

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

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. I do not ask anyone to accept my views; rather I urge everyone to boldly challenge all the ideas that they hear from me. Refuse any that you cannot see in Scripture for yourself. I urge you to be like the Bereans who searched the Scriptures to see if the things that Paul said were so (Acts 17:10-11).

I like to say this regularly: when I teach on the end times or anything related to the Scripture, I do not ask anybody to accept what they hear me say. I want you to challenge every idea you hear, not just from here, but from everywhere. Challenge it with humility and refuse to accept anything you cannot see with your eyes in your own Bible. If you cannot see it with your eyes in your Bible, then do not accept it. I like to say that a couple times a year just to remind us that we are to be like the Bereans in Acts 17. Paul the apostle came into their town, Berea, and he taught the Word of God. They said, “Well, we will get back to you later, Paul. We are going to see if it lines up with the Word of God.” Now that is pretty good when you make sure Paul is teaching the Word of God before you accept it, so I like that.

- B. Those who are living in the final generation of natural history need to know this. Two questions are often asked. First, **can they know** if they are living in that generation? Second, **how will they know** if they are living in the last generation? What are the signs? The good news is that there is much biblical information on this because Jesus wants His people prepared for His end-time purposes. Jesus would not tell us of the circumstances around His coming and then say no one could know it.

We are going to look at the exhortation by Jesus to know the signs of His coming. He actually commanded us—the people of God—He commanded the people of God who are living in the final generation of natural history to know it. When I first read that, I thought it was an unusual idea because I thought we, the people of God, could not know it, but it is exactly opposite; they are commanded to know it, talking about those who are living in that generation. They need to know it because there are unique dynamics going on in that hour of history that are unprecedented in all of human history.

The manifestation of God’s glory in the intensity of the revival is beyond any time in history. The intensity of the darkness and demonic activity is beyond any time in history. So we have the intense good and the intense bad in the same hour that creates unique dynamics never seen in history before. That is why the people living in that generation need to know that they are in it. That is what Jesus commanded them to do.

Well, there are two questions that are often asked. Can those people know if they are living in that generation? If they can, how will they know? What are the signs? Well, of course we are having this fourteen-class course on the signs of the times, but it is not enough to take a course. If I were to ask you right now from your heart without looking at notes to list twenty signs of the times, could you do that? My point is not to see if you could not do it or you could; that is not my point. My point is to alert you that taking a course is not enough. We have to actually grasp them so that we can watch, because if you are not aware of them, really familiar, then it is not possible to watch them unfold. You cannot connect what is happening in culture or what is happening in the nations with what the Word of God. If you cannot do that, then it does not create the urgency and the confidence and the faith.

So if I ask you to write ten positive and ten negatives signs or trends right now, could you do it, right now, right from your heart? If the answer is yes, then continue to go deeper. If the answer is no, then determine tonight to say, “You know what? I am going to get hold of this stuff. It is not enough for my friends to know. I want to know it.”

The good news is that there is much biblical information on this topic. Why? Because Jesus wants us to know it because He loves us. He does not want us confused. He does not want the people of God afraid in that hour. He does not want them deceived. He does not want them being seduced in compromise that they did not even know they were being seduced into. He does not want them offended because many believers will be tempted to be offended at the Lord, asking, “Lord, why did You allow the intensity of the distress to reach this level?”

He will say, “Well, I put it in the Book several thousand years ago. A couple thousand years ago I spoke it with My own mouth. I have a plan, and I am with you because the good is breaking out as well.” He wants us to know these signs so we can cooperate with Him. Jesus would not tell us the circumstances in that generation if He did not want us to know them. He only told us because He is urgent that we would know them.

Well, there is a major obstacle, and that is scoffing. Look at 2 Peter 3:3-4. This is a surprising prophetic word from the apostle Peter. It surprised me when I first looked at this passage. He says this, “Knowing this first, scoffers will come in the last days.”

Now that is an unusual thing to put first on the list. If I heard Peter say that, I might have said, “Well, Peter, surely being warned about scoffers is in the top ten, but it is not first. I mean, come on. Aren’t you exaggerating this a little bit?”

I think that Peter understands that the scoffing or the mocking spirit—and I am not talking about a demonic spirit per se; I am just talking about an attitude, a mindset, that is in the church and in the culture outside the church in society—will be a tremendous obstacle to the prophetic church moving forward, because people will be hindered by it, thrown off by it, made insecure by it, and they will draw back.

Peter said that you have to know this about the end-time generation. You will be ridiculed for believing what the Bible says about that hour. You will be far more ridiculed if you say it. You can believe it privately and still be ridiculed some by close friends, but if you say it, you will be ridiculed, and you will have a stigma, because there will be a mocking, scoffing response to what the Bible says about that. Know that first of all so that you are not thrown off by it, but you are braced for it.

He said that the scoffers will be walking according to their own lust. He said that some of their mocking will be rooted in their lifestyles. Some of them will have a private agenda of a lifestyle with some compromise that they are protecting even in their mocking, in their defending their lifestyle by putting down the doctrines that are calling for an intensity of lifestyle. He said that it is going to be linked in part to their lifestyle in their private agendas, but you would never know that.

Here is what they will say: “Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers have fell asleep”—for generations in other words—“all things continue like they always have been.” It is always the same. In other words, the stumbling block of that generation is that what is going to happen is so unprecedented there will be nothing in history to compare it to in a fully adequate way. Jesus had to go all the way back to the flood of Noah, the flood of Noah’s generation, to compare it. He said that it is that unprecedented, it is that outside the box, it is that unseen in history, and there is nothing to compare it to.

I mean when you read the book of Revelation, you read what the apostles said about that generation, and what Jesus said about it, it is like, “Come on, really?” I mean the glory is so intense beyond the book of Acts, and the global negative is so intense, it just seems like a movie, a fairy tale. It is not realistic. What Peter was saying here is that the number one obstacle will be the fact that that which is being described prophetically has never been seen before.

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

- A. The apostles asked what sign would indicate the time of His coming (Mt. 24:3). Jesus gave three commands in Matthew 24:32-42. He commanded us to **learn** the parable of the fig tree (24:32), to **know** when His coming is near (24:33) and therefore to **watch** (24:42).

³“...And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?...³²Learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. ³³So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near--at the doors! ³⁴Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. ³⁵Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words [these prophecies, etc.] will by no means pass away. ³⁶But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only... ⁴²Watch...you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. (Mt. 24:3, 32-42)

Matthew 24, of course, is the main chapter on signs of the end times. We have looked at it several times. The context is the apostles asking, “What sign or what signs shall we be looking for?” That is in verse 3. “What will be the sign of Your coming? What will be the sign of the end of the age?” So that is the biggest question they had, the longest-term question. It is in that context that Jesus gives three commands.

I want you to identify these three commands really clearly so that you can commit your heart to them and so you can determine whether or not you are actually doing what He said. I find these three commands a little bit challenging.

Command number one, He said, “Learn the parable of the fig tree.” Learn it. Take a little bit of time to get familiar with it and learn it.

Number two, He commanded us to know when His coming was near. Now the qualifier is that it is the people living in that generation who are to know it.

Number three, they are to watch. They are to take the biblical information and then observe what is happening in the nations, in the Church, and in the culture, connecting the dots so that it would awaken an urgency as well as be an encouragement. An encouragement and a confidence on the one hand, but an urgency on the other, that there is a big storyline unfolding in that hour of history.

Because, as I have said almost every session, it is the most natural thing for you, for me, for all of us to get trapped in the bubble of our own lives and struggles. When we see there is a divine storyline, a divine narrative bigger than the small bubble of our life, bigger than our little IHOP ministry and our little finances and our little family—though those are important to the Lord and to us. Your life is important to the Lord and to you—the way we approach life changes. The Lord says, “There is a big storyline, bigger than your local ministry and your local assignment. I want you to have urgency to be involved in that storyline, because when it touches you, it changes your perspective on the way you approach life.”

Let’s read verse 32, “Learn the parable.” Now this is a commandment. This is something we are to take time to do. That is why we are having this fourteen-session course. We want to learn the parable. I want you to know that He wants us to learn the parable and to identify that as a command. He said, “When its branches are already tender, and when the fig tree begins to put forth leaves”—meaning it is the spring time; that is when they put forth the leaves. After the dark, cold deadness of winter, after that season, all of a sudden the spring comes and the leaves begin to come out on the branches—“I want you to know something: the harvest, the summer where the harvest is, is very near. It is right at the door.”

Here is the key word in Verse 33, “When you see all of these things...” See, we are witnessing many of the signs of the times increasing on a global level, though not all of them yet. It is premature in this hour of 2016 to say all of them are happening. Jesus said, “When you see **all** of them happening.” There is only one generation they **all** happen in. They are not **all** happening yet; we are not there yet, so we cannot have absolute confidence at this hour. In my opinion, the signs are happening so fast on a global level, so many of them, that we are alerted it is not so far away. Of course with the Lord it could go on for a few decades, or with the Lord it could be the opposite and He could instantly speed up the process.

Since we are not in the season yet where all of them are happening, in my opinion it is inappropriate to say we know for sure it is now. Well, most believers that I know—and I am not trying to be negative; I am trying to be alerting—do not even know what all of the signs **are**, so they would not even know **if** they were being fulfilled or not. I want us to know what all of the signs are so at least we have a grid through biblical information at least to interpret what is happening in the culture and in the nations.

I can say for certainty most of them and almost all of them are happening, but not quite all; we are not quite there. He said, “When you see all of them”—and the key word is **all**—“know.” That is the second commandment, “Know.” Be certain in that hour. We are not there yet. but I think we are not so far away from that time. I could be wrong, but it seems that way to me by my observation of the biblical times of the signs. Again most believers do not know what the signs are. I mean they know wars, rumors of wars, earthquakes, yeah and yeah, things like that. You know if you interviewed people, they would all know wars, rumors of wars, and earthquakes, something famine, yeah famine is on that list too. There is quite an extensive biblical list.

We want to say, “Yes, Lord, we want to grasp it, and we want the Holy Spirit to help us with this.”

He said, verse 34, “Assuredly I say to you, when all of the signs are happening, this generation will not pass away”—in other words, before before the lifetime of the people in that generation is over—“until all these things come to pass.” He uses the word “all things” again, but now He means Jesus appearing in the clouds. He means the final culmination of the trumpet, the voice of the archangel, the Lord Himself returning in the sky. All of those things. The cosmic supernatural dimension of the Lord’s appearing in the sky will take place.

Now Jesus knows that there is going to be a mocking, scoffing mindset in the Church and outside the Church resisting this information at every step. So Jesus prophesies way down the road and says to the people of that generation, verse 35, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.” He could have said it this way, “I promise you these prophetic words I gave you in this chapter, they will come to pass. Though the heavens and earth will pass away, these words will not fall to the ground.” So He is prophesying for 2,000+ years down the road saying, “People of God, My beloved, be sure these are real words. They are reliable. They are durable. They are more durable than the stars.” So that was like a cry of love down through the generations to that generation. He is saying, “I would not lie to you, and My words created the heavens and the earth, so therefore I know they are more reliable and durable than even creation.” He says this that we might know that generation. You might be alive and have the certainty of it.

In verse 36 He speaks of the Father. The prophetic signs are not a substitute for intimate encounter with the Father, for though the signs may give that generation certainty they are in that time frame, they still will not know the day or the hour, as only the Father knows. You got to stay connected to the Father. It is not going to be enough to be academic with the Bible information. There has to be a relational interchange with the Father. That is what He is saying.

So in verse 42 He gives the third command. He says, “Watch.” Watch means to actually look, to take what the Bible says and to look at the nations, look at the culture, look at the Church, connect the dots, and let it

strengthen your courage. Let it give you encouragement, urgency, and resolve that you are in that hour of history. That is what they are to do; they are to watch. Because if they watch, then they are not going to be caught unaware, they are not going to be found off guard.

- B. *Learn the parable from the fig tree (24:32):*** The lesson from a fig tree is easy to understand. A fig tree loses its leaves in wintertime. Its leaves *begin* to come forth in the spring, and figs become ripe in the summer. When we see the leaves sprout in the spring, we know the summer harvest is near. Thus, when the biblical signs of the times all take place, we know that the end of this age is near.

Jesus says to learn the parable from the fig tree. It is a simple lesson, but still one we are commanded to learn, so we want to take time on it. I want to identify it because it is a command. A fig tree loses its leaves in the winter. Its leaves then begin to bud in the spring, and then the figs become ripe in the summer. Everybody in Israel knew that. It was very obvious. When you see the leaves sprout in the spring, then the summer harvest is a few weeks, a month or two down the way. It is so close.

1. The biblical signs of the times must occur in a way that commands global attention, making headline news, for them to function as a prophetic sign that has a clear message from God.

So, as I have written here, it is clear. If all the signs of all the trends are in place and recognizable at a global level—I think that is a key point that we covered that in other sessions—then you know you are in that generation in that hour. Again, we are not quite there where we can say we know we are there. I believe we are close enough that we can say we are very alerted. It is not too early to begin to train the next generation on this subject, because things may speed up really fast as things are escalating quite rapidly in the last decade or two. You just never know with the Lord; it might slow down for a decade or two or it might speed up even faster.

2. As fig leaves signaling the summer can be seen by anyone who pays attention, in the same way, the events signaling the second coming will be obvious to anyone watching for them.

Number two, here is a key: as fig leaves signal the summer harvest, anybody can see it if they are paying attention. That is one of the points of the parable of the fig tree. Anybody can see it if they are paying attention. A child can see it. You do not need a doctorate in theology to understand it. A child can see it if they are paying attention. That is one of the key points. It does not take a special revelation. It does not take a special gifting. It does not take a special station in life. Anybody, even a child, can see the leaves.

“Mommy, Daddy! The figs are coming just in a little while.”

“Yes, little Billy, the figs are coming in just a little while. You are right.”

Jesus said it is that obvious and that simple. So do not say, “Well, I do not know Greek and Hebrew, and I do not have all the theology.” Jesus said that it is pretty straightforward if you are paying attention. That is part of the lesson of the fig tree; anybody can know it if they are paying attention and if they are not afraid of the scoffers, they are not intimidated, and they are not shut down by the stigma of believing what Jesus says about that hour.

You know there is a stigma related to many things Jesus says. Some of the things are just amazing and so easy to understand and so easy to receive. Believers and unbelievers alike love them.

“God so loved the world.”

Everybody says, “Amen! That is a good one, Lord.”

“His mercy endures forever.” Yes, that is an easy one.

Well, the Lord says a few other things that have stigma, even in the Church, and not just things about the end times—that generation of unusual unprecedented activities—but He says a number of things like, “They will be cast into unquenchable fire forever.”

Like, “Oh whoa! Now wait, Lord! Let’s dial that down just a little bit so we can be a little bit more relational about this thing.”

Anyway, the Lord says a number of things. He is completely unintimidated because He is not in a popularity contest. He knows He is the only worthy Man. He knows what He is saying is sound. He knows who He is. I find we must really embrace what He says, not just the popular trends that we all celebrate, believer and unbeliever alike. I mean the other things. I said, “Lord, I want to be a disciple. I want to follow You wherever You go. I want to say what You say. I want to bear whatever stigma You feel I need to bear. I am not into stigma. I do not like stigma, but I will do it if I know it is You.”

So the Lord is saying to learn the parable of the fig tree. Even a child can understand it, as it is obvious if you study it, if you look for it, if you search for it. But you have to stand with child-like faith in the midst of it as well. It is like will the darkness and the death of winter ever be gone? Will there be anything that will get us through the difficulty of human struggle? Well, the leaves—the signs of the times—come forth. They are like love statements from heaven. Though some of the signs are negative in themselves, the Lord is saying, “I am shouting from heaven that it will not always be the winter. Summer and the harvest are around the corner. Lift up your heads. Understand who is speaking. It is Me moving and acting in human history because I love My people.”

3. Jesus made a loving statement in telling us how to interpret the signs of His coming. He was saying that when the earth is covered in the darkness and despair of winter, then the “leaves” begin to come forth with the promise of new life leading to the summer harvest.
 4. When His people see the biblical signs, they are to know that He is on the move. Though it looks like winter and that darkness will never end, the signs of the summer harvest begin to appear. The signs of the times give us hope and encouragement that Jesus’ coming is near.
- C. **When you see all these things (24:33):** “All these things” or the signs spoken of Matthew 24:4-28. There is only one generation in which God’s people will see **all** the future signs described in Matthew 24 and Luke 21 occurring at the **same** time making headline news on a global basis.

When you see all of these things—we have already looked at that for a moment—but what are the “all”? Well it is all the things spoken of in Matthew 24:4-28. Because Jesus is the living Word, is the embodiment of the written Word, He, it is fair to put all of what the Word of God says about that generation as well. In context He is talking about what He said from verse 4-28. He said that when you see all of those things come to pass, know you are in that hour.

I broaden it a bit and ask, “Well, what does the whole counsel of the Word of God say about that generation?” Because they are all going to be reliable and come to pass. So I am looking at all the signs. Again I take them as love tokens from God’s heart that the winter is past, the spring is now, and the summer harvest is so close.

1. Jesus gave **12 negative sign trends** that will bring distress to the nations and indicate the generation of His return (Mt. 24:4-14; Lk. 21:11, 25). These trends include **deception** by false christ/prophets (Mt. 24:4-5, 11), **ethnic conflict** (Mt. 24:7), **economic warfare** (Mt. 24:7), **famines, pestilences, and earthquakes** (Mt. 24:8), **hatred of believers** (Mt. 24:9), **relational breakdown** in society (Mt. 24:10), **lawlessness**, or increased sin and rebellion (Mt. 24:12), **fearful sights** (Lk. 21:11), great signs in the **sky** and disturbances in the **sea** (Lk. 21:11, 25).
2. Some of these trends have always existed, but in the end times they will have a distinct intensity that will make global headline news. They will constitute a prophetic sign with a message from the Lord that can be discerned by the Body of Christ worldwide.
3. Now, for the first time in history, most of these trends and the developments leading to key end-time events are happening in an alarming measure at the same time on a global basis. For example, Israel had to become a nation before the abomination of desolation could occur.

Now, for the first time in history, for the very first time in 6,000 years plus or minus of human history since Adam, most of these trends and the developments to the key events are unfolding. The trends and events are not the same thing. There are trends in the culture, and there are actual events that take place. Israel became a nation; that was an event. Most of the trends and the development that will lead to the events are increasing on a global level right now. There are a handful of events that are increasing. Most of them are increasing on a global level right now; I have made that point. It is good to know that this is the first time in history that has ever been true. This was not true fifty years ago, it was not true thirty years ago, it was not true 100 years ago, but it is true now for the first time in history.

4. Jesus, the Man we love, gave His people much insight into what He considered to be the most important things to know about the generation in which He returns.

The man we love—Jesus, we love Him, He loves us—the Man we love says, “I want you to know what is important from My point of view for you to know. I love you, you love Me,” says the Lord. “This is what I say is important.”

Yet for much of the Church it is not important to them. They say, “Well, I am not really into that.”

I reply, “You have got to be into that. It came from the lips of the Man you love, so you got to be into it a little bit.”

I am not into the end times; I am into the Man. I love His leadership. Whatever He says I like it. Whether it is popular, unpopular, I like it. I am in all the way. I am into prayer, not because I am into prayer, but I like what Jesus does. I am into soul winning. I am into servanthood—well I need to be into it more—I am into all that stuff because He is into it.

You know I have talked to folks who say, “Wow, you are really into the end times!”

I answer, “No, that is not exactly it. I am really into following that Man, the Man that I love.”

That is why I love Israel. People ask, “What is this Israel deal?”

I reply, “The glorious Man, the awesome Man, the Bridegroom King said, ‘I am with Israel.’ That is all there is to it. If He says it, I am in.” Now there is more to unpack with that, but that was my beginning point. When I found out it moved Him, then I wanted it to move me.

Some folks I talked to over the years have said things like, “Well, I am not really into the Israel thing” or “I am not into the end times” or “not really into the prayer thing, not into this thing.” I say that I am not into any of those things really; I am into Jesus. Whatever He says I am into. I want to shift the end-time subject to a Man and His leadership in history, not to kind of eccentric, novel ideas that are cool to write novels about or make movies about that will be bestsellers. I am all for that, but it is bigger than that. It is loyalty to a Man.

5. The signs of the times tell those who are under siege that Jesus will return to rescue His people. The generation that sees “all these things” will be rescued (Mt. 24:30; Lk. 21:27). Israel was not rescued in AD 70 nor were “all these things” fulfilled in the first century.
 6. Had a first-century believer tried to apply a preterist understanding to Matthew 24, by the time he saw “all these things” it would have been too late for him to flee Jerusalem. Jesus told the first-century believers to flee Jerusalem when the siege *first* started (Lk. 21:20-21).
- D. **Know that it is near (24:33):** Jesus commanded one generation of believers to *know* that His return was near. It was the generation who would see all the things that He prophesied in Matthew 24.

³³When you see all these things, know that it is near--at the doors! ³...This generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.... (Mt. 24:33-34)

He says, “I want you to know it is near.” Let’s read the verse again. We have already read it, but we will read it for review, verse 33. My goal is that you really lock into verse 33. This is a big statement. “When you see all of these things, know!” That is the thing I am emphasizing now: know, have certainty. If you are alive when all of the things are happening, have certainty.

“Get rid of the ambivalence, the ‘well maybe, maybe not,’” He says, “if you are alive in that hour.”

Again I do not think we are at that hour where it is all happening yet. I braced myself, and I said, “Lord if that happens in my lifetime and it is in the Word and it is happening, I am not going to be ambivalent about it. I do not care if it is popular. I care if it is right and it is dear to You.”

Know this: it is near; it is at the door. Know this—verse 34—that generation of people alive in that time frame will see the whole thing unfold. The people in that generation will see it come to completion. Jesus commanded this one generation of believers to know His return was near. Again it is the generation that sees all the things.

1. Believers are to recognize when these things *begin* in the generation Jesus returns (Lk. 21:28, 32). The end-time distress of nations will have a recognizable beginning, increase in intensity over a generation, and culminate at His return. *Unexpectedly*—those surprised by the increasing distress will be more vulnerable to fear (Lk. 21:26, 34).

²⁸When these things begin to happen...lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near... ³²this generation will by no means pass away till all things take place... ³⁴Take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down...that Day come on you unexpectedly.” (Lk. 21:28-34)

He says a similar thing in Luke 21. He says in verse 28, “When all these things begin to happen, lift up your heads”—be encouraged. Even at the beginning of the generation, as these things begin, before they all are happening but have begun in a noticeable way. I believe we can say that they have begun in a noticeable, discernible way, in a major way beyond any time of history. We are already at that point. “Lift up your heads.” In other words, be encouraged. Do not give in to fear like the others. Your salvation, your redemption, the breakthrough is so close, the full breakthrough. I mean we have partial breakthroughs in our life and in our

ministry, but here it means the breakthrough of all of history where the whole realm of the glory of God fills the earth. I like the partial breakthrough in my life and ministry, but I have an eye on the ultimate eschatological breakthrough that is not far away.

He said this in verse 32, “This generation will not pass away.” In other words, the generation in which it begins. One decade unfolds, two, three decades, four decades, five decades; we do not know how many decades. When it begins, there will be one generation that sees the beginning and the completion because the beginning is recognizable.

He says in verse 34, “Take heed.” If you are in that hour, you do not want your heart to get weighed down. He is talking about by sin and compromise and fear. Because if your heart gets weighed down you will lose perspective, and these events will come on you unexpected. You will not expect them because you will be dull in your perception; you will have a weighed-down heart. A weighed-down heart is like smoke in your eyes. The clearest thing can be in front of you, but if you have smoke in your eyes you cannot see it. You cannot make right choices in light of it. You get a weighed-down heart, He says that you will not see what the Scripture is clearly declaring and describing. You will be lost in all the muddle and the confusion of the culture and of the nations that are being filled with fear.

He says, “I do not want this to come upon you unexpectedly. I do not want this to surprise you. I want you to watch it intensify. Decade by decade as it unfolds I want your discernment as to what is happening to increase, your faith to increase, your accessing the grace of God to increase. I want them all to increase together.

2. By observing the biblical signs of the times, believers who are alive in that generation are to know that it is the generation of Jesus’ return, yet without knowing the exact day or hour.
3. My opinion is that ***we may be in the early days of the generation in which Jesus will return.*** In other words, it is possible that there are people alive today who will see the return of Jesus. It could be the 20 year olds or the 2 year olds who may see His return—no one knows with certainty. This is by God’s design because He wants us to move forward by faith as we search the Word and live in deep connection and relationship with Him through the Spirit.

My opinion is—it is not a prophecy; it is an opinion—that we may be in the early days of that generation. That is an opinion. I have said it several times in the course, from Genesis 15:13-16, that a generation can be 100 years. When God spoke to Abraham about four generations He said that the children of Israel would be in Egypt 400 years and leave in the fourth generation. The very first time a generation was ever described by God, He said it was 100 years. That does not mean it has to be 100 years, but it can be that long. So you might think, “Wow! A 100-year window. That is long! Hmm, where are we at in that 100-year window?” That generation may not go that long, we do not know, but it has that kind of latitude biblically.

I think that we are in the early days. I am not sure, but I believe it is very possible. It is my opinion that we are. I do not know that I will see it in my day. I am sixty years old. I do not even care. Someone might ask, “Do you hope?”

I say, “I just hope I do the will of God actually. That is what I hope.” Because God determines those things, and His wisdom is perfect. Maybe the twenty-year olds will see it. Maybe it is the two-year olds. Maybe it is their children. I do not know. Maybe it is me. Maybe it is my people. How many of you are sixty-ish? Come on! If you think they are not being honest, point at them. Okay, good, I saw that!

4. My opinions on this generation are based on *observation* of the biblical signs, not on personal *revelation* such as prophetic visions. We must insist that our faith be based on what the Bible says, not on personal revelations about the timing of His return.

My opinion about this is based on the observations of the signs of the times. It is not a personal prophecy. I do not want to base something that important on a personal prophecy or on a guy's dream, even if he has a really accurate prophetic history of accurate dreams. I appreciate that, but I am putting that at the side. I am basing my opinion on biblical signs the observation of what the Bible says.

We have to insist that our faith be built on the Bible. It is confirmed by the Lord touching us by the Holy Spirit and prophetic words where it is confirmed. Our convictions are based on what is written in the Book and that is what we go by.

5. Over 150 chapters in the Scripture have God's end-time plan as the main subject. When we combine the prophecies in these chapters we get a fuller picture of biblical signs of the times.

It is surprising to most people when they hear that there are 150 chapters in the Bible in which the end times is the primary subject; that is a staggering piece of information. If you count up the four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—there are eighty-nine chapters, almost ninety chapters, about Jesus and His leadership at His first coming, ninety chapters almost. But there are 150 chapters about the second coming, about the negative and the positive events related to that generation of history, almost twice as much about that generation than about Jesus' generation.

It is the same Jesus—He is the leader of both generations—same Bible, same Holy Spirit, same God, and yet many people just put those 150 chapters aside and think, “Well, I am not really into that.”

I say, “No, no! Do not do that just so casually. This is Jesus' leadership. It is shifting the earth to the age to come. You want to know what the Word says about that.”

6. Paul taught that the Church should know the times and seasons related to Jesus' coming.

¹Concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you...⁴But you, brethren, are not in darkness [ignorance] so that this Day should overtake [come on you unexpectedly] you as a thief...⁶Therefore...let us watch. (1 Thes. 5:1-6)

Paul the apostle agreed with Jesus, of course. He said that we believers should know; that believers in that hour will know is what it means. Look at 1 Thessalonians 5. He said this concerning the times and the seasons and he was talking about the end times because that is what 1 Thessalonians is about. The passage right before there he was talking about the rapture, being caught up to meet the Lord in the air, just a few verses before. He says now, “Concerning when this is going to happen you have no need that I explain it to you”—because I have already done it is the idea.

Verse 4, believers are not in darkness. That is, believers are not in ignorance about it. The Bible is clear about what will be happening in that generation. So that that day, in that hour, that time frame of history will not overtake a believer like a thief because they will watch it progressively unfold. They will not be surprised by it. As the distress increases, they are watching the glory of God in the nations being manifested as it is increasing. The believer's personal response is increasing. It is all progressively increasing. They are not overtaken like by a thief.

So Paul says in verse 6 what Jesus says, “Therefore watch.” That is the number one command of both Paul and Jesus related to the end times, “Watch.” “Watch,” he says. Watch and pray. Many times it says to watch, and

many times it says both to watch and pray. Put them together. You want to put them together although not every passage adds the word pray.

Watch means actually watch: open your eyes, read the Bible, look at the culture, look at the nations, look at the Church, connect the dots, and say, “Wow! My God is speaking. He is breaking into history. I get it. I am part of the plan. I am involved with You.” Watch. Jesus said it more than anybody, Paul says it here.

7. It is essential for God’s people to have understanding in that hour so that they embrace what is right and refuse what is wrong. For example, a counterfeit justice and unity movement will emerge in that hour—the harlot Babylon will include global religious and economic agendas (Rev. 17-18). Some believers will embrace the agenda associated with the harlot Babylon or aspects of it because they do not know what the Scripture says about it.

Now it is essential for God’s people to have understanding in that hour. Why? In that generation—whether it is five decades or ten decades, fifty years or 100, however long that generation goes we do not know—believers need to embrace what is right and refuse what is wrong. Well, that is obvious, you know, embrace what it is right and refuse what is wrong. Here is the problem: there will be all kinds of counterfeit activity happening with the Harlot Babylon reality of Revelation 17-18. There is a counterfeit justice movement, as well as a counterfeit unity movement related to religion that is emerging in the earth. Many believers are going to say, “Fantastic! Justice, unity, everybody together, everyone is right! This is amazing! This is the unity we prayed for.”

The Bible says, “No, that is the counterfeit.” Watch, pay attention to what the Bible said.

“Counterfeit? No how could it be? Look at the unity and the love and the justice. It is amazing!”

The Lord says, “Do not embrace the counterfeit that emerges in that hour of history.” There will be counterfeit signs and wonders, there will be counterfeit religious movements, unity movements of nations, of religions. For every one of them, toleration is the number one virtue and value: that everything is right and nothing is wrong. Those movements are increasing rapidly right now. If you are not aware what the Bible says, you can get caught in the momentum of the nations, though it is going contrary to what the Word of God says.

8. What people believe will be an issue of life and death, not just theological debate. Do you have biblically-informed convictions about the significance and trends of the last generation?

⁶My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. (Hos. 4:6)

This is an issue of life and death. The issue is not, “Well, I am into the end times” or “I am not really into the end times.” Again, I myself am into Jesus and the Bible.

It says in Hosea, “My people are destroyed by lack of knowledge.” It is not just general knowledge He is talking about they did not know in the context of what He is talking about. It is that they did not know what God was doing in their generation. They did not understand what He was saying.

Some people think the subject of the end times is kind of a curious subject that we just debate over. You think that; I think this; let’s debate over it. There is a bit of that going on, but, beloved, it is a far bigger issue than a theological debate. It is an issue of life and death. I am not talking about all of the fine print details. I am talking about the broad strokes of what is happening. It is not a casual thing; it is life and death. People will embrace the wrong things unaware, and it will cause the destruction of their life—their spiritual and their physical life.

Do you have biblically informed convictions about the end times? What the Bible says, do you know it? If you do, are you able to pass the main ideas on to other people, to your children, to your friends? I do not mean you know every Bible verse and know every detail; that is not what I mean. Do you know the main storyline and the main trends, good and bad? Could you pass it on to someone? This will be an issue of life and death. It is not this minute, but it is going to be before it is over.

Of course many people say, “No, I don’t know it. Not yet.” I am not saying that is some horrible deal. I am saying it is time to get the information. We are in that hour when it is time to get it.

So I am just encouraging you just to settle the issue and say, “I am going to be a person who gets this.” Again, not all the details, but the main broad strokes.

9. Israel’s unresponsiveness to Jesus was related to their not knowing the time of their visitation. He wept over Jerusalem because they did not respond rightly (Lk. 19:41-44).
- E. ***This generation (24:34)***: This generation will not pass away till all these things take place.
1. A generation in Scripture may last up to 100 years—the Lord spoke to Moses of Israel’s captivity in Egypt as lasting 400 years or 4 generations (Gen. 15:13-16).
 2. The time referred to as *this generation* is the generation in which “all these things” take place. Some of “these things” had a partial fulfillment when Rome destroyed Jerusalem in AD 70.
 3. It is clear that the fullness of what Jesus prophesied will not be happen until the end of the age. Other uses of the phrase “this generation” in Matthew (11:16; 12:41, 42, 45; 23:36) refer to Jesus’ contemporaries. This is determined from each contexts, not from the phrase by itself. Thus if the contextual factors in Matthew 24 do not refer to AD 70, then it points to the future.
 4. Matthew 24 speaks of a *divine rescue* of those under siege at the end of the age by Jesus’ coming (24:15, 29-31), which did not happen in the Roman siege of AD 70 (Lk 21:20-21).
- F. ***My words will not pass away (24:35)***: Heaven and earth will pass away, but Jesus’ words will not pass away. It may have seemed different for the apostles to believe that all these signs would occur in one generation (Mt. 24:34). Jesus compared the reliability of His prophetic words in Matthew 24 to the reliability and durability of heavens and earth (Mt. 24:35).
1. The emphasis on Jesus’ words in verse 35 is not on His general teachings, but on the reliability of His prophetic words given in Matthew 24.
 2. Paul taught that the form of this world is destined to pass away in the future (1 Cor. 7:31).
³¹***For the form of this world is passing away. (1 Cor. 7:31)***

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

- A. Jesus’ main message here is sometimes missed—that people alive in the generation He returns could understand the prophetic significance of that time frame, but *many will not* (Mt. 24:36-42). Here Jesus implied that most of the people living in the generation of His return will not know it. The secondary application is that the generation will be violent like Noah’s and immoral like Lot’s.

³⁶**But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.**
³⁷**But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. ³⁸For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, ³⁹and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. ⁴⁰Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. ⁴¹Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. ⁴²Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. (Mt. 24:36-42)**

Verse 37, “But as the days of Noah were, so also will be the coming of the Son of Man” or the generation the Lord returns. Noah’s generation was unprecedented in what happened. A flood came. You know it never rained before. Can you imagine? Noah is out there and he preaches for like seventy years. We do not know the exact time, but a good estimate of how long he built the ark and preached about it was about seventy or eighty years, something like that. You can put it together by the age of his children when you compare a few verses together. So let’s just say seventy years.

Here he is. I mean I picture this guy at year one of this seventy-year assignment. He’s out there sawing a tree down, okay. “Hey Noah! Hey bro, what are you doing?”

“Well, I am sawing a tree down.”

“What are you going to do? You have already built your house.”

“Well, I am going to build a boat.”

“Okay, why? Because the ocean is quite a ways away.”

“Well, it is going to rain.”

“What do you mean, rain?”

“It is going to rain.”

“Well, Noah, basic science class, second grade. Remember second grade, Noah?” The book of Genesis said the water came up from the ground. It did not come from above. God watered the earth from beneath. “Noah, second grade, remember the water comes from the ground?”

“Well, no, it is going to come from above.”

“Noah, you are a good guy, but you always were messing around in second grade. It is impossible for water to come down! There is no way they can hold the water up there. Water is heavy! You cannot keep it up there. Water does not come down; it comes up.”

“No, it is going to come down this one time.”

“Really? Who told you?”

“God.”

“Really? Good for you, Noah.”

Now it is year ten and he is still sawing. He has got callouses now, no more blisters. It is year twenty. It is year thirty. It is year forty. His in-laws have had it with him. “Mrs. Noah, we told you not to marry that boy. He went off the edge! Look at that monstrosity that he has been building for fifty years. What about the kids and college and the future? What is that? We are a long way from the ocean. “

Sixty years, seventy years. I mean I cannot fathom a seventy-year assignment believing something that is unprecedented will happen, something that has never ever happened before ever. Jesus said in verse 37 that like in the days of Noah so also will be the coming of the Son of man. I mean, what a remarkable reality!

He goes on and says, “For in that day before the flood”—for that sixty, seventy years—“the people were eating and drinking”—business as usual.

That makes sense. There is nothing wrong with that. Their argument was that it had never rained before. “We have never seen rain. We are not going to believe this message.”

Then—and again I do not know if it was exactly seventy years, but let’s say seventy just for the telling of the story here—he enters the ark, verse 39.

- B. **The day and the hour (24:36):** But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels, but only the Father. God could prophetically reveal the timing of Jesus’ return to His servants, but He chose to leave the specific day and hour unknown *so that* His people must cultivate a heart of faith with hunger to know His heart and to walk closely with Him in that generation. Jesus emphasized that His people would not know the day or hour of His return (Mt. 24:39, 42, 44, 50; 25:13).
- C. It is ironic that this qualifier to the command to *know* the generation is used as an argument *against knowing* the generation. Many use this verse to justify their unfamiliarity and lack of study of biblical prophecy. They use this passage in the opposite way that Jesus intended it in its context.
- D. **Days of Noah:** The majority were unaware of what would happen even in light of Noah’s preaching (2 Pet. 2:5). They went about engaged in the ordinary activities of daily life completely unaware of the significance of what would happen in their generation. The surprise of Noah’s flood parallels the lack of understanding that the majority will have in the most significant hour of human history.
⁵[God]...***did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah...a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly...*** (2 Pet. 2:5)

The vast majority, besides eight of them, I mean it was the whole of them other than Noah’s family, did not know that here they were in the most significant generation in history at that point in time. They were completely unaware, though Noah had been preaching to them with the Lord’s blessing on him.

He is called a preacher of righteousness in 2 Peter 2:5. He was a preacher of righteousness. He was speaking it with authority and clarity for fifty, sixty, seventy years, but still Matthew 24:39 they did not know. What do you mean you did not know? Well, they heard, but they never ever connected the dots. They were in the most significant generation of human history up to that time. The entire earth was going to be transformed, and no one was aware of it. Then the flood came and took them away.

Jesus said in verse 42, “Watch therefore.” Jesus said to pay attention because you do not want to be unaware. There are a number of ways in which it is like the days of Noah. The people were unaware completely; it sounds like today. The nations are unaware. Much of the Church is unaware, not even paying attention. It is unprecedented what is going to happen. Jesus said when He looked back over history, “No, not that generation. No. No. No. The most comparable example of what is going to happen that is going to be so unprecedented and it is going to be so un-responded to is the generation of Noah.” He went way back there. That was the most unprecedented thing in history, and it was the most un-responded to thing in history that was from God. The people did not know, and it came suddenly. Suddenly it escalated to a whole other level.

You know, it is one decade, two decades, three decades. The boat is getting bigger. They are laughing. They are mocking, four decades, five decades, six decades, seven. There was a time when it suddenly escalated and people could not find their way at that time.

- E. Noah and his family prepared for many years without knowing the specific day or hour.

***⁷By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household...* (Heb. 11:7)**

Look at Hebrews 11:7. Noah was divinely warned—here is the key phrase—of things not yet seen. Unprecedented. There was no record of this in history, but he was moved by godly fear because it was the word of the Lord. He prepared an ark sixty, seventy years, whatever that number actually was. I look at Noah, just the resolve he had. Have you ever done anything for ten years? I mean ten years stayed with something that had stigma, that had people laughing at you that it was God? Have you ever done it twenty years? No drops of rain, thirty years, forty years? I mean it is like “Ugh, have mercy on the guy, Lord! Come on, have some mercy on Noah! Speed this thing up.” Well, the Lord did not need my prayer on that.

Well, we are coming to a time where there is a generation like Noah and God is raising up Noahs; He is raising up messengers, preachers of righteousness, is what I mean. For us, the ark is obedience to the Man Jesus; that is the ark. The ark of safety is the word of the Lord and our obedience to it, our responsiveness to it, and our confidence in it; that is the ark. God is raising up young and old ones who are divinely warning a generation and divinely inviting a generation. There is a warning and there is an invitation, it is two sides of the same coin. I want to be a man among a people in a generation that is not moved by the stigma, not moved by the scoffing, not moved by the delay, not moved by the unprecedented, because I want to fear the Lord and I want to be about His business.

Amen and amen, let’s stand. Let’s stand before the Lord. Let’s ask Him to touch us.