



GracePoint: A Weekly Sermon Discussion

77 - Immediately

Announcements:

7/19 @7:30 -

Prayer

7/20 @6:30 -

Grace Group

7/23 @8:30 -

Sunday School

8/6 @6:00 -

FAMILY NIGHT

ICE BREAKER: Are you a patient person? What thing tries your patience more than any other?

READ: Matthew 24:27-31

There are a whole lot of things that make it difficult to understand the Olivet discourse. It is of the genre “Apocalypse” which here means less “end of the world” and more “a highly symbolic form of writing that uses historical and religious imagery to paint an eschatological picture”. It is unique in all of the book of Matthew, in that there is no other portion of Matthew that is saying these things in this way. But one of the biggest things that makes it difficult is understanding the timing of all the things that are spoken about. This is highlighted in our passage that we just read that starts with the word “Immediately”. What is going on here, how does this help or make difficult understanding the timing of what is going on here?

The first thing that we need to understand is this: What is being spoken of here? What is helpful again is the question that we asked previously in this series: WHICH QUESTION? Here the answer is the return of Jesus and “the end of the age.” Clue number 1 is that Jesus explicitly says so. “For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the *coming of the Son of Man*” (Verse 27). It is helpful to note however that there are also other reasons to think this. Verse 29’s language points us to “the end of the age” with the proclamations that the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light. The whole world will “see the Son of Man coming on the clouds” (verse 30), and the gathering of the elect in verse 31 makes us think of Revelation 4, 7 and 20. In other words, as certain as I felt that the previous passage was NOT talking about the end of the world, I am even more certain that this passage is! This is a good place to start.

DISCUSS: In terms of timing, why is it important to understand that this passage is about the end of the age?

Understanding that this is talking about the return of Jesus, we can turn our attention to the difficulty that the word “immediately” brings. The problem can be stated directly this way: it has been 2000 years since Jesus said these things, how can that ever be “immediate”? There are two answers that I think can help us think through this. The first relates to what we call “prophetic foreshortening”. Oftentimes, because the prophet is looking to the future, the events that they see are, from their point of view, right next to each other. However, because their point of view is limited to a specific place and time, there are valleys in between these things. The picture is like looking at a mountain range from far away then realizing as you approach one mountain that the next is further off than you thought. Thus Jesus can say that these things are “immediate” because from where he is standing they are right next to each other, but from being on the other side of the mountain we realize the great valley in between.

DISCUSS: What do you think of this explanation? What are its strengths and weaknesses?

But the final thought focuses actually on the word “Immediately” itself. While it usually does mean “right next to” or “with no delay” it can also mean “as the next thing”. In other words, what the word can (and I think does) mean here is not immediately in terms of its happening NOW and more in terms of its happening NEXT. If we were to lay out God’s whole sovereign plan for the world it would go something like this: Creation, Covenant with Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham... (there are a lot of things here) ... Jesus comes, Jesus dies, Jesus resurrected, Jesus ascended, The Holy Spirit is sent, Jesus returns! By saying “immediately” Jesus is placing us at a particular place in the timeline. Specifically we are on the place where the only thing left to happen is that he will return. When we hear this immediately our thought should not first be “when” but rather rest that his plan is unfolding and Our King is returning!

DISCUSS: Why is this understanding of the word “immediately” helpful? What lessons can we learn from this?