

Certainty and the Fig Tree

Luke 21:29-33

October 6, 2024

Well, we have come to this final section, actually, of the Olivet Discourse this morning. It's toward the end of Luke 21. So you can turn there in your Bibles to Luke 21 and find your way to verse 29. In this section, the whole section is verses 29 to 36. But in this first section, Luke 21:29 to 33, Jesus is kind of rounding out his teaching on the end times. He's kind of circling back here to the questions that his disciples asked from the very start, and he's going to answer from their questions.

He's going to answer "the when" question and secure the assurance of their hearts in the certainty of truth about the timing of the end. And then having done that, having assured them in certainty about the truth, Jesus wants to give them, in verses 34 to 36, a sense of urgency. The certainty leads to a sense of urgency about how they must live. There's a general

understanding about the timing of his return that can be known, that he tells about. But as we find out from Matthew 24:36, no one knows the day or the hour.

So there's a general understanding of the timing, but the specifics, the exact time, no one knows; not any man, woman, no one on the Internet, by the way, and no Angel in heaven, not even the Son of Man in his humanity knows the day or the hour, only the father. So the general timing is known. No one knows the day or the hour. And that remains in the doctrine of imminency of Christ's return, which instills a sense of urgency every single day that we live about how we must live as Christians before God.

So see if you can hear those two notes in this final section of the Olivet Discourse, the note of certainty about what Jesus has said and taught, what he's told these disciples, and then also the note of urgency about how they must live, and by extension, how we must live.

GRACE CHURCH



Grace

Let's start reading Luke 21, starting in verse 29. "Then he told them a parable," the then, refers back to what he just told them about the signs in the sun, moon, stars, the powers of the heavens shaken; all these signs, and then the coming of the Son of Man in a cloud with power and great glory. And after that, "then he told them a parable: 'Behold the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they put forth leaves, and you see it for yourselves, know that summer is now near. So you also, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near.

"Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will never pass away. But be on guard so that your hearts will not be overcome with dissipation, and drunkenness, and the worries of life, and that day will not come on you suddenly like a trap; for it will," come upon on all "come upon all those who inhabit the face of all the earth.

"But keep on the alert at all times, praying earnestly that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to

take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.” And thus ends Luke's account of the Olivet Discourse. So much to consider in this section, isn't there? As we enter into this final section of the Olivet Discourse, it's really important for us, as a people living 2000 years later, Gentiles in a Gentile, predominantly Gentile church.

It's very important that we come to this text with the right mindset so that we're ready to see, and to learn, and to reflect on all that's here; it's so vital, so important. So let me ask a question as we begin. Do we really trust in the certainty of what Jesus is saying as he teaches about the end? Do we really believe him? It's hard to tell sometimes when we see how so many Christians live their lives. Not a lot of urgency, not a lot of intentionality in how they speak, and what they do, how they act, the priorities that they said in their lives.

Think about this, just to make an analogy. Consider how many Christians share the gospel with people and you've heard different, and I'm going to say it this way, versions of the gospel. There's only really one version of the gospel; it's what



the Bible teaches. But when you hear different people talk about the gospel, you would get the impression that they're different versions of it. There's the lighter version and there's a really heavy version. There's the fire and brimstone, and then there's the God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.

If our gospel pitches something like God loves you unconditionally and has a wonderful plan for your life, what is it that prevents a sinner from responding something like this? Yes, I appreciate God's unconditional love. In fact, it's a good example that I try to follow in my own wonderful plan for my own life and I look forward to seeing God in heaven one day after I've lived my most wonderful life.

Many of us have come to understand that that is an insufficient gospel; it's sub-Christian. It is not faithful to what the Scripture teaches. We've come to understand that the doctrine of hell really matters, that the punishment of eternal conscious torment for breaking God's law, for rejecting his gospel, for refusing to repent and to believe, for refusing to follow and obey the Lord Jesus Christ, for refusing to love God with all of

our heart, soul, strength, and mind. There is judgement waiting for those who refuse Christ, for those who refuse to line up under God's law. This is a vital aspect of the gospel that we must share with sinners. If we love God and we love people, we got to tell the truth, don't we?

We mentioned our doctor friend. What kind of a doctor would he be if he could see not just the symptoms, but could understand the causes leading to the symptoms and refused to talk about that with his patients because he didn't want to make them feel uncomfortable? So he medicates them, takes away the pain, and sends them on their way and they die a week later. That would be malpractice. As Christians, when we share the gospel, we cannot be guilty of malpractice.

As we think about analogy to what we've been preaching in this text in the Olivet Discourse, if hell is real, if we are certain about that element, doctrinal truth, then why are we not more intentional in rescuing sinners? If we know hell is hot and judgement is coming, why are we not more urgent and insistent in our witness? Why is it not the daily preoccupation of our minds

to tell others, to rescue them from their sins? And I hope you see the connection here to eschatology.

It's very clear, the Son of Man, the one who is coming, God has given all judgement to the Son, John 5:22. And in John 5:27, a few verses later, God gave him authority to execute judgement because he is the Son of Man. This is the one we're waiting for. This is the one we're praying will come, who will do justice on the earth. Jesus, the Son of Man, he tells these men, his disciples, these disciples who represent all believers, he tells them in Luke 21:34, "Be on guard so that your hearts will not be overcome with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life."

He tells them in verse 36, "Keep on the alert at all times, praying earnestly that you," not that those ungodly people, but "you may have strength to escape these things, and that you," not all those irreligious people, not the secularists, "but that you may have strength to stand before the Son of Man." He's warning them. He's warning believers, and he's warning believers, because it must be, as he sees it, that dissipation,

which is another word for self-indulgence, that drunkenness which is representative, really, of coming under the influence of other things that distract you, and take you away, and dull the mind, and then the worries and anxieties of daily living. All these things are threats to believers and believers who know the truth.

Do we really believe him in this? Is our faith manifest in the urgency of how we live? Consider these disciples, Jesus' closest men, they were men like you and I. Some of these men were married to women, who are much like you women who are here today. Women joined in and travelled around, at times, with the disciples and Jesus, as we read in Luke 8. Unlike you and me, these men, along with a few important women who travelled with them, they had followed Jesus around for three years.

Jesus, I understand that many of you have followed Jesus for decades, but it's different here, isn't it? Jesus was physically present with them. He shared meals, camping spots, time around the fire. They talked about everything. They attended to personal matters, they walked together, they talked and had

conversations that went to depths that you and I rarely come to, if ever, in our lifetime. More than that, all these men and some of the women, they all heard Jesus' teaching to the crowds. They had the privilege of intimate access, almost daily opportunity, to follow up with him about things he had taught in public. They could follow up in private.

They watched as Jesus performed powerful miracles, healing people, restoring, giving sight to blind eyes, letting paralytics walk again, raising the dead. He casts out demons with a word. He commanded nature itself. He produced food on command. So, yeah, they were men and women like you and me, but they enjoyed a level of access to our lord that was quite unique, wasn't it? And very intimate.

This captivated them, held their full attention. And so when he told them in Luke 21:6, Do you see all these great buildings, the days will come when they will not be here, left one stone upon another, that will not be thrown down. And in other words, he's saying, listen, folks, your stable world, the jobs that you have relied on, the families you've supported and enjoyed and

taken vacations with, the reality that you've counted on as an unchanging reality, listen, none of that is permanent. None of that is going to stay the same and you had better get ready. You'd better get your minds around that.

What would you do if you had heard for yourself, what they had heard? Make any changes? Would you shift your priorities? Would you reorder your life at all? Of course, the disciples ask him in Luke 21:7, "Teacher, when will these things be?" I mean, when's this happening? "What will be the sign when these things are about to take place?" We know also from Matthew 24:3, they also asked him, "What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" They understand Jesus to be speaking eschatologically. He's Speaking of end times.

So since, ever since knowing Jesus, ever since meeting him, man, their lives had changed, everything had changed for them. Yeah. But now they start to apprehend what Jesus is telling them about the future. It's starting to dawn on them the implications of the life to come. They're starting to think about their city, about the temple, about their religion, about their people, the

Jews, the whole world for them is going to be turned upside down.

They understand with increasing clarity, that all that seems solid in their lives, all that seems stable, reliable, secure, it's all an illusion. Everything that they thought mattered so much up until this point, it really doesn't matter. What matters is what this man Jesus is telling them right now.

It's probably easy for us from our vantage point as we read the black and white print in our Bibles, it's probably easier for us to see and appreciate what these men are going through at some level. I mean, we're at a, we're at a kind of a dispassionate, cool distance from the actual events, but I wonder though, do we see the same reality as clearly in our own time, in our own world? Do we perceive the implications of future events, that are settled fact in God's mind, for our own lives, for our families, for our job pursuits, for ambitions, for our hobbies, for our pastimes?

Because listen, if we did, if we do have that sense of gravity, if the weight of what is coming to the world in the future really settles on our minds, well, we're right where these disciples are in their minds. On this cool evening around a campfire on Mount Olivet, we're able to have our mind set aligned with theirs for this moment as they listen intently to the Lord, as they are hanging on every word, eager to hear these words of certainty as their world is, is, is basically dissolving and everything they thought was stable and solid is, is coming to pieces, atomized, drifting into nothingness.

They're looking for certainty in his words. They're looking for assurance in their understanding and the certainty of his words are going to settle their hearts in assurance about the future, assurance about his coming, assurance about the kingdom coming down to earth. So that's what we're going to cover in this final section over the next two weeks; should the Lord allow. This week, emphasizing the certainty of Jesus words that provides assurance and next week, how the certainty of Jesus words give urgency for living in light of his certain and imminent return.

So I've got just two points for this morning. Here's the first, number one: The assurance of the kingdom's coming. Assurance of the kingdom's coming. If you look again at verse 29, follow along. I'm going to follow, basically follow the LSB translation with, with slight changes in a, in a way that I believe makes it just a bit clearer, but follow along from verse 29 again. "Then he told them a parable. Look at the fig tree and all the trees. As soon as they put forth leaves, you see and know from yourselves that summer is now near. So you also, when you see these things happening, know that the Kingdom of God is near."

Some say the fig tree represents Israel filled with sap, ready to flourish again and the rest, that's the rest of the trees, in which is unique to Luke, they represent the nations. After all, Luke is writing Gospel to the Gentiles. The summer represents fruitfulness. So what this means, this parable, is that Israel's restored and with Israel, the nations and the whole world becomes fruitful. And that's what some believe this is teaching.

I think that's very creative, but I do not think that is correct. I understand, though, why some want to see each element

here as a metaphor, as a symbol that represents something else. After all, Luke's introduction translated it, in our versions, calls this a parable, doesn't it? But the word *parabolē*, it can mean illustration. You can talk about a parable, which is a short little story of common truth, wide, widely recognized, that has analogy to something spiritual, or it can just simply mean an illustration. That's what is the meaning here.

Jesus is giving an illustration and in verse 30, Jesus is very clear about the point of connection and in verse 31, he's very clear about what the fig tree is meant to illustrate. The fig tree represents a fig tree, that's it. Very common on the Mount of Olives. They were probably surrounded by them. Fig trees on the Mount of Olives; a fig tree, along with all the other trees, they share common traits as seasons change.

After a winter of barrenness and fig trees in particular are completely leafless in the winter, totally barren. But in the springtime, the branches of the fig tree or all other trees, they swell the sap, they become soft, leaves shoot forth from the branches, sprouting from the branches. And to those who live

in Palestine, the budding of the leaves on the fig tree, or to those who live in any location, any tree, it's a clear indication winter's over, spring is here, and summer is coming.

That's the illustration, that's it, as clear to them as the fall leaves changing are to us. When we see fall leaves changing, what do we say? Football season, right? But that's the illustration. It's nothing more than that. Some insist, though, on going even deeper in the symbolism, finding symbolism here, but not in the fig tree or in the trees. Instead, they focus their creative efforts on finding symbolism in summer. As one commentator says, quote, "The summer is a time of fertility, growth, and fruit and was figurative of the Kingdom of God with the removal of old forms of Judaism." He's referring to the destruction of the Temple.

"The Messiah's Kingdom was to find fertile soil not only in Palestine, but throughout the world. It was to grow into the uttermost parts of the earth. It was to bring forth abundant fruit to the glory of God. The destruction of Jerusalem in the events," preceding, "preceding it were not terrible signs, but

harbingers of a summer that would spread its blessings throughout the earth. All the distressing events predicted by Christ, instead of discouraging the disciples, they should encourage them, for by them they would know it was the beginning not of winter time for this world, but of summer. They indicated the beginning of a worldwide harvest of souls.” End quote.

Now, apart from sounding Pollyannish and biblically naive, that view fails to appreciate how terrible the destruction of Jerusalem was to these disciples. It's utterly tone deaf to imagine Jesus, who has himself mourned for this city of Jerusalem, that he should tell the disciples to just look back, on past, all these horrific judgments that are going to come upon the city and tear down the temple and destroy its people and see in that nothing to discourage them, but everything to encourage them.

A harbinger of summer, a worldwide harvest of souls, is that what Jesus is saying here? Is that the sense that you get reading the text? More to the point, that view fails to represent accurately what Jesus actually says in the Olivet

Discourse. It fails to depict how grim and terrifying that situation really is for the disciples. It really was, as we read back in church history. Matthew 24:30, "Jesus says when the Son of Man," peers, "appears, all the tribes of the earth will mourn."

Same thing he said in Luke 21:25 about the distress of the Gentiles, and in verse 26, about people fainting with fear and foreboding. Why is that? Because in verse 35, at Christ's return a, a trap is going to snap shut on all those who inhabit the face of all the earth. That is, all the unbelievers are going to be caught in a trap of suddenness of Christ's return because they have not been looking for it.

Jesus is not portraying the joy of harvest here, the worldwide success of the gospel, the joyful reaping of souls. At the end of the age, the Tribulation, and Israel's distress are going to come to an end, that is joy for the repentant nation then, but it is the beginning of Christ's judgement on all the nations. And before he judges all the nations, when you back up in the 2000 years since the destruction of Jerusalem, it's been hard

for the Jews. Would you admit that? There is pain, and sorrow, and sadness all through this text? The joy that comes is that Christ returns to put everything right. For those who are on the wrong side of his grace, those who've rejected it, utter desolation, utter destruction, horrific judgement.

Because of the parallelism in Jesus' illustration in verses 30 and 31, he's made his meaning here impossible to miss. He says to his disciples, look at the fig tree. You can't find one. Well, any tree will do. Look, notice how the trees are starting to send forth shoots from their branches; you see, that stem's producing leaves, leaves produce buds, buds produce fruit. Winter is, winter is over, isn't it, men? Spring's here, Summer's coming. An obvious point, yeah.

But the point of comparison in this illustration comes in verse 31, and the parallelism involves three keywords. And by those three keywords, Jesus creates parallels between verse 30 and verse 31. Just as trees signaled the coming of summer, celestial signs and the return of Christ signal the coming of God's kingdom. Notice first, in each verse, Jesus tells them to pay

attention to what they can see with their eyes. Just as they can see the fig tree budding in verse 30, they can also see things happening in verse 31, which points back to the things of verses 25 and 26.

In the context, it's no mystery. It's, he's talking about the signs and the sun, moon, and the stars. He's talking about the, the roaring of the seas. He's talking about the changes on the Earth. Just as you can see what's happening on a fig tree and know the changing of seasons, so you can see when you look up and see all this stuff happening, something's happening, something's changing; we're entering into a new season.

Even the Amillennial commentator, William Hendrickson agrees with this. He writes, "In Luke 21:21 to 24, the destruction of Jerusalem is foretold. At the close of verse 24, the evangelist quotes Jesus prediction that Jerusalem would be trodden down by the Gentiles until the times the Gentiles are fulfilled. And that brings us to the end of the age, that is to the second coming, including the signs accompanying the second coming. So there really is not any great difficulty in explaining the word

these things in verse 31. They naturally refer to the things mentioned in verses 25 and 26. End quote.

So the first point of parallel between verse 30 and 31: What your eyes can see for themselves. The second point of parallel between those two verses is that the main verb in each verse, *ginōskō*, the verb, to know, it refers to the immediate knowledge that they possess due to what their eyes can see. There's no need for them to reflect, no need of them to think deeply, to interpret, to determine meaning here. It's the perception of sight that leads to instant knowledge. Immediately actionable intel is what they have when they see it. That's a second point of connection, second parallel between verse 30 and 31.

And then the third point of parallel is there, that that little word, *engys*, which is at the end of each verse. It's the word, *engys*. It's used in a temporal sense here. So it means close in time, temporal, meaning time, close in time, or an even better word, imminent. So in verse 30, you see the trees budding you know summer is near, summer is imminent, it's coming. Likewise,

verse 31, you see the signs in the sky you know the Kingdom of God is near, it too is imminent. It's that simple.

Again, William Hendrickson explains, "When this happens to a fig tree, disciples realize that the summer is near. Similarly, when the things mentioned in the present context verses 25-26, signs in sun, moon, stars, etcetera, when the things mentioned in the present context take place, believers then living must recognize that the Kingdom of God in its final manifestation is at the very door." End quote.

Not hard to figure that out. It's simple and plain. Jesus offered the kingdom of God to the people of Israel at his first advent. When Israel rejected him as its Messiah, the establishment of God's kingdom on earth had to be postponed. He's not going to establish his kingdom with God's people who reject him as their king, because there is no other way. He is the king, and his citizens must bow the knee willingly from the heart, loving God, loving him. When they failed to do that, this kingdom of God on earth is postponed.

God judged Israel for its sin in AD 70. That's a judgement that continues to this day. It's a judgement that will continue, as Jesus says in verse 24, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. And once they are fulfilled at the midpoint of the tribulation, at Christ's second advent, which happens after that, the kingdom of God will come and Jesus will take his seat on the throne of his father David. It's what we've been praying for, two millennia, taught by Christ himself, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth just as it is in heaven."

In that day, our prayer is answered in full when Christ, who is the king of kings and the Lord of Lords, when he rules on this earth as he rules from heaven now, at his Father's side; so he will do in that day, but visibly, physically present, literally in Israel, in Jerusalem, on the throne of David his father. So that's the assurance of the kingdom coming.

Everyone on earth will see the signs preceding Christ's return, and everyone will see Christ return. Quite a contrast, isn't it, between Jesus first advent and Jesus second advent? I mean the hinge point of the entirety of human history, which is the cross

and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That resurrection, you know who saw him in his resurrected form? None but believers. No one on this earth saw him visibly physically resurrected in his resurrection glory, except believers. I mean, as I read, the Gospel accounts, maybe it's just your experience, too. I'm like, couldn't he march right into the Sanhedrin, say, hey guys, that little stone with the seal on it, the guards you put there and stuff; I left them sleeping. They're okay. I'm here.

It's a good thing I'm not writing the Gospels. Don't you want to see that vindication? When every eye will see him, all the tribes of the earth will mourn because they got it wrong. Justice will be served. The mocking will stop. The injustice being done on this earth and the unrighteousness, it's rejoiced in, and celebrated, and paraded, will come to an end. When they all see these things, they will know that God's kingdom is imminent.

The promises of restoration that he's given to Israel, all his promises are going to commence their fulfilment at that time, and there will be 1000 years of his reign on earth for him to

execute and fulfil every promise. Talk about an eschatology of hope, right? Talk about an eschatology that gives us joy, and assurance, and comfort. Talk about truth that is powerful enough to grab hold of your heart and mind and set you off on a new course with your shoulders back and your chin up and strength in every stride because God is empowering you by his truth. That's what this teaching does. But there's more here as Jesus gives assurance to his disciples about the timing.

So second point, number two, first was assurance of the kingdom's coming; second point, assurance of the kingdom's timing, assurance of the kingdom's timing. I'm not talking about timing in the sense of date setting. Jesus said, we already mentioned this, "no one knows the day or the hour, not the angels, not the Son, but the Father alone."

But here we're talking about the timing in the sense of once all this commences, how long is it going to take to set everything up? Look at verse 32, "Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away."

Now, believe it or not, that little verse, verse 32, has been the cause of much consternation among biblical interpreters for generations. Some even say it's the most difficult verse in all the Gospels to interpret. There are those who dive into this text, at verse 27, to see that Jesus predicts his own coming, his own return. And then they skip to verse 32 and read, "This generation will not pass away until all things take place," that is, until Christ returns.

So Jesus said he's coming. He said this generation is going to see it. And in ignorance of the rest of the Olivet Discourse and with no sincere interest to learn the Olivet Discourse, to read these texts in their context, they say Jesus has not returned. Therefore, Jesus is fallible, in error, not to be trusted. This whole thing is a fraud. There are those who say that, such a man was Bertrand Russell, atheist, author of the tract that he wrote in 1927 called, *Why I Am Not a Christian*.

According to Bertrand Russell, this is one evidence to reject Christianity, namely that Jesus promised to return during the

lifetime, his, of his disciples. He didn't do that, and so Jesus was wrong. Russell writes, quote, He that is Jesus, "He certainly thought that his second coming would occur in clouds of glory before the death of all the people who were living at that time."

Then he writes this: "That was the belief of his earlier followers and it was the basis of a good deal of his moral teaching." He continues, "When he said," he's talking about Jesus, "When Jesus said, 'Take no thought for the morrow and things of that sort, it was very largely because he thought that the second coming was going to be very soon, and that all ordinary mundane affairs did not count. I have, as a matter of fact, known some Christians who did believe that the second coming was imminent.

"I knew a Parson" a, a preacher, "who frightened his congregation terribly by telling them that the second coming was very imminent indeed. But they were much consoled when they found that he was planting trees in his garden. The early Christians did really believe it, and they did abstain from such

things as planting trees in their gardens, because they did accept from Christ the belief that the second coming was imminent. In that respect, clearly, he was not so wise as some other people have been, and he was certainly not superlatively wise." End quote.

Well, since in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, it's hard to imagine the situation that Bertrand Russell finds himself in now after writing his essay in 1927. He died in 1970, so he's had 54 years to reflect on those words he wrote, the mocking that are represented in his tract. Sadly though, there are many believers today, still today, who are still tripped up and intimidated by Bertrand Russell and that spirit of Bertrand Russell, how he mocked the words of Jesus who said, "truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place."

Now, it's a debatable point whether the early church misunderstood Jesus or not, that's beside the point. And we consider how the original audience heard and understood Jesus at the time, that's important to figure out in doing biblical

interpretation, but it is not determinative of meaning. How the original audience or how generations after that original audience understood Jesus is, is important to understand, but it's not determinative of the meaning, because many, including Jesus own disciples, often misunderstood him. Should we take their misunderstanding as the true meaning of the text?

What really matters in Bible interpretation is authorial intent; Jesus' intent. What did he intend to convey when he spoke? So since we see Jesus here speaking prophetically to his disciples about his future return, since he in his mind's eye sees these things unfolding right before him, it is most natural that this generation he speaks of refers to the people then living.

When the signs are happening, he's talking about them. In context, he's speaking about a future time, so he's speaking about the generation of that future time. He uses that, near, demonstrative pronoun, this, because in giving the prophecy, he's in that future moment and he sees 'this generation' before him.

So it's those who see the celestial signs, verse 25, in sun, moon and stars, who witnesses the effect of all that pandemonium on the earth, widespread panic that grips the nations, who see the Son of Man coming on the cloud with power and great glory. Jesus says to this generation, the end of the old era, the starting of the new. Listen, it's not going to take long, once the events that lead up to and follow the return of Christ begin, everything is going to happen in relatively rapid succession such that the same generation that witnesses the commencement will also witness the conclusion.

So for this generation, once the events of the tribulation commence, it's not going to take long for them to be fulfilled, for even the, the tribulation to come to their end, for the times the Gentiles to be fulfilled, for the angels to gather the elect and bring them to Israel, for the regeneration and the redemption of Israel. When it happens, it'll all happen relatively quickly, and this generation, seeing it all, is going to see it commence and conclude.

Now others have tried to identify, this generation, differently than I just have. They make different suggestions. I'm going to mention a few of the main ones, not all of them, but I'll mention a few of the main ones and then try to refute them for you. Some say this generation refers to the generation living at the time of Jesus, those who lived contemporaneous with him during his earthly life.

So if Jesus is saying this generation, including you disciples standing here right now, if that's what he meant, you're all going to see everything that's been predicted. Luke 21, verses 20 to 24, including verses 25 to 28, you're all going to see everything. If that's what he meant, that leaves us with several options. We have number one, Bertrand Russell's view that Jesus was just simply wrong. That's patently false on doctrinal theological grounds. I'm not going to explicate that any further.

Then a second view that kind of unfolds from this understanding, the view that Jesus did return and that the second coming has happened, but he returned spiritually, so no further coming is

expected. This is what some of you, may've heard, the full preterist view. This is what they teach. It's a form of rank heresy based on 2 Thessalonians 2:1 to 3. Paul says don't be upset as if we wrote this or taught this, that Christ has already returned. That's rank heresy, which we reject, too, on the basis of that passage.

Another view, though, based on, this generation, you're going to see everything that's written here, is that Jesus came in a figurative sense in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD70. The people who say this don't make the claim that that's the second coming, but they say that's what Jesus meant here, that he returns in a figurative sense. The problem with that view is that Jesus words just don't allow it.

His return here is literal, not figurative. It's physical, visible, not spiritual, not invisible. At his return he comes to execute judgement on all those who inhabit the face of all the earth. And that's not a figure of speech that's literally going to happen, verse 35. All those people who live on the face of the earth, verse 36 are going to stand before the Son of Man.

Question is, will you have strength to stand or are you going to fall in judgement?

There's a different view entirely, it takes 'this generation' as a race of people. It's a kind of people, so could refer to the Jews as a race of people or Gentiles, or even a race of disciples. So this, if this generation refers to a race of Jews, Gentiles, disciples, it's talking about them being preserved through the events of the Tribulation. They make it to the end. If it's the Jews, they survive and are blessed in the promises of God. If it's disciples, they too survive and experience the blessing of promise. But if it's Gentiles and they're unbelieving, they survive only to come to fall to judgement.

I'll grant that the word generation, *genea*, it can mean lineage, it can mean race, but not often. And even in some of the passages that are used as support for that, this non-chronological sense of generation, it's forced. And some of those passages and it, it really doesn't fit this context, which is all about chronology. The context requires us to use a chronological sense for *genea*. So this one's out too.

So we have to come back to the most viable option, which is also the most common sense natural way to read, this generation. It's those who are alive at the time these signs are starting to happen. They're going to see everything from start to finish and without delay. And that's what Jesus means here. Now I want to just pause and reinforce this because there are some who are prone to mock this view because they misunderstand it.

I like what Daryl Bock writes to address this objection, when it's raised, he writes this, "Some argue that this view is tautologistic making Jesus say the obvious. When you see the end, you see the end. This," means, "misreads the point. What Jesus is saying is that the generation that sees the beginning of the end also sees its end. When the signs come, they will proceed quickly. They will not drag on for many generations. It will happen within a generation." End quote. That's what Jesus is saying.

Just to unpack this a bit further, and I've mentioned this from time to time as we've moved through the text. It's just helpful

again to back up and recognize, Jesus is speaking to his disciples. These men are his chosen apostles, and as such, these apostles have a very unique role in the redemptive plan. They are, these men, these 12 apostles, are representatives of the Church, Ephesians 2:20.

And at the same time, these apostles are also representative of Israel, of a future nation of Israel, in its regenerate, repentant, and believing state. Which is why Paul points to himself in his own salvation as an indication and a down payment on all the future promises to Israel. He's the first fruits of those. God has not given up on Israel, has he? "I too am an Israelite of the tribe of Benjamin, Hebrew of Hebrews." These apostles too, they represent the future nation of Israel in its regenerate, repentant, believing state.

He speaks, Jesus speaks of that rule in the very next chapter. He tells his apostles in Luke 22:30, "You will sit," with me, "on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." It's really important to see that here, to remember that these men, they have a vested interest, ethnic, historical, religious interest

in the outcome here. They have a civil, social, cultural interest in how things turn out for the Jews as a people, for Israel as a nation.

Perhaps it's easiest to see this if we turn over to Matthew's Gospel. Just turn back very quickly to Matthew chapter 20, 23, starting in verse 34, Matthew 23:34. This is Matthew's account of the, just before the Olivet Discourse. It's kind of a, a ramp up into the Olivet Discourse, if you will. In Matthew 23, Jesus has indicted the failed false spiritual leadership of Israel.

And in that chapter, he pronounces woe after woe after woe upon them for their hypocrisy, for their greed, for their ungodly leadership and he says this. Jesus says this in Matthew 23:34 and following, "On account of this, Behold, I'm sending you prophets and wise men and scribes, and some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from city to city. So that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murder between the sanctuary and the

altar. Truly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones, those who are sent to her. Oh, how often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings. And you did not want it. Behold, your house is being left to you desolate, for I say to you, from now on you will not see me until you say, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." The disciples are there for that. The disciples hear that, this indictment upon their leadership, the pronouncement of judgement and desolation of the temple, the clear indication that Jesus Christ, he's going to be leaving them.

So they're thinking, if such horrific judgments are to come upon the Jews for rejecting their Messiah, how are the Jews going to survive this? If as Jesus said in Matthew 23:35 and 36 that the blood of all the prophets from Abel, that's Genesis chapter 4, verse 10, all the way to Zechariah, the end of Israel's history, basically in 2 Chronicles 24:21. If all that blood guilt is going to land on the head of this generation, on their own

people, on the Jewish contemporaries of Jesus. If their temple is to be left to them desolate, Matthew 23:38, what hope is there for the future of our nation? Obviously, thoughts like those would have been on the disciples' mind, one of their own contemporaries, a Jew of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, Hebrew of Hebrews, who'd come up through the ranks of the Pharisees, the Apostle Paul. He asked in Romans, God has not rejected his people, has he? His immediate answer, you know what it is? *umē*. May it never be, emphatic negation. And that's years later, in the mid 50s, more than 20 years after our events in the Olivet Discourse.

Paul makes clear in the rest of Romans 11 that there is hope for the Jewish people. God's promises of restoration to his people will never fail. Not one jot or titel of the law will fall. Everything will be fulfilled. The hope of the Jews and all that God has said will not be disappointed. All will be fulfilled. And these disciples being believers, they shared that same hope.

In fact, right after Jesus has predicted the judgments on the Jews in Matthew 23:38, 34 to 38, that fulfillment began, by the way, when he, God, sent the Romans to destroy Jerusalem and its temple in AD70. As I said, that judgement continues through our own day. It's going to continue until Israel repents, until Israel trusts in Christ, in Matthew 23:39. Here's what the disciples see; though Jesus speaks of leaving them, at the end of that sorrowful statement, he sheds a ray of light on the dark words, "For I say to you from now on you shall not see me until you say, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."

Implication: So there's hope.

So there's a hope for Israel. So there's a future for the Jewish people. The disciples believing ears heard it, with hearts of faith, with attitudes of believing hope. They pounce on those words. They latch onto them as a promise. They hold on tightly to those words and they start asking their questions.

Unbeknownst to these men, these apostles, they don't even realize that they're the believing seed that plants the church. They are the believing seed of future Israel.

They are representatives of a future generation of Israel. They, in their own generation, represent this generation as the ones who will say, according to Matthew 23:39. Oh yes, "blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." That's the generation of Israel that will look upon Jesus whom they had pierced and mourn and repent. That's the generation of Israel that will be gathered together from among the nations, from East, West, North, South, gathered by the angels. That's the generation of Israel that will receive the promises of restoration. And what will their restoration mean of the fulfillment of all hope for the world?

Now one more aspect to the assurance of the kingdom's timing. Look again at verse 32. Notice the strong statements of affirmation. "Truly," *amēn*, "I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all things take place." Verse 33, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away."

You see what's repeated there. Three uses of the verb, *pass away*, *parerchomai*, it can have a spatial sense, as in spatial movement of people passing by. It can have a temporal sense, as

when time passes by. Here it has a figurative sense, referring to what passes away, what comes to an end, what passes off the scene, whether a generation of people, whether heaven and earth, or words.

Which brings us to an even more important repetition that we need to notice here at the beginning. Notice that Jesus says, "truly, I say to you," it's an emphatic statement of absolute truthfulness, authority, reliability of what he's about to say. And then at the end of this, Jesus states even more emphatically the permanence and immutability, the absolute certainty of his holy words, heaven and earth. What God created, what he fixed and appointed, it'll pass away. My words never, they will never pass away. It's quite a pronouncement, isn't it, from a man, especially when we remember what Jesus said about the law of God in Matthew 5:18, "But truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the law until all is accomplished."

Similarly, in Luke 16:17, "It's easier for heaven and earth to pass away," there, "than for one stroke of a letter of the law

to fail.” In this saying, verses 32 to 33, Jesus puts his own words of promise, his guarantee of certainty, to give assurance to his disciples on par with the words given by God in the law. So as immutable as God's words are, same level of immutability of his own words.

What a comfort, what assurance for Jesus disciples. They received far more from Jesus than a mere timeline of future events. They can put away their charts and stop reading headlines. Then you just see these men received what they did not ask for, but what they desperately needed: Eternal, immutable words of assurance; words more dependable, more solid, more stable, more permanent than heaven and earth itself. Words on par with, as reliable as, the very word of God.

Folks, I asked you earlier, what would you do if you just heard what they heard, because you now have. Would you change anything in your life or would you just carry on with life as usual? Let me offer a little warning by way of encouragement. You know who wanted to continue on with life as usual in his time? We're going to meet him at the beginning of the next chapter. His name

is Judas Iscariot, the lover of money, because money is what gave him what he wanted, what kept his life manageable, under his control.

Judas was willing to trade his relationship with the Son of Man to keep his own life the way he wanted it. Bertrand Russell, he too rejected truth. He loved darkness rather than light, because his deeds were evil, just like Judas's. And there are many who live this way today. Beloved, having heard about the future of the earth, put no hope in elections or politicians. I trust nobody's doing that. But don't seek stability, security, or prosperity in this life.

Everything, everything that seems stable and secure and solid now, will not remain. It's going to change one day. Could be tomorrow, could be next week, could be years from now, but it will change. After your last breath on this earth, when you awaken in the presence of God, then you'll see the wisdom or the folly of how you've lived your life, and by then it'll be too late to make any change.

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Grace

Now is the time of salvation. Today is the day for change. You'll either enter into the joy of your master, Jesus Christ, whom you have served faithfully for all of your life, or you'll be turned away from him, denied access, denied before the father and the angels in heaven, and you'll be sent into everlasting torment. Friends, how you live now, it matters. It really matters. Let's pray.

Our Father, we are so thankful to you for giving us the gift of truth. Words that are more permanent than the ground that we stand on, more solid than the rocks, more faithful than the sun rising every day. You've given us words of life, words that are eternal, words that are from your eternal, infinite mind. You've shared with us your thinking, brought us into the way things really are.

Oh Father, please grant anyone here who does not have faith, grant them faith to believe that their eyes would be opened, that they see this life for what it really is, as an opportunity to serve you out of love for you because you have saved them. And for any here who have been living with weak, shriveled up

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faith, oh Father, will you help us all to repent of weak faith, not make excuses for it, but to live our lives with, with vigor and joy and zeal and hope, because we trust in your word. Please save those who don't know you, please sanctify those who do, and let us all bring glory to you by the power of the Spirit, in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, Amen.