

Session 2 Knowing the Generation but Not the Day or Hour

I. REVIEW FROM SESSION 1

- A. Jesus commanded one generation of believers to know that His return was near. It was the generation that would be alive to see all these things or the signs that He prophesied in Mt. 24.
³³ ***When you see all these things, know that it is near--at the doors! 34...This generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place...36 Of that day and hour no one knows.*** (Mt 24:33-36)
- B. As a believer who loves Jesus, we are eager to know what is on His heart, and thus what He meant by “all these things” that will lead to His glorious return to the earth. The Man we love has given us much insight into what He considers to be the important things to know about the generation in which He returns. He wants us to know them because we will live differently.
- C. If we are living in the last generation, then we need to know it. There are two questions that many ask. First, can we know if we are living in the last generation? Second, how will we know if we 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 us to be prepared for His end-time purposes. Jesus would not tell us of the circumstances around His coming then say no one could know it.
- D. My opinion is that we are in the early days of the generation in which Jesus will return. In other words, I believe that there are people alive today who will see the return of Jesus. It may be the 20 year olds or the 2 year olds who see it. I do not know with certainty. No one knows this with absolute 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.
- E. By observing the biblical signs of the times, it is possible to know the generation of Jesus’ return yet without knowing the day or hour. 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.
- F. I classify the signs of the times into three categories. We focus our attention on sign events and sign trends to progressively strengthen our faith that we are getting near to Jesus’ return.
- 1). Sign events: these are predicted in Scripture and alert us to the timing of Jesus’ return.
 - 2). Sign trends: both positive and negative sign trends will signal His coming
 - 3). Prophetic experiences: subjective personal experiences alert us to the end times.
- G. The apostles and the OT prophets also prophesied of sign events and trends. When we combine their prophecies with Jesus’ prophecies then we get a much more complete picture. Jesus’ most in-depth teaching on the end times is called the ***Olivet Discourse***. The most complete record of this prophecy is in Matthew 24-25. Mark and Luke gave a shorter account of it (Mk. 13; Lk. 21).

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

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

- A. Jesus is answering the apostle's question concerning what signs would indicate His return (v. 3).
³ *The disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" (Mt. 24:3)*
- B. Jesus gave us three commands in Mt. 24:32-42. First, He commanded us to **learn** the parable of the fig tree (v. 32), then to **know** that His coming was near (v. 33) and therefore, to **watch** (v. 42). We "see" more clearly (v. 33) as we watch more consistently (v. 42). Have you learned this parable? Do you have a biblically informed opinion about the significance of this generation?
- C. The lesson of the parable of the fig tree is easy to understand. The fig tree loses its leaves in wintertime and does not sprout till late in the spring. Thus, when the leaves of a fig tree begin to sprout, we know that summer is near. In the same way, when the prophetic sign events and trends take place together making global headlines, then we know that the end of this age is near. They must occur in a way that makes headline news worldwide. This is to constitute a prophetic sign that has a message from God in it that could be discerned by the Body of Christ.
- D. As the fig leaves signaling the summer can be seen by anyone who is paying attention, in the same way, the events signaling the second coming will be obvious to anyone looking for them.
- E. **How long is a biblical generation?** A generation in Scripture ranges from 40 to 100 years (Gen. 15:13-16; Num. 32:13; Ps. 90:10; Mt. 1:17; Acts 7:6). Moses spoke of Israel's captivity in Egypt as lasting 400 years or 4 generations (Gen. 15:13). Thus, a generation could refer to 100 years. There were 14 generations from Abraham to David (Mt. 1:17) each averaging about 70 years.
- F. "All these things" in (v. 33 and v. 34) include the prophetic signs spoken of in Mt. 24:4-28. There is only one generation in which God's people will see **all** the trends and events of Mt. 24 occurring at the **same** time at an alarming measure or making headline news on a global basis. Jesus **commanded** His people in that generation to **know** that His coming was near.
- G. For the **first** time in history, **most** of these trends and **some** of the necessary developments that will lead to the 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.

- H. It seemed incredible to the apostles that all these sign events and trends would occur in a global way in one generation (v. 34). This was the unspoken issue that Jesus addressed by comparing the passing of the heavens and earth to the truthfulness of His words or prophecies (v. 35).
- I. The emphasis on Jesus' words in v. 35 is not on His general teachings, but on the reliability of His prophetic words concerning the future given in Mt. 24. As impossible as it seems that all these events would occur together in one generation, the prophetic words of Jesus guarantee it.
- J. Jesus compared His prophetic words in Mt. 24 to the reliability and durability of heaven and earth. Paul taught that the form of this world is destined to pass away (1 Cor. 7:31).

³¹ ***For the form of this world is passing away. (1 Cor. 7:31)***

- K. We are called to know or recognize the generation in which the Lord returns. One will only look up and lift up their heads if they know it is drawing near. That is the point.
²⁵ ***There will be signs in the sun, in the moon...and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; 26 men's hearts failing them from fear...28 Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near." 29 Then He spoke to them a parable: "Look at the fig tree..." (Lk. 21:25-29)***

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

- A. In Mt. 24:32-39, Jesus emphasized that the people alive in the generation in which He returns are to know with confidence that it is the generation of His return. He gives a significant qualifier to this command, namely that we not take it a step further and seek to know the day and the hour.
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. 38 For 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, 39 and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be...42 Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. (Mt. 24:36-42)***
- B. Jesus emphasized that we would not know the hour of His return (Mt. 24:39, 42, 44, 50; 25:13). The Father has strategically hidden that from His people so that we live free from fear and filled with understanding, only as we search the Word and stay deeply connected to Him. It is ironic that this qualifier to the command to know the generation is used as an argument against knowing the generation. We must seek relationship with the Father because only He knows.
- C. The main message in this passage is that people who could have understood the prophetic significance of the generation they lived in, did not. The surprise with which Noah's flood came on the majority illustrates the ignorance that Jesus wants His people to avoid. Jesus pointed out how the majority were unaware, even in the face of the preaching of Noah.

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 Peter 2:4-5)***

- D. The surprise of Noah's flood proves the widespread problem of lacking prophetic understanding and faith in a significant history changing generation. The people in Noah's day were caught totally by surprise as they went about the ordinary activities of daily life.
- E. Noah and his family prepared for an entire generation without knowing the specific day or hour.
⁷ By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household...and became heir of the righteousness... (Heb. 11:7)
- F. One of Jesus' main points is that many living in that generation will not know it (Mt. 24:37-39). Thus, they will make wrong decisions because of their fear, offense towards God or ignorance of what the Scripture says is happening. Though it is possible for them to know it, many believers will not see it because they did not care about the last generation being important to Jesus.
- G. Believers can know the generation just as Noah did, even though it will come suddenly to those without understanding. However, it will not catch the righteous off guard (1 Thes. 5:1-6).
- H. Many use Mt. 24:36 to justify their unfamiliarity and their lack of study of biblical prophecy. They use this passage in the opposite way that Jesus intended in its context.
- I. Jesus had just laid out main signs necessary to prepare the Body of Christ for that generation. I exhort you to not give way to such shallow arguments. Stand your ground. God has given His word with clarity.
- J. As believers who love Jesus, we are eager to know what is on His heart and thus, what He meant by "all of those things" that will lead to His glorious return to the earth. The Man we love has given us insight into what He considers to be the important things to know about the generation in which He will return. He wants us to know them because we will act differently and make different decisions if we understand what is happening.
- K. It is essential to have understanding in that hour so that we embrace what is right and refuse what is wrong. For example, the greatest counterfeit justice and unity movement will emerge in that hour. It is referred to as the harlot Babylon worldwide religion (Rev. 17). Many believers who are not aware of what is happening, will embrace the harlot Babylon religion, thinking it is good.
- L. Our faith is to be stirred by searching the Bible to gain understanding of what the Word says about the prophetic signs that declare the generation in which the Lord returns.
- M. God could easily settle the issue of timing by telling His prophets in the Church today, but He has chosen to leave the specific day and hour unknown so that we must cultivate a heart of faith with hunger to know what is on His heart about that generation. Jesus taught that most of the people living in the generation of His return would not know it (Mt. 24:37-39).

IV. JESUS REBUKED HIS GENERATION FOR NOT DISCERNING THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

- A. Jesus rebuked His generation for not discerning the signs of His first coming. Asking for a sign was legitimate because Joel prophesied that God would send signs just before the Messiah came (Joel 2:30). The Pharisees' hypocrisy was in asking for signs beyond those Jesus did, to test Him.
¹ The Pharisees...came, and testing Him asked that He would show them a sign from heaven...² Hypocrites! You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times. ⁴ A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign... (Mt. 16:1-4)
- B. Jesus rebuked them for not seeing the prophetic signs of the times for that generation. However, the signs of that generation were not recorded in the OT. If they were rebuked for missing signs not in Scripture, how more responsible are we to know the biblical signs of the times?
- C. Israel's unresponsiveness to Jesus was related to them not knowing the time of "their visitation". He wept over Jerusalem because they did not respond rightly. He had warned the cities of Israel.
⁴¹ He saw the city and wept over it, ⁴² saying, "If you had known...the things that make for your peace...⁴³ For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, ⁴⁴ and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation." (Lk. 19:41-44)
- D. Paul taught that the Church should know the times and seasons related to Jesus' second coming.
¹ Concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you...⁴ But you, brethren, are not in darkness [ignorance] so that this Day should overtake [come on you unexpectedly] you as a thief...⁶ Therefore...let us watch. (1 Thes. 5:1-6)

V. OVERCOMING OBSTACLES: THE FEAR OF MAN

- A. Many draw back from teaching on the end times because of the fear of man. Peter warned the saints to first be aware of the dangers of a scoffing or mocking spirit. The first thing we need to know is what we are up against. All who stand for God's truth in the end times will be resisted by scoffers or mockers from both outside and inside the Church.
³ Knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days...⁴ saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? All things continue as they were from the beginning of creation." (2 Pet. 3:3-4)
- B. Many will scoff and mock the necessity to understand, proclaim and prepare for the Lord's return. Scoffers will argue that people have always said that Jesus was coming. It was a top priority to Peter to warn the saints to not become cynical. Rather, we are to be "anointed observers" of the signs of the times. We must not let a mocking spirit steal these truths from our heart. We do not want to impart a mocking spirit to our children and grandchildren.
- C. I do not ask anyone to accept my views; rather I urge you to boldly challenge all the ideas that you hear. 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).

VI. OVERCOMING OBSTACLES: COMMON LIES AGAINST KNOWING THE GENERATION

- A. **Common lie #1:** Since we are not able to know the day or hour of Jesus' return, we should not try to know the generation in which Jesus returns. Jesus and Paul emphasized the know-ability of the signs of the end times (Mt. 24:32-34; Lk. 21:25-29; 1 Thes. 5:1-6; 2 Thes. 2:1-11).
- B. **Common lie #2:** Every generation believed they were the last one. In ***only one generation*** (the first century) has the majority of God's people believed this in a sustained way. It is true that a very small number (possibly less than 1%) in many generations believed this.
- C. **Common lie #3:** No one can understand these prophecies because they are too complicated. Why even try? Any system of theology that takes the end times out of the hands of the people has treated the text in a way differently than God designed. Scripture was written in a day that most could not read. The truth is that many do not want to take the time and effort to wrestle with the vast amount of biblical information in the face of so much criticism. It is easier to just ignore it.
- D. **Common Lie #4:** Understanding the end times causes us to minimize our work in the kingdom. This is a criticism toward the escapist and defeatist mentality of some who believe in the pre-tribulation rapture. They conclude that they should not work hard to transform the culture since the Antichrist will take over everything anyway and since they may be raptured at any moment.
- E. **Common lie #5:** It will all pan out in the end. The question is, will it pan out well with you and your loved ones? It will only go well for those who are prepared.

VII. WE ARE EXHORTED TO WATCH AND PRAY

- A. We are exhorted to watch and pray: ten times related to preparing for the end times (Mt. 24:42; 25:13; Mk. 13:9, 33, 34, 35, 37; Lk. 21:36; 1 Thes. 5:6; Rev. 16:15). To watch is to cultivate faith and understanding that agrees with what the Word and the Spirit say about Jesus' return. We prepare by watching what the Spirit is saying in Scripture, in circumstances, and in our life.
⁴² **Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. (Mt. 24:42)**
- B. **Scripture:** Search out what the Bible says (OT/NT) about the signs of His coming. There are over 150 chapters in the Bible that focus on the end times.
- C. **Circumstances:** With a heart of faith, watch the sign events and trends that are predicted in Scripture progressively unfold. Set your heart to be an "anointed observer" of these.
- D. **Personal life:** Be alert to the Spirit's stirring and challenges in your personal life and ministry. Many unique things are happening at a high level at the same time for the first time in history, yet this alone will not move a spiritually dull heart. We are to keep alert to our communion with God so as to always be in a disposition to agree with the Spirit.