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Olivet Discourse (Part 2)



The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

In this discussion, Steve Gregg explores the significance of the Holy Spirit in Christianity and its role as a comforter after Jesus' ascension. He also delves into the historical context of the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24, which discusses the end of the Jewish age and the destruction of the temple. While there are different interpretations of the phrase "this generation," Gregg argues that it refers to the events of Jesus' time rather than a distant future. Understanding the details and historical context is essential to understanding this discourse in its entirety.

Transcript

By the way, whenever we say that Jesus is in me, or Jesus lives with me, or Jesus is with me, we really mean his spirit. Because Jesus, the man with the holes in his hands, is at the right hand of God the Father, reigning, and will not leave that spot until his second coming, according to scripture. The heavens must receive him until the time of the restoration of all things, it says in Acts chapter 3, and he's not leaving there until he's put all his enemies under his feet.

So, Jesus is really in heaven. But then who's this here with me and me? That's his spirit, the spirit of Christ, as he's called in Romans 8 and 1 Peter chapter 1. The Holy Spirit is called the spirit of Christ, and Jesus has by his spirit come to dwell inside of me. There's a sense in which when the Holy Spirit came into me, Jesus came into me, because he and the Spirit are one.

We believe in the Trinity. And therefore, it can be said that the Holy Spirit coming into me is the same as Jesus coming into me. In fact, look a few verses later in John 14 at verse 24.

Jesus answered and said to him, If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Who's we? The Father and Jesus. If anyone loves Jesus and keeps his words, the Father and Jesus will come to him.

Has that happened to you? In what sense? When the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, the

Spirit of Jesus come into you, that's the Trinity, you see. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, they're one. So to receive one is to receive them all.

To receive the Holy Spirit is what Jesus is referring to here. Now, in John 14, verse 18, where he says, I will not leave you orphans, I will come to you, the context would seem to suggest he means in the form of the Holy Spirit, the other Comforter. And he speaks of his Father and him coming to them, but obviously he's not talking about a second coming.

He's talking about what happened at the Day of Pentecost. So some people think that when Jesus said, some of you standing here will not taste of death before you see the kingdom coming in power, that this was a reference to the Day of Pentecost. Certainly there was power then.

Jesus said you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you in Acts 1.8. So there was a coming of the kingdom in power at that time. But Jesus said, you'll see the Son of Man coming in power, coming in his kingdom. And if that's what he's referring to, then that did happen before all of them had tasted death.

In fact, only one of them had died, Judas, in the meantime. And therefore, that's a possible answer. There's a third possibility, and that is that Jesus was speaking about the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, when he said some of you standing here will not taste death before you see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.

Now the problem with this is because, and probably of the three opinions, this is the one least likely in the minds of most Christians to be true. The reason is, we are familiar with the Transfiguration, and we are familiar with the Day of Pentecost, but most Christians are not familiar with 70 AD. Do you know why we're not familiar with 70 AD? Because it's not recorded in the Bible.

The Book of Acts, which takes the Church history furthest into the future before the record closes, closes around the year 62 or 64 AD. Therefore, whatever happened after that is not recorded in the historical portions of the Scripture. Therefore, Christians are largely unaware of what happened in 70 AD, and that's where Josephus becomes helpful.

But I will say this, many Christians would object to our suggesting that what happened in 70 AD could in any sense be called Jesus coming. However, let me show you something over in Isaiah chapter 19. Isaiah chapter 19, verse 1, this is a prophecy against Egypt.

It was fulfilled when the Assyrians came and destroyed and conquered Egypt. It says, the burden against Egypt, behold the Lord rides on a swift cloud and will come into Egypt. The idols of Egypt will totter at his presence, and the heart of Egypt will melt, and so forth.

You can read on and find out this is about the conquest of Egypt by the Assyrians. Now,

the interesting thing here is that the Assyrians destroying Egypt is said to be the Lord coming against Egypt. Why? Because they are His armies.

The Assyrians are God's armies coming in judgment against Egypt. The Bible makes it very plain that when a nation is judged by another nation, this is God's doing. God uses the heathen nations.

He causes the wrath of man to praise Him. And there is a sense in which if the nation is invaded because of God's judgment upon it, that is God coming in judgment. Though not personally, not visibly.

Here it is symbolic language. The Lord rides on a swift cloud and will come to Egypt. Well, God didn't come visibly to Egypt, but He came in judgment upon Egypt in the person of Assyrian armies.

Look over now at Matthew chapter 22. We're barely scratching the surface today. We'll have to develop this in the next several lectures.

Matthew 22 says, And Jesus answered and spoke, verse 1, to them again by parables and said, The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding, but they were not willing to come. Again, he sent out other servants saying, Tell those who are invited, see I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and fatted cattle are killed and all things are ready, come to the wedding. But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm and another to his business, and the rest seized his servants, treated them spitefully and killed them.

But when the king heard about it, he was furious, and he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. And he said to his servants, The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. Therefore go to the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.

So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good, and the wedding hall was furnished with guests. Now, here we have a parable about the kingdom of God. It's like a king who made a marriage for his son.

Jesus is the son, God is the king. Those who are invited are those who are invited into the church, into God's family, into God's wedding feast, as it were. The first ones invited did not come.

That was the Jews. Now that he's referring to the Jews there, as the first one is clear, if you read the previous chapter, we don't have time, but the last parable in chapter 21 of Matthew describes the Jews as the vineyard keepers, whom God punished because he sent his servants to them, and they beat them and killed them and threw them out of

the vineyard. Same thing that they did to these servants here.

The identification is unmistakable. If you're not familiar with the parable in Matthew 21, you'll have to read that on your own sometime. We don't have time to go into it, but there can be no mistaking.

Those who were first invited to follow Jesus and to be Christians, and to be in this ceremony, this feast of celebration in the kingdom of God, were the Jews. But, as we know, for the most part, the Jews rejected the invitation. Therefore, the invitation went out to the highways and byways, to the less worthy ones, the ones that no one would have invited, the Gentiles.

And they came in large numbers, and the wedding was furnished with guests. Now, one thing that happens in the very midst of this is in verse 7. When the king heard about it, that is, by the first who were invited rejecting his invitation, he was furious, and he sent out his armies and destroyed those murderers and burned up their city. It would take a profound ignorance of the events of 70 A.D. to miss the point that Jesus is here predicting, as he did elsewhere, that Jerusalem was going to be destroyed by armies.

He said it in Matthew 24, he said it in this place, he said it in many places. But interestingly, he said that the king sent his armies to destroy them. Well, it was the Romans, actually, who destroyed Jerusalem.

But the king in the parable is God. It was God coming against Jerusalem in the person of the Roman armies. Look at Luke chapter 19.

Luke chapter 19, beginning with verse 41. Luke 19, 41. Now, as he drew near, he saw the city and wept over it.

Jesus did. That's Jerusalem. Now, Jesus predicted the doom of Jerusalem in many places.

Many times, he predicted it. But in Matthew 22, which we looked at a moment ago, it says in this parable that the king was angry that they didn't accept his invitation to the wedding feast. Therefore, he sent out his armies and destroyed their city and burned it up.

In your free time, I hope you'll read this description. You'll cheat yourself if you don't. From Josephus, of the 70 A.D. destruction of Jerusalem.

You will find that even the invading armies understood this to be an act of God. The things that happened were so amazing that you wonder why you've never heard about them before. It's one of the greatest cataclysms in history.

One of the greatest overthrows of any nation in history. It took place in 70 A.D. But not only is it major in terms of its cataclysmic effects, but it's major in terms of its

significance in God's program. Because 1,400 years earlier, God had established the Old Covenant at Mount Sinai with Moses and with his people Israel.

And he had given them commandments. And he said, listen, you keep my commandments, you'll be the greatest nation on earth. You'll be blessed in the village and you'll be blessed in the farm.

And you'll be blessed in your store and your basket. And you'll be blessed with the fruit of your womb. You'll be blessed in every way.

But, he said in Deuteronomy 28, if you neglect my commandments, if you rebel against me, if you don't keep my covenant, well, then you'll be cursed in all those same ways and worse. He says, I'll cause your enemies to come against you. And they will drive you out of the land that I gave you.

And you will be scattered throughout all the nations. And for a byword to all the nations. And you'll be insecure there.

And you'll be terrified of everything because your life will hang in jeopardy at all times. And you'll run away at the shaking of a leaf, it says. You'll be so terrified.

Now, that was predicted 1,400 years before this. It was fulfilled in 70 A.D. We don't only have the destruction of a wonderful and beautiful city. By the way, the temple is believed to have been one of the most magnificent structures ever built in the ancient world.

Incredibly expensive building that was destroyed. But, I mean, it's not the cultural phenomenon that makes it significant. It's the statement God was making.

1,400 years ago, he said, keep my covenant and be a blessed nation. Break my covenant and come under my curse and my judgment. I'll send it to you myself.

But he said it would be through armies. And what happened in 70 A.D. was God carrying out his threat. After 1,400 years, he put an end totally to that system of sacrifices, of the temple, of the priesthood, that which had been the only way that God had ever authorized for men to worship him.

For over a millennium and a half, it was now over, forever. Never to be repeated. And this was a major turning point.

Probably one of the two or three major turning points in history in terms of God's dealings with human beings. Its significance would be lost on most of us because of the obscurity of the event. We've hardly ever heard about it.

But its significance in God's dealings, its significance in terms of the great cataclysm that involved, certainly justifies all the hubbub and all the talk about it in the Bible. There's a

great deal of talk about it in the Bible. Look at Luke chapter 21 on the handout I gave you.

Luke 21 and verse 20, the first column. Jesus said to his disciples who asked him this question, when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. Then let those in Judea flee to the mountains.

Let those who are in the midst of her depart. And let not those who are in the country enter her. For these are the days of vengeance, God's vengeance on them for crucifying his son and all the prophets.

That all things which are written may be fulfilled. But woe to those who are pregnant and those who are nursing babies in those days. Josephus records that they even ate their babies in the siege because they were starving to death.

For there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people. On this people. They will fall by the edge of the sword.

They will be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. That is something that Josephus records actually happened.

Of course, we live in the time where they are still scattered throughout all the nations. Although there is a great deal of flap made about them returning, the vast majority of Jews have never returned and don't have any intention of returning to Israel. There's more Jews in New York City than in the land of Israel today.

And there's more in Russia than there are in Israel today. And then he says all the Jews are pouring back into Israel. Well, that's kind of an overstatement.

It's true. Some Jews are pouring back there. But there's a lot of them not going anywhere.

Not yet anyway. If they do later, we'll see. But it's not happening the way that some people like to tell the story.

Anyway, what I'm saying to you is Jesus indicated that the destruction of Jerusalem was a major thing. In fact, in the verses we just read, in verse 22, it says, These are the days of vengeance that all things which are written may be fulfilled. Which indicates that there's a great deal in the Bible written about this very event.

And until we recognize that, we're going to be groping blind trying to interpret prophecy because we don't realize that Jesus himself said this is the event about which most of the prophecies, if not all, wrote. That all things that are written will be fulfilled when Jerusalem is surrounded by armies and God brings the end of Jerusalem. Which he did.

And Jesus said this generation will not pass until all these things be fulfilled. Now, back to the question in Matthew 24.3. What will be the sign of your coming in the end of the age? There's two possibilities, as I said. One is that since Matthew has combined two discourses there, one about 7 to 18 and one about the second coming, that he's compressed them and compressed the question into two questions.

The other is that Matthew is just paraphrasing what the other gospel said. Because the second part of the disciples' question in Mark and in Luke 21 is what sign will there be that these things are about to come to pass? Matthew puts it this way. What shall be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age? Now, the end of the age, because the King James says end of the world there, people historically who read the King James thought that's talking about the end of the world.

The end of the age, however, could readily be a reference to the end of the Jewish age, the end of the age of the temple and of the Sinaitic covenant. It came to an end in 70 A.D. That was the end of an age. It certainly was.

And the beginning of a new one. And yet, your coming is where we get the problem here. Because we are so accustomed to thinking that whenever it talks about his coming, it must mean his second coming.

But let me remind you, in this discourse, he said this generation will not pass before all these things are fulfilled. And in the other passage we saw in Matthew 16, 28, he said, Some of you standing here will not face death until you see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom. Obviously, Jesus was at least willing to talk about something and call it his coming.

That was short range. It was going to happen while some of them were not dead yet, while that generation had not yet passed. It could be the Mount of Transfiguration.

It could be the Day of Pentecost. Or it could be his coming in judgment on Jerusalem in 70 A.D. I'll tell you though, 70 A.D. would be the one that puts it at the outer perimeter of his prediction, this generation will not pass. Because if it's talking about the Mount of Transfiguration, which took place seven days later, or about Pentecost, which took place less than a year later, then to say this generation will not pass, or some of you standing here will not face death before it, seems a bit of an overstatement.

But it does seem to me that a number of the things that he said here would lead us to believe that he means 70 A.D. when he says his coming. Now, let me make something very clear. In saying that, what I've just done is taken some people's favorite verses about the Second Coming of Christ and said, I don't think they're about the Second Coming of Christ.

And people sometimes jump to the conclusion that I don't believe in the Second Coming

of Christ. I do. I hope I've made that clear.

I do believe in the Second Coming of Christ. It's predicted in Luke 17, it's predicted in many places in the Bible. But what I've just thought to point out to you, and this cannot be avoided, is that sometimes there are words in the Bible that sound like they're about the Second Coming of Christ, but cannot possibly be about that subject.

Like when he said, some of you standing here will not face death until you see the Son of Man coming. That sounds like the Second Coming of Christ. But he couldn't possibly have been speaking about that.

Or likewise in Matthew 10, when he sent out the disciples to the cities and villages of Israel, he said, don't go to any cities of the Gentiles, because you will not have had time to go to all the villages of Israel before the Son of Man comes. Well, if he meant the Second Coming, they've certainly had more than enough time now to go to all the villages of Israel, and a great many more besides. But if he meant something like, before Israel is destroyed and devastated by the Romans, and there aren't any more villages of Israel to go to in 70 AD, then that would make sense.

Concentrate on Israel, because you won't have time even to hit all the villages of Israel before the Son of Man comes. It seems to speak of something more short term. Anyway, you can take it either way, and you'd have biblical grounds for doing so.

Whether they said, you're coming in the end of the age means 70 AD, and Jesus coming in judgment at that time, or whether he just compressed two discourses and made the question different, you can decide. But we need to consider, and we won't today, of course, in this lecture, we'll have to take another lecture for it, but we need to consider all the details of this discourse. And I endeavor to show you that everything that Jesus said would happen, the wars, the rumors of wars, the earthquakes, the pestilences, they all happened.

They all happened in abundance before 70 AD, especially in the last three and a half years, from 66 to 70 AD, which was the Jewish war with Rome, where all those things did happen. And we'll point it out later. Let me just finish up by talking a few moments, if I could, about the expression, this generation.

Because three times, once in Luke 21, and in the parallels in Mark 13 and Matthew 24, Jesus is recorded in the Bible saying, this generation will not pass. Now, because many commentators have felt that Jesus is talking about his second coming in Luke 21, when he is not, he's talking about 70 AD, they have tried to wrestle with this, because Jesus' words make it sound as if his second coming would come in that generation, if we identify the passage as talking about his second coming. Now, there are several solutions to this.

The two most popular are the following. One is that generation doesn't mean what we usually mean by that word, but it means a race or a family of people. And therefore, when he said, this generation will not pass until all these things be fulfilled, it is argued he meant this generation, the race of Israel, or possibly the race of the church.

That either Israel or the church would continue until the second coming of Christ, or both. But that he was not using the word generation in the normal sense of that word, but he was using it in the sense of a race of people. And that no particular length of time is suggested, only that the race of the Jews or possibly the race of Christians would continue to exist until the end of the age.

Another and more popular explanation is that when he said, this generation will not pass, he was talking in the natural sense of a generation, 40 years, but that he wasn't talking about his own generation, but of a later generation that would happen at the end of the age. According to some, he meant the generation that begins to see these signs in this chapter take place. That generation would not pass until it was all finished.

In other words, from the beginning to the end of this whole thing would be less than one generation. Some in particular have felt like the reestablishment of Israel as a nation in May 14, 1948, was the mark of the beginning of the last generation. Hal Lindsay, for instance, back in 1980 in the book, *Late Great Planet Earth*, said that since Israel was reestablished as a nation in 1948, and a generation is 40 years, therefore Jesus has to come back by 1988.

And since he believed there would be a seven year tribulation before that, and a rapture before that, he felt the rapture could not come later than 1981. Thus he deduced in his book in 1980, which sold over 20 million copies, *Late Great Planet Earth*, one of the third best selling books in history, predicted that the rapture would occur in 1981 and the second time it would occur in 1988. Well, he was wrong on both counts.

And since then, of course, he's had to revise his story a little bit. The book's still in print, but he now says, well, a generation could be 70 years. Well, that's safe because he won't live to see if that one fails.

So at least he won't have to eat humble pie if he fails on that one. But the point here is, he represents the basic dispensational approach. When Jesus said this generation will not pass, he meant an actual generation of people living at the end of time who would see either Israel become a nation or some of these signs begin to take place.

That generation would be the last generation and they'd see the second coming of Christ. Now, let me suggest a third alternative, and that is to take it for what it says. When he said, this generation will not pass before all these things come to pass, I just didn't let his words have their natural meaning.

He did not say, for example, that generation will not pass, as if he was talking about some other generation in the future. You would expect him to say, that generation won't pass, and tell these things before. He said, this generation will not pass, a term that he used frequently in his teaching.

In fact, look at Luke 17, the fourth column on the handout I gave you. I realize we're running a little over, we'll have to bear with me on this, so we can get to a better stopping point than we're at. In Luke 17, 24 and 25, it says, For as the lightning that flashes out of one part under heaven shines to the other part under heaven, so also shall the Son of Man be in his day.

But first, he must suffer many things and be rejected by who? This generation. The same expression. This generation has got to reject him.

Look over at Matthew 11. Matthew 11, verse 16. Jesus said, But to what shall I liken this generation? There it is again.

It is like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to their companions, saying, We played the flute to you, and you did not dance. We mourned to you, and you did not lament. For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they, who are they? This generation.

They say he has a demon. The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, Look, a glutton and a wine-bibber. So who is this generation? The generation that saw John the Baptist and rejected him, and saw Jesus and rejected him.

Not that generation, some later generation. This generation means the generation that he was living in. Look at Matthew chapter 12.

Matthew chapter 12, all around about verse 41. The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it. Why? Because they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and indeed greater than Jonah is here.

The Queen of the South will rise up in judgment with this generation and condemn it. For she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and indeed greater than Solomon is here. Now, what's this mean? This generation is to be condemned by these people.

Why? Because they heard Solomon, but this generation won't listen to Jesus, who is greater than Solomon. The Ninevites repented at the preaching of Jonah, but one greater than Jonah, Jesus, is preaching to this generation, and they are rejecting him. The generation he is speaking of is the generation that he was preaching to, and who had the opportunity to hear his wisdom, but wouldn't.

Then he says in verse 43, When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry

places seeking rest and finds none. Then he says, I'll return to my house from where I came. And when he comes, he finds it empty and swept and put in order.

Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there. And the last day of that man is worse than the first. So shall it also be with this wicked generation.

What will be? It's like having a demon cast out, but it comes back in force with seven others. That's what this generation is going to experience. When Jesus came to them, he was driving out demons, he was bringing the light.

It's as if the nation was a man who was exorcised of a demon. But when Jesus went away, this generation was to see that they would come back in force. When you read the story of the Jews besieged in Jerusalem, you'll wonder how any story could be this way unless there were demonic powers unleashed on them as nowhere at any time in history otherwise.

Let me show you one other passage, and we'll be done with this. Matthew 23, just before Matthew 24 actually. Notice how many times Jesus says, this generation.

And he's always talking about his own generation. Look at verse 34, Matthew 23, 34. Therefore indeed I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of them you will kill and crucify, some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barakai, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.

Assuredly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation. You generation of vipers. Yeah, in verse 33, you generation of serpents brood, generation of vipers it says in some versions.

New King James says serpents brood. But yeah, generation of vipers is actually what he said. Now, these things, all the blood of all the righteous who have been slain will come upon this generation, he said.

In other words, all the punishment for all the wicked deeds they had done, their ancestors had done, killed all their prophets, and they killed their Messiah, he says, well, this is the generation that is going to see the retribution. As he said in Luke 21, these are the days of vengeance, that all things that are written may be fulfilled. Now, in view of the fact that Jesus repeatedly used the term this generation, and in every case meant his own generation, on what grounds would anyone say that in the one case in Matthew 24, verse 34, when he says this generation shall not pass until all these things be fulfilled, on that occasion he means it totally differently than any other time he mentioned it.

Only because of the false assumption that Matthew 24 is about the last days. If we do

not make that assumption, then his statement is a perfectly good prediction, makes excellent sense, and agrees with the facts of history. Now, we'll have to wait until tomorrow's class to talk about what those facts of history are.

I have a great number of facts to give you about what happened, and we'll go through all these verses, what Jesus said would happen, I'll point out how it did happen. But you can keep these handouts. Before we meet again on this, please read this, Destruction of Jerusalem, excerpts from Josephus, and if you've got a mind for analytical work, you can read this and these observations I've made over here in this column.

And we'll talk about this some more next time. And all this has to do with the tribulation, because it's in Matthew 24 that says, Then shall be great tribulation. When? Well, we'll see.

Next time.