

## 57. The Parable of the Fig Tree

Luke 21:29-38

Luke: A Walk Through the Life of Jesus

This is our third study in Luke 21 on what is known as the Olivet Discourse. This talk by Jesus is also found in Matthew 24 and Mark 13. Matthew mentions that Jesus' message takes place on the Mount of Olives (verse 3) as they look westward and below them to the Temple Mount. The view is spectacular from this vantage point. It was here that Jesus talked to the disciples about the destruction of Jerusalem and the signs of His coming at the end of the age. To understand the Parable of the Fig Tree (verses 29-38), it will be helpful to have some context for what Jesus has been saying in the last few verses before the parable and the verses that follow. Verses 25 to 28 have given us a dark picture of the last days of the end of the age culminating in the return of Christ. There will be signs in the sun, moon, and stars, and on the earth whole nations will be in anguish and perplexity with problems and situations that leave humanity with no way out. The leaders of the nations will be perplexed (verse 25). Whatever is happening on earth at that time will cause men to "*faint from terror*" (verse 26). The Greek word *Apopsychō* is translated using the English word *faint*, which means:

To depart life. To expire, die, breathe out one's life; to faint, swoon, and pass out. This could refer to the heart losing courage and dying to fear (Luke 21:26), or it could mean a literal fainting in the face of awesome 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. They will suffer emotional and psychological devastation in anticipation of what is coming upon the earth because they are unprepared to face the coming of God.<sup>1</sup>

When the world is at its darkest hour, the Lord Jesus will come. "***At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory***" (Verse 27). The Lord wants us to understand something of the timing; otherwise, why would He say the words, "At that time?" He could have left that phrase out. We are not to be unduly worried about the day or the hour (Matthew 24:36), but we are to understand the season and the things that will precede His coming. For those who are living in that time of darkness and persecution, all believers should know the signs that precede His coming. As that day approaches, we are to lift our heads from that which is occurring on the earth (Luke 21:28) and to look with excitement and anticipation for our Lord to come and set things right and to receive us to Himself.

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)

The terror of the cosmic signs and the stars falling from the sky (Revelation 6:13) will cause many to look for a place to hide from the wrath of the Lord. Before Christ's coming, many will be deceived by Antichrist. This man will seek to control all those living on earth and cause them

<sup>1</sup> *Key Word Study Bible*, AMG Publishers, Lexical Aids, Page 1952.

to receive a mark on their hand or forehead enabling them to buy or sell: <sup>16</sup>"It also forced all people, great and small, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hands or on their foreheads, <sup>17</sup>so that they could not buy or sell unless they had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of its name" (Revelation 13:16-17). Without the mark, normal commerce will be difficult. One will not be able to sell or buy anything except *via* digital technology, for there will be no cash. All money will be digitized and able to be tracked. In other words, all buying and selling will be tracked and controlled by computers by this world leader. I believe that part of receiving the mark, when it is set in motion, will be an acknowledgement that Antichrist is god and acceptance of his complete rule. They that receive this mark will be those who will hide in terror at the coming of the Lord. The Scriptures warn of eternal punishment for those who are carried along by Antichrist's deception:

<sup>9</sup>A 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, <sup>10</sup>he, 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. <sup>11</sup>And 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." <sup>12</sup>This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus (Revelation 14:9-12).

Question 1) When you read verses about the end of the age, what concerns do you have? Is this a negative or a positive concept to you?

### **The Parable of the Fig Tree**

It is in the context of the things that are happening on earth that we will now look at verses 29-36. We'll go a few verses at a time. I believe the Lord Jesus is talking about the various signs that will precede his coming, i.e. those that are mentioned in verses 8-11 and, again, in verses 25-26. The Parable of the Fig Tree relates to the timing of the end of the age.

<sup>29</sup>He told them this parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees. <sup>30</sup>When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. <sup>31</sup>Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near" (Luke 21:29-31).

As we have said, we cannot determine the exact time, the day, or the hour of Christ's return, but we are clearly told that those who are living their lives with a heavenly awareness should know the season and be aware of the things happening on the earth that point to the soon coming of the Lord. So, although we cannot set dates, we should be aware of the signs of the times. Those who have signed on to Antichrist's kingdom and are part of his new economy will be totally deceived. To them, the Lord Jesus will come like a thief in the night. He will not be expected by those living outside of Christ. When He comes, they will look for places to hide, but to the believers, it will be a different situation. They will be aware of what is happening.

Paul the Apostle wrote to the Thessalonian believers to make them aware that there would be certain signs of the times that would encourage them as the time drew near (2 Thessalonians

2:1-4). He also wrote that those that are in Christ will not be surprised at Christ's coming, for they will be very much awake as to the signs and Christ's coming. Paul wrote:

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

Those who are unbelievers are spoken of in verses 2-3, while those who have received the light of life are not in darkness that this day should surprise them like a thief because they belong to the day. Like Paul's letter to the Thessalonians, The Parable of the Fig Tree is an encouragement for us to watch the signs of the times. Let's try to understand what Jesus is saying with this parable. There are two popular interpretations of the parable of the Fig Tree.

1) The first concerns the nation of Israel. In this interpretation, the fig tree is a symbol of the nation of Israel. There is not much Scriptural evidence to support this theory, for Israel has been mostly symbolized as a vine (Isaiah 5:7). For those that hold to this interpretation, an example to them is that Israel's early fathers were likened to early figs on the fig tree:

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).

In this view, the nation of Israel (established in 1948 and growing in territory through five successive wars, viz. 1948, 1956, 1967, 1973, and 1982) is like the leaves of a fig tree sprouting before summer, i.e. summer being the picture of the Second Coming of Christ. The leaves growing on the fig tree resemble the Israeli need for defensive borders because of the many enemies around her. Since the establishment of the nation of Israel, she has secured territory on the Golan Heights from Syria in the North East of the country, the West Bank of the Jordan River, Southern Lebanon, the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Desert from Egypt. In the present state of affairs (July 2017), much of this territory has been given back. If this interpretation is correct, why then did Jesus mention the phrase "and all the trees" (Verse 29)? If the nation of Israel was to be a sign of the times, why not use the analogy of the vine, which was well known as the main symbol of Israel. There was a huge golden vine above the gate of the Temple with grape clusters as large as a man.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/14304-temple-of-herod>

2) The second interpretation, which is the one I personally believe, is that, just as new leaves and new growth occur on a deciduous tree, such as a fig tree and other like trees, it is a sign that spring is here and summer is close at hand. In this view, when you see the signs of the times taking place (Luke 21:8-11, and 25-26), you will know that the coming of Christ is soon to take place, symbolized here as summer. I believe this interpretation to be verified by Jesus' usage of the words *these things* in verse 28 and again in verse 31. When you see *these things* happening, you'll know that summer is near (the coming of Christ).

Question 2) What events have you witnessed in the news that could be described as signs of the "leaves sprouting?"

The extreme nature of the terrible things happening at this time is a sign of the soon-coming King Jesus, the Heir to the throne of David. I believe this parable to be encouragement to His people who are enduring through some of the difficult times that are mentioned. Let's now give our attention to verses 32-33.

### What is meant by "This Generation?"

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

Verse 32 is a difficult verse to unpack. How do we interpret what the words *this generation* means? 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." Another view is 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. He has not yet appeared visibly to all the earth, and every eye has not seen Him (Revelation 1:7). The world is not yet under His dominion (Daniel 2:34-35). Another interpretation is that a generation is a period lasting forty years. This does have some credibility, for 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).

Some say that the generation that sees the recapture of the city of Jerusalem (which happened in June 1967) will also see the coming of Christ (see previous study, verses 12-28). Those that hold to that view see a forty-year period that began with the end of the times of the Gentiles, which they believe happened when Jerusalem was recaptured in 1967:

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

Those who think along those lines see the year 2007 as being a crucial prophetic year (forty years being a generation from the recapture of Jerusalem from the Gentiles in 1967). I personally do not yet see the Times of the Gentiles fulfilled because the Temple Mount is still under the domination of the Gentiles. My view is that Jesus is simply saying that the generation of people who see the signs of the times will also be the same generation who will see the fulfillment of all these things. He wants us to have eyes that are open to what is going on in the world, and as we see the things written about in the Scriptures being fulfilled, we are to focus on that which has real value: Christ and the people He loves.

The end times will usher the Church into greater intimacy with Christ, thus pushing back the darkness that exists around them. Isaiah the prophet wrote of a time that was future to him, a time which I believe is just around the corner for us. He talks about darkness as a thick spiritual darkness that will pervade the earth, but during this terrible darkness will be the light of the Messiah (Christ) shining in His people. He says:

<sup>1</sup>Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. <sup>2</sup>See, 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).

Let's now turn to the next verses in Luke's Gospel:

### **Verses 34-36 Warnings to Watch.**

<sup>34</sup>Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. <sup>35</sup>For it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth. <sup>36</sup>Be 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" <sup>37</sup>Each day Jesus was teaching at the temple, and each evening he went out to spend the night on the hill called the Mount of Olives, <sup>38</sup>and all the people came early in the morning to hear him at the temple (Luke 21:34-38).

The admonition is to be careful (v. 34). The English King James Version says, "Take heed to yourselves." During the difficult days ahead, we are encouraged to take care of the central core of our lives, i.e. our hearts. Behind this dark world in which we live are invisible evil beings that have a diabolical plan to shape and mold the inner core of our lives away from intimacy with our Lord Jesus. Their plan is that we may be "weighed down with dissipation" (v. 34). The Greek word *Kraipalē*, translated into the English word *dissipation*, means to suffer a headache due to alcoholic drinks; it carries also 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. We also see a reference to drunkenness and the anxieties of life.

Question 3) To what things do you see men and women turning that desensitizes them? When you are under pressure and anxiety, what do you do to cope with stress?

The spirit of a man or woman can be easily dulled by the anxieties of daily living. There are different ways that people choose to handle pressure. For some, the pressures of living in this dark world will lead them to a greater devotion and dependency on the Lord and on the truth and comfort we find in His Word. Others are 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 second part of verse 34 has some words of warning concerning the time of watching and waiting that Jesus knew His followers would experience. This is like the Parable of the Ten Virgins in Matthew 25. In the Parable of the Ten Virgins, five missed the call to enter the wedding with the bridegroom. The reason they missed the call was because they were not ready and waiting! (Matthew 25:12). The passage finishes with the warning to **“keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour” (Matthew 25:13).**

We are told in Chapter 21, verse 34, that the day of the Lord will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth and that it will close on many unexpectedly like a trap. To those who hold to the view that all these verses were fulfilled at the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., I don't see in history that it came on **“all who dwell on the face of the whole earth” (v. 35).** This will be a worldwide deception to try to force everyone to worship Antichrist before Christ comes. We must do all we can to reach as many as we can with the warnings of Scripture. 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 being sprung over those deceived, like an animal or a bird that is quite unaware. Many people do not realize that there is 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, themselves having to pay the penalty for their sin. It will be a tragic scene. Matthew's Gospel records Jesus as saying something further about this time:

**<sup>21</sup>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. <sup>22</sup>Many 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? <sup>23</sup>Then I will tell them plainly, “I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!” (Matthew 7:21-23).**

These will be good people who have attended church and even helped in ministry, but the door will be shut like a trap sprung unexpectedly with the words echoing through the ages yet future: **“I never knew you!”**

The enemy of our souls wants to lull us into the deception that we can always wait, that time is on our side. Satan would like us to believe that we will always have tomorrow to make our peace with God, or to put things right with our brother, or to make necessary changes in our lives that will draw us closer to God. Our enemy, the devil, seeks to keep us bound by our senses to the things of this world. The truth is that we do not know how long we have. We are not guaranteed any amount of time. The promise of salvation is 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).

Question 4) What does it mean to be "always on the watch?" (v. 36.) How can we do this in a practical way? What are we told to pray?

Those of us who have accepted and acted on God's free offer of salvation should always be awake and not lulled into spiritual sleepwalking (v. 36). The Greek verb *agrupneo*, translated "watch," literally means to keep oneself awake, to be on the alert as to threatening danger, or to be on guard. The word picture is of a soldier standing as a sentry to guard and ward off an attack while also alerting the rest of the troops. Those who are awake to the things going on in the world are to awaken their friends and relatives that they also may become aware to the signs of the times and the soon-coming of the King. Our God is not willing that any perish, but that all may come to turn their lives over to Him (2 Peter 3:9).

How full of joy we will be when in an instant, in the twinkling of an eye, we will be changed (1 Corinthians 15:51). Paul tells us that the Lord will come down from heaven, and with a loud command (how the enemies of our God will tremble), we who are still alive will be caught up together with our loved ones who have already gone to heaven. We will meet the Lord and our loved ones in the air, and so we will be with the Lord forever (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). Imagine the joy of seeing Christ come and setting things right. The suffering of this world will be gone. The Lord wants each of us to be able to look forward to this day and to welcome His coming. He has paid the price for each of us to be delivered from judgment through His substitutionary death on the cross.

If you have never invited the Lord Jesus to take ruler ship over your life, then there is no better time than the present. With a heart of sincerity and honesty before God, here is a prayer you can pray:

Father, I need You. I have lived my life my own way, and now I want You to be my Savior and Lord of my life. I believe that Your Son, Jesus Christ, died for my sins and took my place by dying on the cross to pay for my sins. Forgive me for all my sins. Forgive me for the times I have sinned against others. I turn around now and give You ownership of my life and ask You to lead and guide me. Thank You for your forgiveness, and teach me to be the person You want me to be. Amen.

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