

THE LATTER PARABLES OF JESUS

Message 11

Scripture: Matthew 24:32-41

INTRO: Before I begin this morning, I want to give you a bit of warning. In the next while, I want you to prepare yourselves to be very alert during the preaching and to be prepared to think. I trust you do not come to church to be fed Pabulum. A number in our former church, I understand, are glorying in the fact they are now getting salvation messages. They did not like being pushed to think and grow spiritually. They were tired of having to think in church and having sin pointed out to them. If you will understand, I am not talking about agreeing, but understand what I will preach in some of the following messages, you will have to stay awake and you will have to think. If you do not like to think Sunday morning, this is probably not the best church for you. Let me just mention, I love the doctrine of salvation, but Christians must advance past salvation. Sunday evenings I will deal with salvation in German, because of the audience for whom those messages are intended.

So, with that, we have come to a major shift in these parables. In my calculations, the first two parables we studied happened as Jesus was on the way to Jerusalem for the Passover. He went the long way around, coming up to Jerusalem, passing through Jericho. He then spent some of Friday and all of Saturday, the Sabbath, at Bethany, at Mary and Martha, and Lazarus' place. Then on Sunday, the first day of the week, was the triumphal entry, or Palm Sunday as we know it. Then on Monday, he cursed the fig and we viewed that as a parable. The third parable, and from there on all take place on the next day or two.

In these latter parables, the subject of our messages, the first three parables were given to the disciples. The next three were directed at the religious leaders. We finished with the parable of the wedding banquet. Let me briefly show you what happens between the third parable to the religious leaders, and the next six parables, of which the sixth is the last of the latter parables. The last parable we looked at was in Matthew 22:1-14. Right after this parable Jesus has a run-in with the Pharisees. Look now at 22:15 (read). Now look at verse 23 (read). The Sadducees were the liberals of the day, and the Scribes and Pharisees were the conservative traditionalists. And throughout this day, Jesus is dealing with these religious leaders. Then in chapter 23 we have the most scathing denunciation of the scribes

and Pharisees given by anyone to anyone in all the Bible. And it is given by Jesus to the religious leaders of the day. And I want you to look at how Jesus closes that passage in verses 37-39 (read).

All that brings us now to one of Jesus' five longer discourses in the book of Matthew. It is known as the Olivet discourse. That is because it is given from the Mount of Olives, overlooking Jerusalem. Let me show you a picture taken from somewhere near where Jesus and His disciples were when Matthew 24-35 were spoken. (PICTURE 1). And all six of the rest of the latter parables take place during this day and are found in Matthew 24-25.

Before we go to our next parable, let me just show you the major difference between the first 6 parables we looked at and the last six (Show slide 1). In this we have the general area around which the first six center, and then the general area around which the last six center. In this you will see that we will now be concentrating on what happens just before the end of the age.

FIRST SIX:

LAST SIX

-----OT-----|-----CHURCH AGE-----|---i---MILL----

Tribulation

G. 'The' Fig Tree (Matthew 24:32; Mark 13:28; Luke 21:29-30)

1. The Parable (24:32-41?)

So, let us go to our parable which is found in 24:32-41 (read). I trust you can appreciate how difficult the parables are that lie before us now. We have before us in chapters 24-35 six parables. All six are once more addressed to the disciples, as were the first three. And I wonder just how many of you have wondered what is meant by verse 34, which says, "Assuredly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things are fulfilled"?

Well, we have a very important topic before us this morning, and we do well to give very careful attention to the setting of this parable, because it forms the setting to all the rest of the parables. And each parable then adds to the setting of the next parable.

And so, for the rest of this message, we want to simply acquaint ourselves with the setting of these parables as found in Matthew 24:1-31.

2. The Setting (24:1-31)

So, to get the setting for this parable, we must begin in 24:1. What I plan to do is to briefly look at 24:1-31 in its units or in outline form. As I interpret these verses, there is an introduction in verses 1-3. Then we have the major things that happen during the Church age, before the tribulation begins. That is in verses 4-8. Then we have the events of the first half of the tribulation, in verses 9-14. Then in verses 15-31 we have the last half of the tribulation. There are two very clear time markers. They are verse 15, which happens in the middle of the tribulation, and verses 30-31, which mark the end of the tribulation. We will look at each of these sections now briefly.

Let me just mention that in the amillennialist view of eschatology, what 24:4=31 deals with is the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. I cannot take time to deal with that, but that simply does not fit the Biblical data here and elsewhere.

a. Introduction

The introduction to these last six parables begins with the introduction of verses 1-3 (read). When Jesus was dealing with the religious leaders, He was at the temple. It might have looked something like this (PICTURE 2: Picture of model temple). And the disciples came to show Him the buildings of the temple. The buildings of the temple were all the buildings surrounding the temple as you see in picture 3 (PICTURE 3). This is a model of Jerusalem and the temple that is set up in Jerusalem.

Albert Barnes makes this interesting comment: "Mark says, that they particularly pointed out the stones of the temple, as well as the buildings. 'In that temple,' says Josephus, the Jewish historian, 'were several stones which were forty-five cubits in length, five in height, and sixth in breadth'; that is, more than seventy feet long, ten wide, and eight high. These stones, of such enormous size,

were principally used in building the high wall on the east side, from the base to the top of the mountain. They were also, it is said, beautifully painted with variegated colours" end quote. It was said that he who had not seen Herod's temple had not seen a fine building. It was the best of the best. Several years ago when we were there we were given a tour of part of the temple wall that is way down underneath all the rubble. Let me show you some of those (PICTURES 4-10).

Now, let me point out to you what we are talking about. It says they showed Him the buildings of the temple. There were buildings all around the temple as we saw in the picture earlier.

Now look at the prophecy of verse 2 (read). I have told you already how Jerusalem was destroyed by Titus and not one stone was left on top of another. Next, notice in verse 3 that we have moved from the temple Mount, to the Mount of Olives. Let me show you what that looks like today (PICTURE 1 Leave picture up until next slide).

So, notice that the disciples came to Jesus as they sat on the Mount of Olives and they asked Him three questions. And the first question they asked is, "When will these things be?" And I ask you, when they asked about 'these things', what things were they asking about? Are they now asking about the throwing down of the stones He had told them about while they were at the temple? That seems most natural, but that, I think is not correct. Go to verse 25 (read). Now I don't want to take time to explain the original words used here, but He is not saying, "I have told you all these things before they happen." He is saying, "I told you these things earlier." And when was that? (Look at the picture). It was as they were walking from the temple through the city gate, down into the Kidron valley and up the Mount of Olives from which the picture is taken. And as they walked, He told them many thing that were going to happen. And now, as they are sitting on the mount of Olives, they said

to Jesus, "When will these things happen that You told us about as we were walking here?"

Next, I want you to notice that they asked Him three questions. One: When will these things be? Two: What will be the sign of Your coming? And three: What will be the sign of the end of the age. The Greek language here requires that these are three separate questions. The last two are not a repetition of the same thing. The careful student will compare this passage with the parallel passages in Mark and Luke, and note that they give only two questions and two answers.

Now it is my view that question number one, when will these things be? are answered in 4-31. What will be the sign of Your coming, I believe is answered in 24:32-25:30. And the question: What will be the sign of the end of the age, is answered in 25:31-46.

We want to look at Jesus' answer to question one, when will these things be? We are going to look at the first question to get the setting of our parables. We find this in verses 1-31.

b. Time before the tribulation

As I see it, Jesus describes the time before the tribulation in verses 4-8. We'll put up slide 2 so you can visualize this (SLIDE 2). The time before the tribulation will be a time of deception. We see this in verses 4-5 (read). Then it will be a time of national unrest according to verse 6-7a (read). Then it will be a time of natural unrest, that is unrest in nature. We see this in 7b (read). If you will study these just from 1948 until today you will see how these things are increasing phenomenally. For example, earthquakes alone have risen from 1 killer quake in 10 years to over 100 in the same time.

Now note verse 7. It says these are the beginnings of sorrows. Let me just say that the word 'sorrows' speaks of the beginning of birth pangs. If this is the beginning, you know then that much worse is to come.

c. Time from the beginning to the middle of the tribulation

After the beginning of sorrows, in verse 9, I see the beginning of the tribulation. Here we enter Daniel's 70th week. From here it will proceed until we come to another definite time marker. So let us read verses 9-14 (read). When you study the book of Revelation, one thing that is clear is that the first half of the tribulation will see many, many thousands of people become Christians; and many, many thousands will be martyred. The other thing that is evidenced here is that it will be a tremendous time of evangelism. And that is what we learn from the book of Revelation as well.

d. Time from the middle to the end of the tribulation

Now if you look at verse 15, very clearly we have come to the middle of the tribulation (read). It says that those who read are to understand, and I ask you, do you understand? Well, go to Daniel 9 (read 24-27). Notice verse 27 says that the antichrist will confirm a covenant for one week. That is Daniels 70th week, or the tribulation time of seven years. But notice, that in the middle of the week he breaks his covenant and he causes the sacrifice and offerings at the temple to cease. Oh my, how much needs to be said here.

But look now at what happens after this in Matthew 24:16-28 (read). Let me just point out verse 21-22 (read). Verse 21 tells us that the time entered now is a time so horrific as has never been before. That means the Jewish holocaust pales in comparison, and it was horrific beyond comprehension. And verse 22 says that unless those days were shortened no flesh would be saved. What does this mean? It means that if the Lord let this time go on without stepping in, mankind would wipe himself off the face of the earth. Nobody would be left alive. No flesh would be saved. That sounds like a nuclear war would take place if those days were not shortened.

It is then that we come to verses 29-31 (read). Again, we have a very clear time marker. We are at the end of the tribulation. As I interpret this section, He has just answered in precise chronological fashion the disciples first question: When will these things be? He has briefly told them what would happen from their time until the end of Daniel's 70th week, what would happen.

If I am correct in that, He will next answer the question, "...and what will be the sign of Your coming..."? And this He will answer, mostly in parable form in the next five parables. But before we consider that, I must give a most important explanation of a word found in our text.

So go back now to 24:3. Let us read the verse and take note of the word 'coming' (read). They said, "What will be the sign of Your coming?" That word 'coming' is the word 'parousia'. It comes from the words 'para', meaning 'with', and 'ousia', meaning 'being'. The key idea of this word is 'a being with', a presence. Its secondary meaning is the beginning part of being with. To be with someone, one must first go to be with that person. So there is the coming part, and the being with, part. In the NT this word has been translated 'coming' 22 times and 'presence', or being with, only twice. The reason for that is that most occurrences of this word emphasize the beginning of that presence which is the arrival time.

So in parousia, we have both the idea of the arrival and the continued presence. Vine's Dictionary says that in some instances the arrival is prominent; in others the conclusion of the presence, and at other times it is the time of being with that is prominent. I think, however, that it is the arrival or the continued presence that is in view in this word.

So, go now to Matthew 24:3 (read). Now it could be translated like this: What will be the sign of Your arrival, or Your presence? You see, when you are traveling somewhere, before you arrive there, there are signs telling you how far it is yet. And here is the question: What sign will there be that will

tell us that Your arrive or presence with us is near?

Now go to 24:30 and note the word 'coming' as we read the verse (read). Here it is not the word 'parousia'. It is the word 'erchomai'. It is the action of coming that is in view, not the presence. Look now at verse 39 (read). They did not know until the flood came, *erchomai*. That is the time, not of the presence of the flood, because by then they were drowned. It is the time when the flood is rising, it is in the process of coming. Now these two words, *parousia* and *erchomai* are found throughout the passages that deal with the return of Christ. In Matthew 24 the word 'parousia' occurs 4 times, while *erchomai* occurs 17 times. So it is most important to study carefully which word is used when the word 'to come' is used.

Now, no doubt, the Lord had explained about His return to the disciples when they made their way from the temple to the Mount of Olives. And when they sat on the Mount of Olives and they asked their three questions, they were related to what He had talked to them about on the way there.

So, turn now to 1 Thessalonians 4 (read 13-18). It says, "13 But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. 15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming (the Parousia or arrival to be present) of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. 16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore comfort one another with these words."

That is one of the clearest passages on the rapture, or the catching up of the Church there is

in the Bible. And in our parable, the Lord will now answer the disciple's question what the sign of His coming or presence will be.

3. Interpretation

So, before we seek to interpret this parable, let us read 24:32 first (read). We have seen the fig tree used in parables before, and we said that it refers to Israel. Mark and Luke both record this parable. Mark refers to the fig tree, but Luke says, "the fig tree and all trees." So what is particularly pointed out is the fig tree. And here is the earthly story. When you see the fig tree, or any tree for that matter, budding, then you know summer is near. That is all very clear to us since we have observed that many times.

Now, because we have interpreted in earlier parables what the fig tree pictures, we must now ask, what does the summer refer to? It says by the budding of the trees one knows summer is near. The budding of the tree here is a sign. A sign is given to tell you how near you are to something.

Well, Jesus interpreted the parable in verses 33-35 (read). Jesus said that just like when the fig tree buds, so also when you see all these things you know it is near. So, we must answer two questions. First, what did He mean by 'all these things'? And second, what does the pronoun 'it' in the phrase 'it is near' refer to? So we ask first, what did He mean by 'all these things'? He meant all the things He had told them in verses 4-31. They had asked, "When will these things be?" And He had given them these events of all these things in chronological order.

Second, what did He mean by the pronoun 'it' in the words 'it is near, at the very doors'? Some of your Bibles may indicate in the margin that the pronoun 'it' could be translated 'He is near.' So, when you see all these things you know He is near. What is in view is the answer to their second question. He has answered the first one. But now we have a second one, "What will be the sign of Your presence?" So He is saying, "When you see all these things, you know He is near, or His presence (it) is near."

Now, that adds another question to the ones asked already. The problem is this: when you see 'all these things', that includes verses 29-31 (read). Here is the problem, when you see Him coming, His coming is not near, then Christ's presence is not near, it is here.

Now let me show you something very important. Let me quote from some Bible studies many years ago. I wrote, "How then is one to understand these words? The word SEE in verse 32 is in the Greek aorist tense. Normally it is translated as the past tense but it signifies other things as well. It can indicate the beginning of an action and is quite often used like that. Mark 13:29 gives the very same tense, indicating when you see these things begin to come to pass then you know Jesus' return is near. In Luke's parallel account of 21:28 he uses the very words that the aorist tense here indicates." So, let us turn to Luke 21:28 (read).

So, what is the sign that indicates that Christ's presence is near? Well, it is when the things Jesus had told them 'begin' to come to pass. So we go to the beginning of the these things referred to. We find these in 24:4-8 (read). Here is what He is saying: Just like when the fig tree buds you know summer is near, just so when you see the things of verses 4-8, you know my presence is near! When you see all these things BEGIN to come to pass, you know my presence is at the very doors. And I ask you, are we there today? You heard the news this past week of Hurricane Patricia, and the massive earthquake in Afghanistan.

Let me give you one example, that of earthquakes. It was in my early years they said an earthquake could not happen in Alaska. We lived in central BC and felt the earthquake that happened there many years ago. Grant R. Jeffrey, in his book, "Apocalypse: The Coming Judgment of the Nations" said that until the year 1900 the world averaged about one killer quake every 10 years. About the time Israel became a nation, earthquakes began to increase significantly.

0-1900 approx. 1 every decade

1950-59 recorded 9 killer quakes

1960-69 recorded 13

1970-79 recorded 56

1980-89 recorded 74 killer quakes

At the time Jeffrey wrote the book he said it is estimated at the present rate of increase that 1990-99 will record 125 killer quakes. I do not know what the number is today, but I have read that those who check find that the earth is tremoring somewhere at all times. Today, the rocks are crying out. Nature is waiting expectantly.

If these things are the sign that Christ's coming is near, I ask you, are we there? Yes, and we have been for some time. You see, the things of verses 4-8 are not only happening right now, they are increasing. Furthermore, the things of verses 9-31 have not happened yet. They speak of the tribulation which is still future.

WARNING: If Time...

And so I ask you, if I am right that the things of verses 4-8 are the sign that Christ's presence is near, are we seeing these things today? The answer is a clear, 'Yes!' And right here I want to put a warning in for us. Turn to 2 Peter (read 1-7).

1 Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder), 2 that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior, 3 knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, 4 and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation."

Let me add here that I expect that the further we go on now in time, the more the doctrine of prophecy and the return of Christ will be scoffed at. It will be something that we ourselves will have to be on guard against. But there is a problem with those who scoff at prophecy and the return of Christ for Peter says in verses 5-7:

5 For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, 6 by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. 7 But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgement and perdition of ungodly men.

Then Peter reminds us of something very important in verse 8. He says, "But, beloved, do not forget this one

thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." This does not mean that a thousand years does not mean a thousand years. It means that if it takes 2,000+ years before Jesus returns, that is only like 2 days for the Lord. Peter says people forget that the first earth perished through a flood by the Word of God. And the heavens and earth of our present time are preserved by God by that very same Word. And they are reserved for fire until the day of judgement and perdition of ungodly men.

We have read what the Word of God says about our time. Jesus said when you see these things begin to happen, it is like seeing buds on a tree and you know summer is near. And what were the beginning of these things? "For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows." And knowing that, we do well to take heed to it, for it will happen just as it was said, and we are very near to the time of His presence with us.

VIEWS: If time...

Now, we want to do one more thing this morning. I want to leave you with some homework. Look at our parable again. Look at verse 34. Jesus said, "Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled." We have here a very difficult verse. The question is, "What is meant by the phrase, 'this generation'?"

Let me give you the main views:

1. This generation refers to the generation then living. The interpretation is that Jerusalem was destroyed 40 years later, that is within that generation (Ellicott and Barnes).
2. This generation refers to the generation that sees the fig tree budding. That is the generation that saw Jerusalem and Israel re-established in 1948, and that generation will not end until all these things have been fulfilled. That is now 67 years ago, and so it depends on how long a generation is whether that view could even work anymore. Most would say we have gone beyond a generation from that time already.

3. This generation refers to mankind, thus mankind will not cease to exist until all these things happen (Gill).

4. This generation refers to believers, the spiritual Israel, so believers will never cease to exist until all these things have been fulfilled.

5. This generation refers to those who see the tribulation begin. Since the tribulation is only seven years long, then it will exist until all these things are fulfilled (Walwoord).

6. This generation refers to those who know and discern the times, and that generation will not pass away until all these things have been fulfilled (Pulpit commentary).

7. This generation refers to the Jews and that means the Jewish people as a race will not cease to exist until all these things have happened (Matthew Henry).

CONCL: We have begun to look at the very short parable of Matthew 24:32, "Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near." Our effort this morning was to understand the setting of this parable. The setting was a prophetic overview of Jesus that gave a brief history of time from that time until the end of the tribulation, when Jesus descends to earth.

I gave you my view that Matthew 24:4-8 speaks of time before the tribulation. Verses 9-14 speak of the first half of the tribulation, and verses 15-31 speak of the last half, right up to where Christ returns to earth at the end of the tribulation. And I took the view that verses 4-8 give us the budding of the fig tree. When we see the events of verses 4-8, then we know that summer, or the presence of Christ is near.

We have now, just begun to look at the words of verses 34-35, "Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away." Your assignment is to see what those words mean.