

Luke 21:25-36 The Parables of Jesus

As Jesus and the disciples were leaving the Temple Mount, one of them remarked about how beautiful the buildings were with the rich adornments from gifts given. Jesus replied that not one stone would be left on another: "As for these things that you see, the days will come when there will not be one stone left upon another that will not be thrown down" (Luke 21:6). This answer shocked them to the core, so they questioned Him: "And they asked him, "Teacher, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?" (Luke 21:7). In talking about every stone of the temple being thrown down, Jesus was prophesying about the destruction of the temple by Rome that happened approximately thirty-seven years later in 70 A.D. (vs. 20-24). Every stone pulled down was fulfilled when the temple was set on fire. All the temple gold melted into the cracks in the stones resulting in the stones being separated to get the gold for the conquering Roman army.

The Signs of the Times

Jesus went on to answer their question as to the sign that would precede His Second Coming:

²⁵"There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. ²⁶People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. ²⁷At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. ²⁸When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." ²⁹He told them this parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees. ³⁰When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. ³¹Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near (Luke 21:25-31).

In His talk in Luke 21, Jesus shared prophetically with His disciples concerning things of the future, an address that has become known as the Olivet Discourse, also found in Matthew 24 and Mark 13. Matthew writes that the conversation took place on the Mount of Olives (Matthew 24:3), hence the name the Olivet Discourse.

To understand the verses concerning the Parable of the Fig Tree (vs. 29-36), we need to look at the context. The preceding verses of this chapter in Luke give us a prophetic word of the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jewish people for the last 1,900 years. Jesus also talked about the last days of this evil age culminating in the return of Christ (Luke 21:8-11 and also verses 25 to 36). There will be signs in the sun, moon, and stars, and whole nations will be in anguish on the earth. The people of the nations will be perplexed because of the problems and situations that leave the human race with no answers to the stressful situations they are confronted with (v. 25). Jesus said that their anguish and perplexity were due to the "roaring and tossing of the sea." This phraseology is often a picture of unrest and riots among people: "Woe to the many nations that rage—they rage like the raging sea! Woe to the peoples who roar—they roar like the roaring of great waters!" (Isaiah 17:12). Whatever happens on earth will cause men to "faint from terror" (Luke 21:26). The English New International Version uses the word faint to translate the Greek word *Apopsychō*. This Greek word means:

To depart life. To expire, die, breathe out one's life; to faint, swoon, and pass out. This word could refer to the heart losing courage and dying to fear (Luke 21:26), or it could mean literal fainting in the face of extraordinary and terrible events. The Scriptures describe a time so devastating that people will be overwhelmed with terror and acutely distressed by the dreadful spectacles around them.

Many will give up on life and commit suicide because of what the world is enduring. For others, there will be great stress and fear that will cause their hearts to fail literally. Hope will seem far away. When the world is at its darkest hour, the Lord Jesus will come. Jesus said: "At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory"²⁸When these things begin to happen, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near" (Luke 21:27-28).

Discuss with one another what the phrase these things mean in verse 28?

I believe the phrase these things refer to the various signs that will precede Christ's coming, the different signs of the times mentioned in verses 8-11 and, again, in verses 25-26. Those who believe in Christ are to encourage one another as we look for our Lord Jesus to come in the most extraordinary event in all human history. The coming of Christ will bring great terror for those who have not received God's gracious gift of salvation and mercy:

They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!" (Revelation 6:16).

Many will be deceived by the Antichrist, the world leader who will require all those living to receive a mark on their hands or foreheads, thus enabling them to buy or sell (Revelation 13:16-17). Those who accept this mark will hide in terror at the coming of the Lord. The Scriptures warn of eternal punishment for those carried along by Antichrist's deception:

⁹A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: "If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, ¹⁰he, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. ¹¹And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name." ¹²This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus (Revelation 14:9-12).

In the context of the things prophesied to happen on earth, we will now look at Luke 21:29-36 and try to understand what Jesus is saying with the Parable of the Fig Tree.

The Parable of the Fig Tree

We cannot determine the exact time of Christ's return, for the Lord Himself said that no man will know the day or the hour:

³²No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come (Mark 13:32-33).

Even Jesus, while He walked in human form on earth, was dependent on the Father for knowledge (John 8:38) and could not determine when these things would take place. We must not be concerned about the day or the hour, but those living with a heavenly view of things should be aware of the season of time pointing to the soon coming of our Lord. When we see the signs of the times happening, we are to encourage and build up one another in anticipation of the coming of the Lord.

Paul, the apostle, wrote about the coming of the Lord and the catching away (rapture) of God's people in this way:

¹⁶For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

Unfortunately, there is a chapter division that separates Paul's thoughts about Christ's coming and the events that lead up to it. The context of the beginning of chapter five is of the same topic:

¹Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, ²for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. ⁴But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. ⁵You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. ⁶So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. ⁷For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. ⁸But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. ⁹For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁰He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. ¹¹Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing (1 Thessalonians 5:1-11).

What group of people is meant by the phrase "them" in verse 3? Who are those not surprised in verse 4? What was Paul suggesting or implying by writing about "those who sleep?" (v. 7).

This phrase, "thief in the night," has been used in the wrong context many times. As Christians, I have often heard people say that we are not to know the time of the Lord's coming because He will come as a thief in the night. He will come when we least expect Him. This thought has been taken even further to suggest that it is non-productive to even talk about this subject since we cannot possibly know when it will be. When we take this passage as a whole, nothing could be further from the truth. God's people need to be watching, waiting, and encouraging one another, and they need to be aware of the signs. It is also helpful to consider the context as to why Paul wrote this passage to the Thessalonian church. Some were concerned because of the persecution they were enduring (2 Thessalonians 1:4). They were wondering if their suffering was the wrath of God and if they had missed the coming of Jesus for believers. Paul wrote a second letter to alleviate or ease their fears. Here's part of chapter two of his second letter:

¹Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers and sisters, ²not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by the teaching allegedly from us—whether by a prophecy or by word of mouth or by letter—asserting that the day of the Lord has already come. ³Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. ⁴He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God (2 Thessalonians 2:1-4).

There had been some communication by false prophecy or by letter that gave rise to their fear of missing the snatching away (the Rapture) of the saints (v. 2). Paul answered by writing this second letter to the Thessalonians. Paul's response to the question was that three things would happen before the Lord's coming. The three things are as follows:

1) A falling away, apostasy, or rebellion of many who have never given their lives to Christ (2 Thessalonians 2:3);

2) The man of lawlessness, elsewhere called Antichrist, will be revealed;

3) The man of lawlessness (the Antichrist) will sit in the temple of God, proclaiming himself as God (2 Thessalonians 2:4). This third event refers to a desecration of the temple, which the Lord Jesus called "the Abomination of Desolation" (Matthew 24:15). These are signs spoken of by Jesus as happening before summer comes (the coming of the Lord for His saints). When God's people see these things, He tells us to lift up our heads for our redemption draws near (Luke 21:28). By using the word "redemption," we believe Christ is talking about the snatching up of the saints, otherwise known as the Rapture.

There have always been false prophets setting dates for the coming of the Lord. Many cults have had their prophetic dates disproven only to arrange another time. We should not let this error blind us to the fact that Scripture tells us the warning signs that will herald Christ's return. We are to watch, wait, comfort, and encourage one another while we wait for the coming of the Lord. Instead, we find that exploring the prophetic Scriptures has become an unpopular topic and considered too controversial to study. After all, people reason, isn't it better to focus on what we can do today to be ready? There is a reason for everything in Scripture. God wanted to forewarn His people and reveal the signs of His coming.

Perhaps the enemy wants us to think of this topic as something only "certain types of people" talk about. One immediately calls to mind a person with a placard, "The End is Near." We all know that people will walk past that person, dismissing them as psychologically ill. The enemy of our souls does not want the Church to look ahead to this awesome event; he would rather us be fearful, easily manipulated, and easily controlled. We must be aware of the seasons and aware of Christ's coming.

The coming of the Lord is an event that is real and will someday take place. It can encourage us to know that He is coming and cause us to live our lives with eternal values in mind. We are not to be asleep, but instead, we are to be awake. We do not know the day or the hour of the Lord's coming, and if someone comes to you and says, "The return of Christ is to be on such and such a day," we are to be wary of that person's teaching. However, a season is noted by what we see around us. Usually, if someone is predicting a date, you can

bet that they will have a select group of followers who consider themselves to be elite and elect and want us to join their ranks! This kind of thing happened in 2011 with a group led by a man in Florida, USA. This man took out billboards all across America, claiming he knew the date that Jesus was coming. He was wrong. So, beware of anyone who sets specific dates. However, do not let that discourage you from learning about and being mindful of the Lord's coming because the signs are something for which we, as Christians, are to look.

Two Interpretations of the Parable of the Fig Tree

The Parable of the Fig Tree is an encouragement for us to watch for the signs of the times. There are two popular interpretations of the Fig Tree Parable.

The first interpretation concerns the nation of Israel. In this view, the fig tree is a symbol of the land of Israel. There is not much Scriptural evidence to support this view. I found only one verse concerning fig trees used to describe the nation of Israel:

When I found Israel, it was like finding grapes in the desert; when I saw your fathers, it was like seeing the early fruit on the fig tree (Hosea 9:10).

Those who hold to this interpretation believe that the establishment of the nation of Israel in 1948 and growing in territory through five successive wars (1948, 1956, 1967, 1973, and 1982) is compared to the leaves sprouting before summer, i.e., summer being the picture of the Second Coming of Christ. In that view, the Israeli need for defensive borders has led her to secure the Golan Heights from Syria in the North East of the country, the West Bank of the Jordan, Southern Lebanon, the Gaza Strip, and the Sinai Desert from Egypt. Much of this territory has been given back to Egypt in the present state of affairs (May 2022). If this interpretation is correct, why then did Jesus mention the phrase, "and all the trees?" (Luke 21:29).

The second interpretation, which is the one this writer believes, is that just as new leaves and new growth on a deciduous tree ("the fig tree and all the trees") is a sign that spring is here and summer is soon to arrive, in the same way, when you see the signs of the times taking place (vs. 8-11, and 25-26), we will know the coming of Christ is soon to take place. Jesus verifies this thought using the phrase "these things" twice in verses 31-32. This parable encourages God's people who are enduring some of the difficult times mentioned. We'll know that when we see these things happening, the Kingdom of God, the full manifestation of the righteous rule and reign of the Lord Jesus Christ over the earth, will soon be complete and evil called to account.

Do you believe that we live in the season when we will see these things come to pass? What events have you witnessed in the news that could be described as signs of the "leaves sprouting?"

What Did Jesus Mean by Speaking About A Generation That Will Not Pass Away?

³²"Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. ³³Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away (Luke 21:32-33).

Some say that the words this generation mean the Jewish nation and that Jesus is saying that even though Israel will go through difficult times as a people group, they will survive and not "pass away." Others say that those listening to His words as He was sitting there on the Mount of Olives would not pass away until He came again. However, history shows us that could not be true. Although it seems clear that the early disciples anticipated seeing the Lord's return in their lifetime, I can't go along with the belief that the kingdom of God is here in its full manifestation.

Another interpretation is that a "generation" is a period lasting forty years. This view does have some credibility because we know that the Israelites wandered in the desert for forty years and Moses, who wrote the book of Numbers, called them a generation:

The LORD's anger burned against Israel and he made them wander in the desert forty years, until the whole generation of those who had done evil in his sight was gone (Numbers 32:13).

Those holding that view believe that the generation that will witness the recapture of the city of Jerusalem (which happened in 1967) will also see the coming of Christ. Some say that the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled because Jerusalem is under the sovereignty of the State of Israel and that we are that generation. Here's the Scripture:

Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (Luke 21:24).

This writer does not believe the times of the Gentiles have been fulfilled because the Temple Mount is still under the domination of the Gentiles. In 1967, when Moshe Dayan, the Jewish general, recaptured the Western Wall, also known as the Wailing Wall, from Muslim hands, the Temple Mount was allowed to stay under Gentile Muslim dominion.

My view is that Jesus is saying that the generation of people who see the signs of the times will also be the same generation that sees the fulfillment of all these things. Christ wants us to have eyes open to what is going on in the world, and as we look at the fulfillment of things written about in the Scriptures, we are to focus on what has real value: Christ and the people He loves. The end times will usher the Church into greater intimacy with Christ, pushing back the darkness around them. Isaiah the prophet wrote of a time future to him, a time, which I believe, is just around the corner and, to a degree, is already here. He warned about a time of darkness, i.e., thick spiritual darkness that will permeate the earth, but the light of the Messiah (Christ) shining in His people will be amid this terrible darkness. Here's his prophecy:

¹Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. ²See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you (Isaiah 60:1-2).

Warnings to Watch (Luke 21:34-36)

³⁴"Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap. ³⁵For it will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man" (Luke 21:34-36).

The warning is to be careful. The King James Version says, "Take heed to yourselves." Here we are encouraged to take care of the central core of our lives, our hearts. The dark world in which we live has a way of shaping our inner character away from intimacy with our Lord Jesus. We can be "weighed down with dissipation" (Greek word Kraipalē which means to suffer a headache due to alcoholic drinks and carries the meaning of dizziness and staggering). It speaks of one feeling like the only way to cope with life's pressures is to try and forget our present circumstances and focus on activities that will desensitize us.

Where do you turn when under pressure and anxiety? What type of activities help you cope when you are under stress?

The anxieties of daily living can quickly dull the spirit of a man or woman. There are different ways people choose to handle pressure. For some, the demands of living in this dark world lead to greater devotion and dependency on the Lord. Others will be like the ostrich that hides its head in the sand, seeking escape. When this world weighs you down, let it be something that drives you to Christ! "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7).

The Day of the Lord will close on many unexpectedly like a trap (Luke 21:34). Many will hear the message of God's love and mercy and will put off the decision to turn to Christ for His forgiveness. The word picture is of a trap sprung unexpectedly over an animal or a bird. Many people do not realize a closing time to this period of God's grace. The day of God's grace will close unexpectedly, and they will be left outside, thus having to pay the penalty for their sin themselves. It will be a tragic scene. Matthew's gospel records Jesus as saying something further about this time:

²¹"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²²Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' ²³Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!' (Matthew 7:21-23).

The enemy of our souls wants to lull us into the deception that we can always wait, that time is on our side. He would like us to believe that we still have tomorrow to make our peace with God, put things right with our brother, or make necessary changes in our lives to help us draw closer to God. The enemy seeks to keep us bound by our senses to the things of this world. The truth is, none of us knows how long we have. The promise of salvation is only for today: For he says, "In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you. I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2).

Those who have accepted and have acted upon God's free offer of salvation should always be on watch (Luke 21:36).

What does it mean to watch and wait? What practical things can we do to watch and wait?

The Greek verb *agrupneo*, translated as "watch," literally means to keep oneself awake, alert to threatening danger, and be on guard. The word picture is of a soldier standing guard to ward off an attack and alert the rest of the troops. Those who are awake to the things going on in the world should awaken their fellow soldiers, and those that are, as yet, civilians are to become soldiers of Christ. Our God is not willing that any should perish but that all may turn their lives over to Him (2 Peter 3:9). How full of joy we will be when in an instant, we will be changed in the twinkling of an eye (1 Corinthians 15:51). Paul tells us that the Lord will come down from heaven with a loud command (how the enemies of our God will tremble), and we who are still alive will be caught up together with those in Christ who have already gone to heaven. We will meet the Lord in the air with those who have departed in Christ, and so we will be with the Lord forever (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). God wants each of us to be able to look forward to this day and welcome His coming. He paid the price for us to be delivered from judgment through His death on the cross. If you have never invited the Lord Jesus to rule over your life, there is no better time than the present. With a heart of sincerity and honesty before God, tell Him:

Prayer: Father, I need you. I have lived my life in my way, and I now want you to be my Lord and Savior. I believe that Your Son, Jesus Christ, died for my sin and took my place by dying on the cross. Please forgive my sin. Forgive me also for the times that I have sinned against others. I turn around and give You ownership of my life and ask You to lead and guide me. Amen.

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