



Small Group notes: Luke 21:29-34, Living On Mission

Opening Discussion: If you were to write a purpose statement for you life to help you stay “on mission”, what would that purpose statement be in one sentence?

- Christ's prophetic warnings were never meant to cause fear, but confidence and motivation to live on mission.
- [29] And he told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. [30] As soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near. [31] So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. [32] Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place. [33] Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.
- We see here in this passage the three-light view of Christ's prophecy!
 - **Fog Lights: his followers needed to recognize the season they were in. Jesus was with them and would be departing soon. (Vs. 29-31)**
 - Jesus used the illustration of trees and seasons. This is a great visual for us as we watch the leaves change color. We know that fall is approaching, which is important in GA because it is still so blooming hot! Jesus was looking at the fig trees about to bloom in the early summer. That would make sense as we know that passover and resurrection Sunday took place in the spring of that year.
 - **Low Beams: his followers they were going to have to endure all that Jesus had warned them about. (Vs 32 in reference to vs 5-28)**
 - This was a clear prediction that the people he was speaking to would experience what he was speaking about! Yet, these people did not get the privilege of witnessing his physical return, only the arrival of the Holy Spirit. (Don't diminish how special that was, but it wasn't what they were hoping for.)

- What does the word generation mean in Christ's teaching here? We know that Jesus has not yet returned. The word generation here is the greek word genea.¹
 - Philip Ryken has proposed that there are three ways the word genea is used in scripture:²
 - 1. Generation is used for an ethnic group. (Luke 11:50-51; Matt. 11:16; 12:39)
 - 2. Generation is sometimes used to describe a group of people with who share a common spiritual condition. (Gen. 6:11-12; 7:1; Ps. 14:5)
 - 3. Generation is most often used for immediate ancestry of a certain time.

Discussion: Take some time to freely conjecture how you would interpret these statements. Why would you interpret in that way?

Discussion: Every generation has looked at the prophecy of Christ's return as being for them. Is this right? How do we remain motivated to keep anticipating Christ's return?

- When we are unclear on a Biblical interpretation, it is best to give space for every interpretation that fits the rest of scripture and conversely doesn't go against any scripture. This means that when it comes to prophecy such as this, the fog light, low beam and high beam approach gives us the best and safest hermeneutic. Jesus was speaking to them, and he was speaking to us!
 - Another example of this way of reading scripture is with Matthew 16:18
 - [18] And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. (ESV)
 - The "rock" could be the earth starting from where they were, or Peter who's name was similar to the word "rock", or Jesus who we know is the chief cornerstone. All three would be correct in some way because the church is founded upon Christ, and it is being built around the world and it was begun through Peter and the other apostles!

¹ γενεά (strong's G1074)

² Philip Graham Ryken, *Reformed Expository Commentary: Luke Vol. 2* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Pub. 2009)437-438

- The key to these types of scriptures is utilizing other scripture to be sure we are not adding to or taking away from the true intent of the scripture we are trying to interpret.
- The apostle Peter was addressing this exact issue in his second letter!
- **2 Peter 3:4–6 [4] They will say, “Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.” [5] For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, [6] and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. (ESV)**
 - I spoke last week about seeing the sin cycle of humanity throughout history whenever we read prophecy Sin brings chaos! It always has and always will! Peter likened future judgments of the earth to past judgments of the earth, namely the Noahic flood. Biblical Prophecy continually articulates this cycle.
- **2 Peter 3:7–13 [7] But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. [8] But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. [9] The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.**
 - What feels incredibly long to us (over 2000 years) is a couple of days to the Lord. It’s like God just allowed for us to hear these things!
 - When you think about an eternity in heaven, what is a couple thousand years anyway?
 - Every day that God delays is a day that we have the opportunity to win more people to Christ.
 - Peter challenges us to live as though Jesus warned us yesterday and is coming back tomorrow!

Question: This truth about God’s view of time can also encourage us in our day to day life. How ?

- [10] But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. [11] Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, [12] waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! [13] But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. (ESV)
- Story about the night-stalker.
- Peter reminded the readers of his letter that when we get caught up with an earth that is going to dissolve we struggle to live lives of holiness and godliness. We have to remain focused on the eternal!
- Only one thing is eternal God's Word! (Vs 33)

Question: Can you think of other passages in the Gospels where Jesus reminds us not to get to wrapped up in or focused on the stuff of earth?

- High Beams: even though the earth will perpetually suffer the chaos of sin and eventually the final judgment of sin, God's word will remain through every generation, therefore we can trust it for the trial and tribulations we face today! (Vs 33)
- Ambrose believed that the fig tree illustration had a double meaning. He believed the fig tree represented the faith of believers, but also the "lewdness of unbelief."³
 - When you look at another passage where Jesus used a fig tree to make a point, it shows us that this was indeed a fair exegesis of Christ's statements here in Luke 21.
- Matthew 21:18–22 [18] In the morning, as he was returning to the city, he became hungry. [19] And seeing a fig tree by the wayside, he went to it and found nothing on it but only leaves. And he said to it, "May no fruit ever come from you again!" And the fig tree withered at once. [20] When the

³ Arther A. Just Jr. & Thomas C. Oden (editors) *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*. (Downers Grove, IL.: Inter Varsity Press. 2003) 321-22. Quoting St. Ambrose of Milan. *Exposition of the Holy Gospel According to Saint Luke with Fragments on the Prophecy of Isaia*s. Translated by T. Tomkinson. (Etna, Calif.: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 1998) 402

disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, “How did the fig tree wither at once?” [21] And Jesus answered them, “Truly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea,’ it will happen. [22] And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith.” (ESV)

Question: are there any other lessons that can be learned from the illustrations of the un-productive or soon to be flowering fig tree?

- The implication for those Jesus was speaking to becomes the application for us! This helps us process more fully Jesus’ next statements:
- [34] **“But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. [35] For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. [36] But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”**
 - Peter will have remembered these very words of Jesus as he wrote the statements we just read from his second epistle.
 - To summarize vs 34 in today’s vernacular: “Check yourself before you wreck yourself!”
 - Vs 34 is the application of Christ’s prophecy for us!
 - I always find it interesting that someone will inevitably say “watch it” or “be careful” after I have already tripped on a step or curb. I needed that warning a few seconds earlier, before I tripped!
 - Jesus is graciously warning us to live on mission before he returns. That was an applicational statement for his context, and it is still an application for us today!
 - **Jesus gave two imperatives in these verses:**
 - **1. Watch yourself, or your heart will lead you to despair and you will seek to comfort your despair in unhealthy ways.**
 - **2. Stay awake, or you will struggle to pray and depend on God for strength.**

- Let me repeat that both people and churches deconstruct their faith because of two issues: injury and idolatry. Christ's warnings give us two different words that communicate the same idea: Despair and Distraction.
 - When we despair it is because we aren't remembering the hope of God's hesed.
 - When we are distracted it is because we aren't remembering the purpose of God's presence.
- Dead or dying churches are distracted and in despair. Both of these issues stem from Gospel Amnesia!

Discussion: talk about why despair (injury) and distraction (idolatry) cause churches to become dysfunctional.

- **[37] And every day he was teaching in the temple, but at night he went out and lodged on the mount called Olivet. [38] And early in the morning all the people came to him in the temple to hear him. (ESV)**
 - Jesus' followers had a strong sense of urgency to spend time with him, so much so that they were coming out every morning to hear him at the temple.
 - If Jesus offered to take a walk with you every morning, would you sleep in? That is not a hypothetical!
 - Every day is a battle to get into God's word and seek to hear from the Holy Spirit. When we pursue Christ through devotion, not only do we find ourselves more awake and watching without distraction, we also remember the truth we need to fight our despair.
 - You are actually the most powerful preacher in your life. You will say things to yourself no one else will say. What are you telling yourself? Is it the truth of the Gospel?
- David understood the importance of seeking God to overcome distraction and despair. I'd like to read this song as a reminder of the inner-voice we must use to our own souls, that we might watch ourselves and fight despair.
- Psalm 63 My Soul Thirsts for You, A Psalm of David, when he was in the wilderness of Judah.
 - **[1] O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. [2] So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. [3]**

Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. [4] So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands.

- **[5] My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips, [6] when I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night; [7] for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy. [8] My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me.**
- **[9] But those who seek to destroy my life shall go down into the depths of the earth; [10] they shall be given over to the power of the sword; they shall be a portion for jackals. [11] But the king shall rejoice in God; all who swear by him shall exult, for the mouths of liars will be stopped. (ESV)**

Discussion: share some ideas or ways to be consistent in our daily pursuits of time with Jesus.