as his predictions are because he is from everlasting to everlasting, so certain is his return and his carrying his children to be with him in eternity. God's enemies are defeated.

AW Tozer was a faithful, godly preacher in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. At the time of his death, in 1963, he had begun an expositional commentary on the book of revelation. He only managed to get through the first few chapters before he died, but he had named the commentary prior to his death. There is a sense in which he said all that needed to be said, simply in the title that he chose: ***Jesus Is the Victor***. The eternal King Jesus predicts what will happen, prepares his children to be faithful in the midst of persecution, he protects, and ultimately he prevails. Let this stir your soul to greater obedience and worship of our eternal King.

### Closing Thought

Brothers and sisters, not just in preparation for that day of persecution, but simply because Jesus is worthy of it, let us submit to his word and learn to walk in obedience one step at a time. Our claim to love him is validated by our obedience. Let's advance in small areas in this day of ease, else we be

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<sup>1</sup> It may also speak of the day of Pentecost, since the coming of the Holy Spirit has left the world radically and dramatically different than before Pentecost.

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no match for the Day of Dread. Daily obedience will ready us. What if believers ignored Christ command to flee to the mountains because they don't like the mountain air? It would've been their death. Obedience is life. Today if you hear his voice today, see the beauty of learning to walk in obedience to Christ, and even the smallest matters. Do not harden your heart.

The body of Christ is given to help you in your faithful walk of obeying, serving, living in holiness, denying yourself... Where we struggle with our old nature, pride prompts us to conceal and hide the struggle. We don't want anyone to think we aren't perfect. Push against that towards spiritual maturity. Be transparent about struggles. Pray with each other. Call the elders to pray with you. Invest in those who form the body of Christ here, and let them invest in you. Let's make practical steps and efforts to do so. The body of Christ is the unique thing — a blended family, of sorts. We are all adopted. None of us are native born. Earthly blended families must work very hard and perform unusual acts of deference and love in order to become one. Beloved, at the end of this year, if the Lord has not yet returned, let it be said of us we have worked very hard and have demonstrated unusual acts of differential love to help each other grow in Christ-likeness. Leave behind the silly, inconsequential things that will not help you in the great day. Trust yourself to Christ in the context of his people. We will need this in the days ahead. It will be essential.

**PRAY**