

Session 12 Learn the Parable of the Fig Tree (Mt. 24:32-42)

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. I do not ask anyone to accept my views; rather I urge everyone to boldly challenge all the ideas that they hear from me. Refuse any that you cannot see in Scripture for yourself. I urge you to be like the Bereans who searched the Scriptures to see if the things that Paul said were so (Acts 17:10-11).
- B. Those who are living in the final generation of natural history need to know this. Two questions are often asked. First, ***can they know*** if they are living in that generation? Second, ***how will they know*** if they are living in the last generation? What are the signs? The good news is that there is much biblical information on this because Jesus wants His people prepared for His end-time purposes. Jesus would not tell us of the circumstances around His coming and then say no one could know it.

II. LEARN THE PARABLE OF THE FIG TREE: KNOW THE GENERATION OF HIS RETURN

- A. The apostles asked what sign would indicate the time of His coming (Mt. 24:3). Jesus gave three commands in Matthew 24:32-42. He commanded us to ***learn*** the parable of the fig tree (24:32), to ***know*** when His coming is near (24:33) and therefore to ***watch*** (24:42).
³“...And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?... ³²Learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. ³³So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near--at the doors! ³⁴Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. ³⁵Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words [these prophecies, etc.] will by no means pass away. ³⁶But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only... ⁴²Watch...you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. (Mt. 24:3, 32-42)
- B. ***Learn the parable from the fig tree (24:32)***: The lesson from a fig tree is easy to understand. A fig tree loses its leaves in wintertime. Its leaves *begin* to come forth in the spring, and figs become ripe in the summer. When we see the leaves sprout in the spring, we know the summer harvest is near. Thus, when the biblical signs of the times all take place, we know that the end of this age is near.
 - 1. The biblical signs of the times must occur in a way that commands global attention, making headline news, for them to function as a prophetic sign that has a clear message from God.
 - 2. As fig leaves signaling the summer can be seen by anyone who pays attention, in the same way, the events signaling the second coming will be obvious to anyone watching for them.
 - 3. Jesus made a loving statement in telling us how to interpret the signs of His coming. He was saying that when the earth is covered in the darkness and despair of winter, then the “leaves” begin to come forth with the promise of new life leading to the summer harvest.
 - 4. When His people see the biblical signs, they are to know that He is on the move. Though it looks like winter and that darkness will never end, the signs of the summer harvest begin to appear. The signs of the times give us hope and encouragement that Jesus’ coming is near.

- C. **When you see all these things (24:33):** “All these things” or the signs spoken of Matthew 24:4-28. There is only one generation in which God’s people will see **all** the future signs described in Matthew 24 and Luke 21 occurring at the **same** time making headline news on a global basis.
1. Jesus gave **12 negative sign trends** that will bring distress to the nations and indicate the generation of His return (Mt. 24:4-14; Lk. 21:11, 25). These trends include **deception** by false christs/prophets (Mt. 24:4-5, 11), **ethnic conflict** (Mt. 24:7), **economic warfare** (Mt. 24:7), **famines, pestilences, and earthquakes** (Mt. 24:8), **hatred of believers** (Mt. 24:9), **relational breakdown** in society (Mt. 24:10), **lawlessness**, or increased sin and rebellion (Mt. 24:12), **fearful sights** (Lk. 21:11), great signs in the **sky** and disturbances in the **sea** (Lk. 21:11, 25).
 2. Some of these trends have always existed, but in the end times they will have a distinct intensity that will make global headline news. They will constitute a prophetic sign with a message from the Lord that can be discerned by the Body of Christ worldwide.
 3. Now, for the first time in history, most of these trends and the developments leading to key end-time events are happening in an alarming measure at the same time on a global basis. For example, Israel had to become a nation before the abomination of desolation could occur.
 4. Jesus, the Man we love, gave His people much insight into what He considered to be the most important things to know about the generation in which He returns.
 5. The signs of the times tell those who are under siege that Jesus will return to rescue His people. The generation that sees “all these things” will be rescued (Mt. 24:30; Lk. 21:27). Israel was not rescued in AD 70 nor were “all these things” fulfilled in the first century.
 6. Had a first-century believer tried to apply a preterist understanding to Matthew 24, by the time he saw “all these things” it would have been too late for him to flee Jerusalem. Jesus told the first-century believers to flee Jerusalem when the siege *first* started (Lk. 21:20-21).
- D. **Know that it is near (24:33):** Jesus commanded one generation of believers to *know* that His return was near. It was the generation who would see all the things that He prophesied in Matthew 24.
- ³³**When you see all these things, know that it is near--at the doors! ³...This generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.... (Mt. 24:33-34)**
1. Believers are to recognize when these things *begin* in the generation Jesus returns (Lk. 21:28, 32). The end-time distress of nations will have a recognizable beginning, increase in intensity over a generation, and culminate at His return. *Unexpectedly*—those surprised by the increasing distress will be more vulnerable to fear (Lk. 21:26, 34).
- ²⁸**When these things *begin* to happen...lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near...³²this generation will by no means pass away till all things take place...³⁴Take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down...that Day come on you unexpectedly.” (Lk. 21:28-34)**
2. By observing the biblical signs of the times, believers who are alive in that generation are to know that it is the generation of Jesus’ return, yet without knowing the exact day or hour.

3. My opinion is that ***we may be in the early days of the generation in which Jesus will return.*** In other words, it is possible that there are people alive today who will see the return of Jesus. It could be the 20 year olds or the 2 year olds who may see His return—no one knows with certainty. This is by God’s design because He wants us to move forward by faith as we search the Word and live in deep connection and relationship with Him through the Spirit.
4. My opinions on this generation are based on *observation* of the biblical signs, not on personal *revelation* such as prophetic visions. We must insist that our faith be based on what the Bible says, not on personal revelations about the timing of His return.
5. Over 150 chapters in the Scripture have God’s end-time plan as the main subject. When we combine the prophecies in these chapters we get a fuller picture of biblical signs of the times.
6. Paul taught that the Church should know the times and seasons related to Jesus’ coming.
¹Concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you...⁴But you, brethren, are not in darkness [ignorance] so that this Day should overtake [come on you unexpectedly] you as a thief...⁶Therefore...let us watch. (1 Thes. 5:1-6)
7. It is essential for God’s people to have understanding in that hour so that they embrace what is right and refuse what is wrong. For example, a counterfeit justice and unity movement will emerge in that hour—the harlot Babylon will include global religious and economic agendas (Rev. 17-18). Some believers will embrace the agenda associated with the harlot Babylon or aspects of it because they do not know what the Scripture says about it.
8. What people believe will be an issue of life and death, not just theological debate. Do you have biblically-informed convictions about the significance and trends of the last generation?
⁶My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. (Hos. 4:6)
9. Israel’s unresponsiveness to Jesus was related to their not knowing the time of their visitation. He wept over Jerusalem because they did not respond rightly (Lk. 19:41-44).

E. ***This generation (24:34):*** This generation will not pass away till all these things take place.

1. A generation in Scripture may last up to 100 years—the Lord spoke to Moses of Israel’s captivity in Egypt as lasting 400 years or 4 generations (Gen. 15:13-16).
2. The time referred to as *this generation* is the generation in which “all these things” take place. Some of “these things” had a partial fulfillment when Rome destroyed Jerusalem in AD 70.
3. It is clear that the fullness of what Jesus prophesied will not be happen until the end of the age. Other uses of the phrase “this generation” in Matthew (11:16; 12:41, 42, 45; 23:36) refer to Jesus’ contemporaries. This is determined from each contexts, not from the phrase by itself. Thus if the contextual factors in Matthew 24 do not refer to AD 70, then it points to the future.
4. Matthew 24 speaks of a *divine rescue* of those under siege at the end of the age by Jesus’ coming (24:15, 29-31), which did not happen in the Roman siege of AD 70 (Lk 21:20-21).

- F. **My words will not pass away (24:35):** Heaven and earth will pass away, but Jesus' words will not pass away. It may have seemed different for the apostles to believe that all these signs would occur in one generation (Mt. 24:34). Jesus compared the reliability of His prophetic words in Matthew 24 to the reliability and durability of heavens and earth (Mt. 24:35).
1. The emphasis on Jesus' words in verse 35 is not on His general teachings, but on the reliability of His prophetic words given in Matthew 24.
 2. Paul taught that the form of this world is destined to pass away in the future (1 Cor. 7:31).
³¹For the form of this world is passing away. (1 Cor. 7:31)

III. LIKE THE DAYS OF NOAH: UNAWARE OF LIVING IN A PROPHETIC GENERATION

- A. Jesus' main message here is sometimes missed—that people alive in the generation He returns could understand the prophetic significance of that time frame, but *many will not* (Mt. 24:36-42). Here Jesus implied that most of the people living in the generation of His return will not know it. The secondary application is that the generation will be violent like Noah's and immoral like Lot's.
*³⁶But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.
³⁷But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. ³⁸For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, ³⁹and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. ⁴⁰Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. ⁴¹Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. ⁴²Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. (Mt. 24:36-42)*
- B. **The day and the hour (24:36):** But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels, but only the Father. God could prophetically reveal the timing of Jesus' return to His servants, but He chose to leave the specific day and hour unknown *so that* His people must cultivate a heart of faith with hunger to know His heart and to walk closely with Him in that generation. Jesus emphasized that His people would not know the day or hour of His return (Mt. 24:39, 42, 44, 50; 25:13).
- C. It is ironic that this qualifier to the command to *know* the generation is used as an argument *against knowing* the generation. Many use this verse to justify their unfamiliarity and lack of study of biblical prophecy. They use this passage in the opposite way that Jesus intended it in its context.
- D. **Days of Noah:** The majority were unaware of what would happen even in light of Noah's preaching (2 Pet. 2:5). They went about engaged in the ordinary activities of daily life completely unaware of the significance of what would happen in their generation. The surprise of Noah's flood parallels the lack of understanding that the majority will have in the most significant hour of human history.
⁵[God]...did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah...a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly... (2 Pet. 2:5)
- E. Noah and his family prepared for many years without knowing the specific day or hour.
⁷By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household... (Heb. 11:7)