

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Could Jesus Come Today?

Scripture: Matthew 24:32-35

Code: 2372

We have such a great privilege as we meet together on the Lord's Day in studying God's Word. It's easy for us to forget that privilege. We may take for granted the abundance of biblical teaching to which we're exposed here at Grace Church. Whenever I'm away in another place, meeting other people who do not have the privilege that all of us enjoy here with so many God-given teachers, I'm reminded of how rich we are and how I ought to be thankful to God and never take – ever – for granted the wonder of His great and glorious Word. And I hope that as we come to God's Word on each Lord's day, there is in your heart a sense of anticipation, a sense of joy, a sense of separation, if you will, from the world and the things around so that you can concentrate with all your heart on the things that the Spirit of God would say through the Word of God. This is a high and holy and sacred privilege for us and is no less the Word of God than if the Lord Himself were here to speak or if an apostle or a prophet were here giving the message. This is God's Word to us and we hear it with great joy and thankful hearts.

And God's Word to us this morning is from Matthew chapter 24 verses 32-35. That's the next passage in our ongoing study in this great gospel of Matthew. I want to read the passage to you before we take a look at it in depth. Matthew 24, beginning in verse 32. "Now, learn a parable of the fig tree, when its branch is yet tender and putteth forth leaves, you know that summer is near; so likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. Verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass till all these things are fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away."

The hope of every Christian is the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible says we are those who love His appearing. We are those who are looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. We are those who are eagerly waiting for, Paul says, the glory which shall be revealed in us. We are waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God, the glorious liberation of the children of God. We are waiting for the redemption of the body. We are those, says the New Testament, who waits for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The day when the saints shall judge the world, when we shall all be changed, when death will forever be defeated along with sin, and we will enter into the presence of Christ, as Paul says, like a chaste virgin presented to a bridegroom. We long for the day when we shall be absent from the body and present with the Lord. The day when He shall appear and we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

The theme of the second coming fills the New Testament. It is the great anticipatory reality of Christian living. We look back to the cross where our souls were redeemed. We look forward to the second coming where our bodies will be redeemed and we will enter into the fullness of our salvation. And we as Christians long for the day when Jesus comes because it is in that day that Satan will be defeated. It is in that day that the curse will be lifted. It is in that day that saints will be glorified, that Christ will be worshiped, that creation will be liberated, and that sin and death will be eliminated. And so with great anticipation do we look for the second coming of Jesus Christ. And we believe it is a real event that will happen as historically as did His first coming with just as far-reaching and glorious impact.

And when we think about the second coming, we could think about so many, many passages of Scripture, but we're in one that is really without equal. Matthew 24 and 25 is Jesus' own sermon on His second coming. So when our Savior Himself wanted to speak of His second coming, these are the terms in which he chose to speak of it. And so we are finding wonder after wonder as we hear the Savior as He speaks to His disciples on the Mount of Olives and tells them that this is not the end, but He will return in glory and power to establish His kingdom.

Now, the sermon itself is called the Olivet Discourse because it was given by our Lord right on the Mount of Olives. It is recorded by Matthew and Mark and Luke because of its tremendous importance. We're looking at Matthew's look, which is the longest, most detailed look at the sermon given by our Lord, and we're learning so many marvelous and exciting things.

Now, today we come to this small portion in which our Lord gives the parable of the fig tree. And I think when we're done, you're going to see the tremendous impact and import of this parable as it's applied in His second coming. But in order to get a grasp on it, we have to back up a little bit and find out where we are. We can't just jump in at verse 32. So go back to verse 3, if you will, of the chapter. Jesus sits down with His disciples after climbing the Mount of Olives, which would be a good climb. They've spent all day in the temple dialoguing with the religious leaders and the people. And Jesus has said in His final word to the Jewish people in verse 39: "Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord." And He introduced His coming in glory. He introduced His coming in power. He introduced His coming in the kingdom that was promised by the prophets of old. And that piqued the interest of the disciples.

And so when they reached the top of the Mount of Olives, they said to Him privately in verse 3: "Tell us" – and they're filled with anticipation – "when shall these things be and what shall be the sign of Thy coming and of the end of the age?" They want further information about Him coming, further information about that great time when He reigns as King of kings and Lord of lords. They want to know when and they want to know what are the signs. So they really ask two questions: When will it be? And what will be the signs?

Now, Jesus answers those questions in reverse order. The second question, He answers from verse 4 through 35, and we've been looking at that second question: What are the signs? The first question – When will it be? – He begins to answer in verse 36 when He says: “But of that day and hour knoweth no man” and then goes on to talk about when it shall be. But we're looking at the section where He answers their question: What are the signs? What is it we look for to indicate to us that You're coming in glory? Now, remember first of all, He answered them beginning in verse 4 and down through verse 14 by describing some general signs that would occur immediately prior to His second coming. And those signs were called in verse 8 birth pains. They are rapid-fire signs that come at the end of man's age, just like birth pains come at the end of a pregnancy, and they result in the birth of the kingdom. So He told them you ought to look for all these signs.

Then in verse 15, He said there is one thing that signals the beginning of the birth pains. There is one thing that triggers these general signs and it is the abomination of desolation. You remember we looked at that, and that is where the antichrist will establish an idol of himself in the temple in the Holy of Holies in Jerusalem, and he will make the whole world worship him. That is the abomination of desolations and that begins what verse 21 calls the great tribulation in which the birth pains take place. So they said: “What is the sign of Your coming?” He says: “Look for the abomination of desolation, and when you see it, run. Because what follows is going to be unlike anything the world has ever experienced.” And He described the birth pains, the rapid-fire intense things that are going to happen on the earth until finally the kingdom comes.

So He gave them general signs and He gave them an initiating sign that begins those general signs. Then He gave him the specific sign in verse 29. He gave them the specific sign in verse 29. “Immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun is dark and the moon doesn't give its light, the stars fall from heaven and the powers of the heavens are shaken.” It's the disintegration of the universe. “And then appears the sign” – there's the sign. They wanted a sign, it's that sign. “When you see the Son of Man in heaven, then in all the tribes of the earth there will be mourning and you will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. He'll send out His angels and with a great sound of a trumpet, they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”

So He says to them: “You want a sign? Watch for the birth pains triggered by the abomination of desolation. And when they are over, then comes the sign. And the sign is the Son of Man in heaven. All the heavenly bodies have gone black. It is darkness in the universe and then appears the sign of the Son of Man in blazing glory in heaven come to defeat the wicked, to gather the elect and establish His kingdom. That's what to look forward to.”

Having given them those things as indicators, He knows in their mind they still have a question. When all those signs begin, how long will it be? How long does it last until the kingdom is established? How

long until the Son of God reigns as King of kings and Lord of lords? How long do the birth pains last? How long is it from the sign in heaven to the kingdom on earth? And so to summarize and act as a transition into the “when” question, He gives this parable and its explanation in verses 32 to 35. And I want you to look at it – it’s marvelous – and I want you to see four elements as it unfolds.

First, an uncomplicated analogy – an uncomplicated analogy – verse 32. “Now learn a parable of the fig tree. When its branch is yet tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near.” Now, there is an uncomplicated analogy. I hope you remember that parables were for the purpose of making things clear to the disciples. For example, go back in your Bible for a brief moment to the 13th chapter of Matthew. In Matthew chapter 13 and verse 10, it says: “And the disciples came and said to Him, Why speakest Thou unto them in parables?” Why are You speaking in parables? He answered and said to them, “Because it is given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven but to them it is not given.”

Parables, then, had a twofold purpose: Parables unexplained hid the truth; parables explained made the truth clear. That was the twofold purpose of a parable. When Jesus gave a parable to the multitude or to the religious leaders and never explained it, it was a riddle to them. When He gave it to the disciples and explained it, it was an illustration that made things all that much more clear. So He says the reason I speak in parables is to hide things from the quote/unquote wise and prudent of this world and to reveal them unto babes. Parables explained become illustrations by which things are made clear. Parables unexplained are riddles by which things are made unclear. And so Jesus now speaks to the disciples and explains what He means exactly so that for them the parable becomes a living illustration making the truth very, very clear. It is an uncomplicated analogy.

Now, when you understand that parables for the disciples were for the sake of understanding, not confusing, then you will understand a very important thing about parables. They are not difficult to understand. They are not complex. They are uncomplicated analogies to illustrate a simple truth. And so you do not have to have a Ryrie Study Bible to understand this parable, or a Scofield Bible or have gone to seminary or have looked at a dispensational chart. You basically can stand on the same turf the disciples did with about as much understand as they had and accept and understand the simplicity of an uncomplicated analogy. I think it’s so important to say that because this particular parable has become used to express almost allegorical concepts rather than analogical concepts. And instead of being an illustration of something, it becomes an allegory, and unless you understand the secrets of it, you can’t even understand what it means. We reject the fact that it is to complicate things and believe that it is to make things very clear.

So it is a simple, natural analogy that they should understand. It is an analogy of a fig tree, which they would easily understand – the place was covered with fig trees. In fact, on this very day in the morning, according to chapter 21 verses 18 to 22, Jesus had already taught them one lesson from a fig tree, hadn’t He? You remember He found a fig tree with leaves and no fruit and He taught them

lessons about barrenness and lessons about prayer off of that fig tree.

He wasn't the first teacher who ever used a fig tree. You can go all the way back to the book of Judges, and you will find in the book of Judges in chapter 9 verses 10 and 11 that there, Jotham uses a fig tree. You can go back to the book of Hosea in chapter 9 verse 10 and there, figs are used, baskets of figs are used to – no, it's Jeremiah who uses the baskets – you can go back to Hosea 9 and 10 and there, figs are used to speak of the patriarchs. Then in Jeremiah chapter 24 verse 2, I believe it is, Jeremiah uses baskets of figs to speak of good and bad people. And also, Joel chapter 1 verses 6 and 7 used the figure of a fig tree as an analogy to a spiritual lesson. You find in the book of Revelation that the universe collapses like figs falling from an overripe fig tree. So the commonness of the tree lent itself to the prophets and the teachers throughout the history of Israel using it as illustrative of certain spiritual truth, and the Lord does just that here as He did at the beginning of the day when He cursed a fig tree. So it was a common teaching aid.

Now, our Lord wants them to understand what He says. Would you notice the word “learn”? He says, “Learn a parable.” In other words, don't just listen but get the message. And He uses the word *manthan*, which basically means to learn, to learn truly or genuinely so that it issues out in a habit. It's to learn something thoroughly. It's used even to express the idea of acquiring a habit. Get the message, let it sink deeply into you. Paul uses the same verb, for example, in Philippians 4:11 where he says, “I have learned in whatever state I am therewith to be content.” Something he learned deeply, something he didn't just hear but something that was truly habitual knowledge, and that's the essence of what He's saying – I want you to understand this, I don't want it to go by you, I want you to grasp it clearly, and here is what I want you to learn: it's the parable of the fig tree, it's the analogy of the fig tree, it's the message or lesson that comes out of this simple illustration.

And here's the story: “When its branch is yet tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near.” Now, nobody can misunderstand that. When you see a fig tree put forth leaves, you know that summer is near. What does that mean? It's time for fruit and harvest. In other words, when the tree buds, it's spring, right? It's really not very complex. What does He mean “when the branch is yet tender”? In this time of year when the sap begins to flow through those branches, they become somewhat swelled and tender as that life begins to pulsate and pour through and push out the end of the branch in the form of a leaf. There is a tenderness to the tree. There is a need to care carefully for that tree in that period of time. And so that's what He's referring to. When its branch is tender because it's soft with swelling sap and it pushes out its leaves, you know its spring, and spring means summer is near and summer means harvest. Summer means harvest.

And whenever the Lord in the gospel of Matthew speaks about harvest, He is speaking about the time when He comes to separate the good from the bad. Harvest in the gospel of Matthew speaks of judgment. It speaks of the Lord's coming to deal with the good and the bad. Go all the way back to Matthew chapter 3 and you'll see that. In John the Baptist's message, he said – verse 11 – that he

came to “baptize with water unto repentance, but the one who comes after me,” he said – that’s referring to Christ – “is mightier than I whose shoes I am not worthy to bear, He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.” And the fire he has in mind is the fire of judgment.

It’s referred to in verse 10. It’s kind of the fire of judgment when a tree that has no fruit is chopped down and thrown into the fire. And verse 12 says his fan is in his hand and he’ll purge his floor, and they used a fan to throw the grain in the air and the chaff blew away and the grain fell back down. And the Lord’s going to sift the good from the bad and burn the chaff with unquenchable fire. In other words, here John the Baptist looks to a harvest and he sees the harvest as the time when God separates the evil and burns it and keeps the good and brings it into the barn, as it were, the barn of His own kingdom.

In Matthew chapter 9, we find again this allusion to harvest. And the Lord looks in verse 36 on the multitude. He’s moved with compassion on them because they are wearied. They are literally flagellated, they are literally abused by their false shepherds, and they are scattered like sheep that have no shepherd. And He says to His disciples: “The harvest truly is plenteous, the laborers are few, pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that He will send forth laborers into His harvest.” In other words, God is going to judge the world, and Jesus sees compassionately the whole harvest, as it were, moving toward that judgment, a whole field of men moving toward judgment, and desires that some be sent to warn them about the impending judgment when God will separate the righteous from the unrighteous.

In Matthew 13, would you notice also verse 30? And here is the parable given of the wheat and tares. And it says in verse 30 that the wheat and the tares are to be allowed to grow together until the harvest, and in the time of harvest, “I will say to the reapers, ‘Gather together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into My barn.’” And again the harvest is seen as a time of distinguishing, a time of judgment, and a time of burning on the part of those that are evil, reward on the part of those that are good. By the way, that’s explained in verse 40. The tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so shall it be in the end of the age – verse 41 – “the Son of Man will send forth His angels, they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend and them that do iniquity and cast them into a furnace of fire. There shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”

Now, in all of those incidents in the gospel of Matthew where you have the look at a harvest, it is a time of rewarding that which is good and of burning and punishing that which is evil. So what the Lord is saying is very simple in this uncomplicated analogy. When you see the leaves come forth in the spring, you know that the coming of summer is near and there will be soon a harvest. And since they would perceive the harvest to be the second coming, the coming of God’s judgment, they would very easily understand the intent of what the Lord is saying.

So the uncomplicated analogy leads secondly to an unmistakable application – an unmistakable application. Verse 33: “So likewise ye,” He says, “when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, at the doors.” Now, in saying “so likewise ye,” He links the parable or the analogy to the application. “When you see all these things.” And somebody says, “What are all these things?” And the answer is all these things. You say, “What is the antecedent to all these things?” Well, it’s all the things that He’s just talked about. What are all those things? The birth pains of verses 4 to 14, the abomination of desolation of verse 15, the need to flee because of great tribulation in verses 16 to 28. So the birth pains, the signal for the beginning of the birth pains, the calamities that come upon the earth, the subtle confusion of those who cry out, “The Messiah is here,” “The Messiah is there,” the sinful corruption like a dead carcass to be eaten by birds, and then the sign of the Son of Man in heaven as the sky goes black and the Son of Man appears in all His glory. All these things, He says, when you see all these things, it’s like the tree putting forth leaves, and you know that it is near.

And somebody says: “What is it? Doesn’t He tell us what it is?” Yes, He does. And Luke, in recording the same Olivet Discourse, was specific – more specific than Matthew at this point – and Luke records this in chapter 21 verse 31: “So also when you see these things come to pass, know that the kingdom of God is near at hand.” So you can write in your Bible margin “it” means the kingdom of God. That is the kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It is the end of man’s day, it is the beginning of God’s day. “Know that the kingdom is near,” the Millennial kingdom of Revelation chapter 20 verse 4 and 5 is in view here, when Jesus Christ reigns with His redeemed saints for a thousand years upon the earth and Satan is bound. The glorious kingdom promised to Israel when Israel will be back in its land and will be preserved from all its enemies and become the servants of the Most High God, the time when Gentiles ten at a time will grab on to the skirt of a Jew and the Jew will take them to God that they may know the true God. It is the time promised by all the prophets of old, that great kingdom.

So what He is saying is when you see all these things, when you see all the birth pains and all the signs and the ultimate sign of the Son of Man in heaven, know that it is near, so near it’s knocking on the door, is the metaphor that is used. It must be the very end.

And then in verse 34, further in an unmistakable application, He says: “Truly I say to you,” and that’s for emphasis, to emphasize the importance and verity of the statement, “this generation shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled.” This generation shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled. Now, the question comes immediately at this juncture: What generation is He talking about? What generation isn’t going to pass? Well, to pass means to die, to come to an end. The generation will not come to an end until all these things be fulfilled. What generation? Very important question. And we’ve had a lot of different answers. Let me see if I can filter you down to the answer that I think is the right answer.

What generation? Here are some of the options. Some suggest that this generation refers directly to the disciples, that what He is saying is: "You disciples will not die before the second coming." You will not die before the second coming. You say, "But that's not true." Right. And those people who hold that view say Jesus was wrong. It was a good guess, but He was wrong. Well, we shouldn't be surprised that He was wrong because He even admitted, they say, in Mark 13:32 that the day nor the hour knows no one, not even the Son of Man. So they say Jesus even confessed His own ignorance.

Listen, Jesus confessed there that in His incarnation, He said He did not know. He chose not to have that knowledge. But it's one thing to choose not to have knowledge, it's something else to propagate something that isn't true. And Jesus in His incarnation may have restricted His knowledge, but He didn't lose His connection with the truth. That is an unacceptable view. And if Jesus was wrong about this, folks, grab for the nearest sky hook because there's a good possibility He was wrong about a whole lot of other stuff also. We reject that view totally. Jesus is not wrong. He is not mistaken. He is not uttering ignorance at all. In His incarnation, He puts self-imposed limits on elements of His own deity and the expression of His divine knowledge, but at no point in time did He ever utter anything out of His mouth that was not absolutely true. And there's no reason to believe this generation means "this little group of disciples" because if that's what He meant, He could have said, "You will not pass away until all these things be fulfilled."

There's another view, so that's an unacceptable view. View number two is that it refers to the disciples, but the thing He's talking about being fulfilled was the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. In other words, they say this whole chapter is all about 70 A.D., that it doesn't describe the second coming. And by the way, this is a very popular view and many of the commentaries you read will hold this view, that this whole thing is a description of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. and that Jesus is saying, "You're going to be here, this generation right now, you disciples and the people of your time are going to be here in 70 A.D. when all this happens."

That also is an unacceptable view because you cannot confuse the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 A.D. with the second coming of Jesus Christ. And they're not asking Him about the coming of Romans, they're asking about the coming of Christ. When they said in verse 3, "What shall be the sign of Thy coming?" they didn't ask, "What's the sign of the Romans coming?" and when He answered them, He answered their question. And their question had to do with His coming. Plus, there is no way under the sun that you can fit all of these events into 70 A.D.

When in 70 A.D., for example, was the sun darkened, the moon not giving its light, the stars all falling out of heaven and the Son of Man appearing in heaven in gathering the elect from the four corners of the earth? When at that particular time did all the tribes on the face of the earth mourn? No way. Absolutely impossible. And in 70 A.D., it was the Romans against the Jews. It wasn't nation rising against nation and kingdom rising against kingdom and earthquakes and pestilences all over the world. No. It's impossible. It cannot refer to 70 A.D., so that also is an unacceptable view.

And by the way, the people who want it to refer to 70 A.D. just make everything symbolic. They just say: “Well, it seemed to the Jews like it was that bad” or “It seemed to them in sort of a hyperbolic way that it was that sort of far-reaching.” So that’s an unacceptable view.

The third view is that it refers to the Jewish race – it refers to the Jewish race. That what He says when He says, “This *genea*,” He could refer to a stock or a kind or a race of people, that’s true. He’s saying, “This generation of Jews, this Jewish people, will not die until all these things come to pass.” In other words, He is predicting the survival and continuity of the Jewish race until the second coming. Now, that’s true. The Jews will survive until the second coming, and I wouldn’t want to go into an alley and fight a guy over this view. Frankly, I wouldn’t want to go into an alley and fight a guy over anything – but certainly not over this view. But again, that’s not a good interpretation here for a couple of reasons. A reason that comes to my mind is that it doesn’t say “Israel,” and if the Lord was talking about Israel, it would seem to me He would say that. I mean He’s not – it would be a rather off-handed way to refer to the covenant people to just call them “this generation” instead of saying “My people.” It would seem to me He would have said “My people shall not pass away till all these things be fulfilled.” To call them “this generation” seems to be a rather indifferent way to speak of the covenant people.

And why would He even bother to say they’re going to survive until the kingdom when that wasn’t even a question in the minds of the disciples, right? I mean they believed in the survival of Israel because they believed in the everlasting nature of the covenants, right? I mean they believed that God made covenants He was intending to keep and so they weren’t even asking, “Is God going to bail out on all of this?” That isn’t in their mind here. They just want to know when it’s going to come. Why would He say, “Well, you’ll – the Jews will survive until then”? It’s obtuse to the issue. So it’s possible, that view is possible. It’s possible, but it’s not the one that I would choose.

There’s a fourth view. That is that *genea* or this generation means God rejecting, Christ rejecting, kinds of people. In other words, the kinds of people that rejected Me, the kind of people that we’ve been talking to all day in the temple that hate what I stand for, this kind of God-hating, Christ-rejecting, phony, religious people are going to be around until the second coming. That He’s referring to that, there will be the continuous of evil Christ-rejectors.

Genea can mean that. It’s used, for example, in the Old Testament, Greek Old Testament, Septuagint version, for the word “door” in Hebrew, which sometimes is translated “this evil generation” or “this righteous generation.” So they say it means this evil generation is going to be around until Jesus comes, so don’t expect things to get better, there will always be wretched, God-hating, Christ-rejecting people among the Jewish race and elsewhere all the way until the second coming. Again, that’s a possible view. That’s a possible view, but it’s vague and it seems that it’s not consistent with the context nor with the issue in the hearts and minds of the apostles. They’re not concerned about

whether evil people are going to survive until the second coming, they're concerned about when is it going to happen and what are the signs.

There's a fifth view, and this is probably the one you've been exposed to, that is this, that the fig tree is Israel. And when – and by the way, that doesn't say that, either, in the Scripture; it just says here's an illustration of a fig tree. Somebody along the line says the fig tree is Israel. Jesus didn't say that. So now you have stopped the analogy and you've got an allegory. And you have to tell us what the elements of the allegory refer to. So we say then that the fig tree is Israel and when it puts forth its leaves, I've heard, that is the statehood of Israel in 1948. Now, have you heard that view? Okay, that's sort of a popular view. That when Israel becomes a state – well, in the first place, Jesus didn't say that, and how in the world the disciples would have ever perceived the statehood of Israel in 1948 is pretty far-fetched.

And you have to remember this: Jesus is illustrating for them the things He's teaching them. He is trying to make clear what He has taught them. He is not trying to say something to them that is so infinitely obscure that it could never be perceived by anybody who lived before 1948. Plus, how can we conclude that the life pulsing through the fig tree and pushing out leaves is the statehood of Israel? Certainly if we're thinking – if we would use it that way, it would have to be if the tree was Israel and it started to put forth leaves, we would assume that it was life coming into Israel, right? And life coming into Israel would be spiritual, not physical, and Israel, though alive today, is one of the most secular nations on the face of the earth. So it doesn't make a good allegory of the spiritual revival of Israel.

And why would the Lord talk about only the statehood of Israel as if it were spiritual life pulsing through the nation and who is to say that the fig tree refers to them anyway when the context has nothing to do with the survival or restoration of the nation Israel but has to do with the second coming of Jesus Christ? So I think that also is an unacceptable, though imaginative, view.

What's left? My view. Now, my view is – you know, and I went into this pretty open-minded because, you know, I've thought about a lot of these things, and I was just reading, and it's so clear to me what He's saying. When the branch is tender and puts forth leaves, you know that judgment is near. So when you see all these things – all what things? The leaves. And what are the leaves? The birth pains, right? The sign in heaven. The attendant signs. All the things He's been describing through the whole chapter. When you see all those things, you know that judgment is near. And this generation – what generation? The "this" has to modify the people who see all those things. This generation that sees all those things will not end until the rest is fulfilled.

In other words, what He's saying – they're wondering how long is that going to take, and when we see the sign – the signal, rather, or the abomination of desolations and start to see the other birth pains and then all of a sudden the sign of the Son of Man in heaven, how long is that going to take,

and what He is saying is the generation that sees all these things will not die off until everything's fulfilled. In other words, He's emphasizing again the concept of the pushing forth of a leaf. When you see the leaf, you know summer is near. Summer is near – that's the whole point.

Or the idea of the birth pains. Birth pains come in rapid-fire at the very end, just before birth. So if you see the leaf, you know you're going to be alive in the summer. If you see the birth pains, you know you're going to be alive at the birth. The generation that is alive, the generation that sees these things, the generation that experiences the phenomena of signs and wonders at the end time will not die off until all these things be fulfilled. In other words, when it comes, it will come fast. In fact, we learned that it is a period of seven years called the time of Jacob's trouble, but the real tribulation period lasts how long? Three and a half years, 12 hundred and 60 days, or 42 months, and that's reiterated again and again by Daniel and John. It is a very intense, condensed period of time. And the generation that is alive when it begins is going to still be around when it ends because, basically, it lasts just beyond three and a half years, and that's what He's trying to say.

Look back at verse 15, for example, when you see the abomination of desolations, verse 16 says, then run to the mountains. And He says run, verse 21, why? Because a great tribulation is coming upon the earth. Get out as fast as you can get out. And the point is it's going to come fast and furious. And it's going to be ended by the sign of the Son of Man in heaven because it says in verse 29 immediately after that three-and-a-half-year period, the sky begins to fall and the Son of Man appears, and He's ready to establish His kingdom. And He just summarizes that so beautifully. So He says those of you who see the signs will see the end. Got it? That's the clearest, simplest, I think, unmistakable application of what our Lord said in an effort to make things clear. Anything else is unclear. That's extremely consistent with the context. So – and by the way, does no injustice at all to the Greek text, the matter of *haut* and its antecedents is completely covered.

Now, I want to ask this question: Who is this generation? What generation will be alive then? What generation will be alive to see these signs? Now, among Christians, there are two views. Some say the church will be there. That's a post-tribulational view. In other words, we will be taken out of the world after the Tribulation. So we'll see all this stuff. We'll go through it. Some of us will get slaughtered in the process. We'll still go to heaven but we'll get slaughtered. Some of us will survive, but we'll go through it and be post-tribulation raptured and we'll go up and meet the Lord in the air and come back down for the kingdom. It's sort of like just a loop is all. Sort of like a ride at Magic Mountain, just go up and down.

Okay, others believe that in a pre-tribulational rapture – that is, before any of this, we are taken out and we spend the time with the Lord and come back at the end of the seven years. Now, some years ago I did a series on "Will the Church Go Through the Tribulation?" and you can listen to the fuller explanation, but let me just give you, for this moment, a reason or two why I believe that we will not be there. We will not be that generation; that is, the redeemed church. Some of you may who don't

know the Savior because you'll not go in the Rapture, you will be that generation who will see those things. And depending on whether you're saved or not, and how much you know about the Bible, you'll either know what's going on or you won't know what's going on. But the church, I believe, will not be here. I believe we will be taken out. And I'll give you some reasons. I'm just going to fire them at you rather rapidly, that's not my intent to get into great detail on them.

Reason number one: The church in the book of Revelation appears in chapter 2 and chapter 3. In fact, it is the theme of chapter 2 and the theme of chapter 3. And our Lord speaks to the church and purifies the church and writes letters to the church and messages to the church and then ends that whole section at the end of chapter 3 with the idea that He stands at the door, a knock, ready to come. You move right into chapter 4 and the church is in heaven. The church is in heaven in chapter 4. And the church is in heaven in chapter 5. Chapter 6, the Tribulation breaks out on earth, and from chapter 6 through 18, the whole story of the Tribulation, there's never one mention of the church. Never one mention of any local church or of how the church ought to act. The word "church" isn't there. So the absence of the church from Revelation 6 to 18 seems to me rather significant, especially when they've been on earth in 2 and 3 and they're in heaven in 4 and 5.

Another point: There is an absolute absence of literature in the New Testament to instruct the church about how to endure the Tribulation, about how to conduct itself in the Tribulation. The church is not mentioned in Matthew chapter 24 as such, and it is a unique group of people, from Pentecost to the Rapture that I'm speaking of. In a sense, in a larger sense, we're all a part of God's redeemed people. But the unique church is not mentioned here in Matthew 24, and there's no warnings given to us about the Tribulation and how to deal with it and how to live through it and how to handle the antichrist kind of thing as a church and so forth and so on. In fact, the only church that I can find during that period is called the mystery harlot, Babylon, the prostitute, the false church which is to be destroyed.

Thirdly, the Rapture seemed to me to be absolutely pointless. The Rapture is described in 1 Thessalonians 4 where we're caught up to be with the Lord in the air and ever are we with the Lord. That seems pointless to me if it happens at the second coming. Why bother to go up and come right back down again? I mean if He's coming to earth with His saints to reign and rule, why doesn't He just come down and we'll meet Him right here when He gets here? How long does it take Him to get from up there to down here? What's the point? It eliminates the point of the Rapture. Why does Paul make such a great point about the Rapture if that's all there is to it? Phist-phist and that's it.

Now let me ask you another question: If all the believers are raptured up at the second coming and come back with Him, who's left on earth alive to populate the kingdom? In other words, when the Lord comes, the Bible says He will destroy all the wicked. And if He comes down and raptures all the redeemed, all the redeemed are raptured, all the unredeemed are destroyed, there's nobody left on earth to populate the kingdom except spiritually glorified beings, and the Bible says there will be

children born during the kingdom, who's going to have those kids? You know, there's got to be people there. There have to be people going in because they'll produce a whole generation. They'll produce a whole population, many of whom will not even believe and will start a rebellion at the end. Remember that in Revelation? So somebody's got to be alive, but if the Rapture occurs at the same time as the second coming, then all the redeemed are out and all the unredeemed are destroyed, there's nobody left to populate the kingdom.

And then a couple of passages of Scripture that I think are important. Revelation is one – chapter 3 verse 10, I think, may be the most important one. In Revelation 3:10, it says of those who are the redeemed: "Because thou hast kept the word of My patience" – that is, obeyed the word of the gospel, the Word of God – "I also will keep thee" – outside, I think, is the best way to translate *tro ek* – "to keep the outside the hour of temptation" – and He's not talking about some little trial that comes upon the church at Philadelphia, or some local deal, but – "I'll keep you outside the hour of temptation which will come upon all the world to try them that dwell on the earth." I believe that's a promise to those who have kept the Word of God by faith in Christ that they will be rescued from out of that period of time, and literally what *tro ek* means is a state of continued existence outside. It isn't that we'll be taken out of the middle of it as a mid-trib view might say, it isn't that we will be kept in it but kept from it. It is that we will be maintained in a condition outside of it. That is the opposite of *tro en*, which means to exist within. This means to exist without, to be kept out. So I believe we will be kept out of that.

In John 14:3, it says that when Jesus went away, He prepared a place for us "that I may come again and receive you unto Myself that you may be with Me," right? "That where I am, you may be also." So the point He says there is "I am preparing a place for you." It can't be down here, true? It's not here. He's preparing a place in the Father's house which is up there in glory, and "I'm coming again to receive you unto Myself that where I am there ye may be also." Now, what that tells me is that He's not going to come down here to be where we are; He's going to take us to be where He is. So if you have a post-trib Rapture, He's simply taken us up halfway, put us right back, and come to be where we are. You understand what I'm saying? So the whole point of John 14 is He's preparing a place for us to be where He is. And that's where we go in the Rapture and remain for those years until we return for the glory of the kingdom and all that it promises.

There are many other reasons. I believe the nature of the church is unique. I believe it was born at Pentecost, it didn't exist before that, and at the Rapture, there's a sense in which that part of God's redeemed community is self-contained and taken out of the earth and that the Tribulation time is called the time of Jacob's trouble. It is particularly for Israel that God goes back to dealing with them. It's like Romans 11 where Israel was cut off and the church was grafted in but He says don't be too proud because the time will come when you're cut off and Israel is re-grafted. I believe God's going to go back to dealing with Israel. It's the 70th week of Daniel. We weren't in the first 69, why should we be in the 70th? So it's a time for God to deal with Israel. The distinction of Israel, the nature of the

church, I believe, sets them apart, and so they'll not be in that period of time – we'll not be in it.

Now, also, have you ever thought about the fact that Paul wrote the Thessalonians and they were all upset because some Christians died and they thought they had missed the Rapture? They thought they'd missed the second coming. They've died and so he writes them and says don't sorrow about the people that sleep, don't be sad about them, because when the Rapture comes, you will not precede them, right? The dead in Christ shall what? Rise first.

See, they were worried. "Oh, those dear folks have died, they're going to miss it." He says, "No, no, no, no." But look, if the Christian church is looking for the Tribulation and not the Rapture, then they would have been sad that they were alive. They would have reversed their problem and said, "Oh, those dear lucky saints that have died, I mean they're already with the Lord, we have to go through the Tribulation," see. But, see, they were looking for something which was joyous and felt bad that people might die and miss it, which proves to me they were not looking for the antichrist, they were looking for Christ. They were not looking for the Tribulation, they were looking for glory, and that's consistent with the Christian hope. The blessed hope is not looking for antichrist, is it? Yes, we wait the glorious appearing of antichrist – no, no, no. We are waiting for Christ.

Well, those are a few reasons. At the Rapture, the church meets Christ in the air. At the second coming, Christ returns to the earth with the church. At the Rapture, Olive is untouched. At the second coming, it's split in half. At the Rapture, living saints are translated. At the second coming, no saints are translated. At the Rapture, the world is not judged and sin gets worse. At the second coming, sin is judged and the world gets better. At the Rapture, the body goes to heaven. At the second coming, it comes to earth. The Rapture is imminent, it could happen at any moment. The second coming has very distinct signs, doesn't it? And the Rapture concerns only the saved, and the second coming concerns the saved and the unsaved. All that to say the Rapture and the second coming are two different things with a time period in between.

So this generation refers to the people that are alive at that time that were not taken in the Rapture because they did not know the Savior, so they'll be Jews and Gentiles. But during the time of the Tribulation, what happens? God takes a hundred and forty-four thousand Jews, according to Revelation 7, they witness all over the world. Jews are saved. Gentiles are saved so that they can't even be counted. So you have a redeemed group and an unredeemed group and that unredeemed and redeemed group of Jews and Gentiles that have not gone in the Rapture because their salvation came after that, or they've never been saved, they're the generation who will see these things come to pass. And when they start to see them come to pass, they'll not die off until all those things are fulfilled. I think that's what He's saying.

Now, let's look at an unprecedented alteration and wrap it up with verse 35. An uncomplicated analogy, an unmistakable application, and then an unprecedented alteration, verse 35: "Heaven and

earth shall pass away” – stop at that point. That’s a flat statement, period, paragraph, – tremendous, unbelievable statement. Heaven and earth shall pass away. You see the sign of the Son of Man in heaven, you’ve already seen the collapse of the stellar bodies, everything is moving into chaos – we already learned, didn’t we, back in verse 22 that God’s going to shorten the daylight hours during the day. The whole calendar goes crazy, the tides will go crazy. And the sum of it is in verse 35: “Heaven and earth shall come to an end.” As we know it, heaven and earth will end. The earth that we know, the heaven that we know, will cease.

Now, just exactly all that that embodies is very, very difficult for us to perceive. We’ve read much of Revelation and many things written by Isaiah the prophet and others, so we know that heaven and earth are going to pass away as we know them, and in their place is going to come a new creation – a new creation.

Finally, Jesus said this: “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words” – what? – “shall not pass away.” That is an unchanging authority. And He closes the parable with an unchanging authority. “My Word shall not pass away.” In Luke 16:17, He said heaven and earth will pass away and it’s easier for them to do that than for one tittle out of the law to pass away. He said not one jot or one tittle in Matthew 5:18 will pass away until all is fulfilled. In John 10:35, He said Scripture cannot be broken. And so if we believe the Word of God, we believe this is going to happen – it’s going to happen.

And the question we ask you is: Are you ready for that? To go with the Lord’s raptured people to be in His presence or do you find yourself staying for the holocaust that follows? Seeing that you know all these things, what manner of persons ought you to be, Peter said. You ought to be godly and holy. You ought to be looking for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. You ought to be growing in grace. You are a redeemed people looking for the Savior. Let’s bow in prayer.

Thank You, Father, for our time this morning, for this great word to us out of Your truth. Bind to our hearts the things that are divine. May we live knowing this is a passing world and may we live in light of eternity.

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