

Matthew 22-06-19a

Good morning, welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is the 19th day of June, 2022. We're in Matthew chapter 24, and we have come to verse 32, verse 32.

We are going to see the lesson of the fig tree this morning. We're going to take a look at quite a bit of scripture. So hopefully you have your fingers loosened up and your scriptures before you.

Let's ask God's blessing on our fellowship and on our study, and we'll begin. Father, we're grateful for this time of fellowship. We thank you for each one present with us and those who will join us perhaps with a delay.

We're grateful for the spiritual gifts that you have given to each one of us and the blessing that we receive as we spend time together in conversation, in activities, and most of all this morning in the study of your word. We pray that your Holy Spirit who unites us, enables us, and empowers us through those gifts and through his presence will enlighten each one of us, impress these truths on our hearts, help us to understand them and benefit from them in the hours and days that remain to us in this life as we prepare for the imminent return of the Lord Jesus Christ, your son, our savior, and our time of service and function in the millennial kingdom and beyond. We pray all these things in Jesus' name, amen.

As we look at the portion of Matthew chapter 24, to which we have come, you will remember that beginning in verse 29, the Lord Jesus said, that immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light. The stars will fall from heaven and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. This is something that is mentioned in scripture frequently, and it is a characteristic of the time of judgment that is foretold in this prophecy.

Now, what is, here's your, just loosen up, get your wheels turning here on this Sunday morning. What is the time of judgment that Jesus is speaking of here? It's a little bit of a trick question, isn't it? Because there are multiple times of judgment being spoken of. We have the earliest fulfillment of many of these signs and many of these conditions coming when? The time of this judgment is at least dual, one being the time in 70 AD with the legions of Titus marching in.

There's some debate about whether anyone in that first fulfillment or that earliest manifestation of these conditions listened to the words of the Lord Jesus and departed the city. And there's great historical doubt that Christians in any great numbers heeded the words of the Lord and escaped that awful judgment. Of course, the second fulfillment of this judgment is going to be yet future at the end of the tribulation period.

And it's important to remember that these descriptions, these judgments, these prophecies have multiple resonating fulfillments going forward. What ties them together? It's, there's such an interesting pattern in scripture. We saw this in Revelation.

We've revisited that thought many times that the seals, the trumpets, the thunders and the bowls all cover the same period of time from different perspectives. And there are common elements that we can see as we begin to line them up one over the other and look at the descriptions of the various circumstances on earth and the various types of judgment, whether it is fire, whether it is scorching, whether it is, and then finally the great earthquake that unites them. One of the prominent features that unites the judgment in 70 AD to the judgment that is coming at the end of the tribulation period is the condition we see in verse 28 that we covered last time, wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together.

And the interpretations of this, there's, I've read 10 or 12 different ideas about what exactly this means. Who are the eagles? What is the body or the carcass? Why have they gathered? How does it relate to Jesus' words about His return and so on? We used scripture last time. We looked at the similar statement in Luke chapter 17, verse 37, where the context is slightly different.

And we looked at the description of eagles and their behavior clear back in Job 39, verse 30. We looked at this last time and what was our conclusion? What does it mean when Jesus says, wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together? Well, one of many facets of this statement is that eagles gather around the slain. That's what Job, that's what God says in Job 39, that they gather where there are the slain, these that have died by some reason or another, but there is death.

And how do they spot this thing that has died? Many times it is because corruption has begun. And when death manifests itself in lack of movement, in exposure rather than concealment, it doesn't flee when you fly toward it. There is a cloud of flies that have accumulated, carrion birds or birds that feed on what has already died or been slain are attracted.

There is an aroma that will travel with the breeze and so on. And so when death has fully manifested itself, something can be dying, it can be wounded, it can be limping or crawling along and it is mortally wounded, but it's not dead yet. Already the birds can be circling.

And this is a favorite motif in the old Westerns is people on horseback will look and they see the birds circling and they say, whoa, maybe old Fred's over there. We're looking for him and they find his body. So this idea of a gathering at the place of death, where death is manifest and has come to its full power, that is the idea.

And what we're seeing here is the moral and spiritual degeneration reaches fullness. This

is something that is repeated throughout scripture. And the reason it's important, the reason we're talking about it right now is if you look around in our time and in our world, what is the level of fullness of this moral and spiritual degeneration of this corruption and this death in the realm of ideas, death in the realm of ethics and morality and spirituality? How dead are we and how close are these circling birds? Well, you find this throughout scripture.

Turn with me back to Genesis chapter six. Genesis chapter six. As soon as I say six, you think I know what that's about because this is where the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair to look upon and they took wives for themselves.

The Lord said, my spirit shall not strive or my spirits shall not judge man forever for indeed he is flesh. His days shall be 120 years. Some people think that this is the limitation of human lifespan.

Some think that this is the amount of time it's gonna take for Noah to build the ark. There'll be 120 more years before the flood comes. Giants in the earth in those days.

Look at verse five. The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. The proportion of righteous to wicked had reached such a low ebb.

The Lord was sorry, verse six, that he had made men on the earth and he was grieved in his heart. Sorrow and grief are what we call emotions. Sorrowfulness, regret.

We tend to think that God is so perfect and so all encompassingly divine that he would be above these kinds of things. Scripture says God was grieved and he was sorry. It doesn't mean that he would have gone back and done it differently.

Does God have it to do over again? He absolutely does. He could have spoken a word and said, this didn't turn out well, let's do experiment number two. The fact that he is sorry and the fact that he is grieved doesn't change the fact that it is a part of his purpose.

You can bring children into the world. There are people now who don't want to bring children into the world because they think the world is too ugly and they don't want to inflict the evil of this world on newborn and young and youthful human beings and so they just don't have children. I don't want to bring a child into this world.

It's too harsh. Well, those of us who have brought children into the world and this is a day that that idea is observed, are glad to have children, but it doesn't mean that it is without sorrow or that there are not times when it grieves us. No discipline is happy on the part of the recipient or the one administering the discipline.

It's no fun for parents to discipline children. It's no fun as a child to be disciplined, but it

is necessary. But it can bring us sorrow.

It can bring us grief. Bad decisions can bring us sorrow and grief. All of us have made decisions ourselves that we regret and that bring us sorrow.

We see our children just as our parents saw us make bad decisions that bring sorrow and grief to them and to us. It is a part of the fallen world. When God looked around after his activity was finished, he saw that it was very good.

After a few generations of humanity on the earth after the fall, he looked and it brought him grief and sorrow. It doesn't mean that he wished he had never created it. It's just a part of what God has to endure.

He endures with great patience, vessels of wrath that are destined for destruction. And it doesn't mean that he enjoys it, that he's happy about it. God does not enjoy the death of the wicked.

So the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I've created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping things and birds of the air for I am sorry that I have made them. Things have come to such a pass. I'm going to destroy them.

Now, if you took this verse out of its context, God says, I will destroy man, man and beast, creeping things, birds of the air. I will destroy them all. Did God in fact destroy them all? Well, no, he didn't.

We have the arc. This is why context is so important. This is why we don't proof text.

We don't yank verses out of their setting. And thereby introduce error into their interpretation. Because Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations, plural, perfect in his generations.

Now this doesn't mean that he's going to be rescued because his daddy and granddaddy and great granddaddy were perfect. But this word generations, dor, D-O-R in Hebrew, is something to which we're going to be returning here in a moment. You remember in our passage, Jesus says something about a generation not passing away.

So just put a little sticky on that idea because we're going to see generations in a bit of a fresh light to understand what Jesus says in that regard. Noah was perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God.

We tend to think that Noah's generations are just his physical ancestry. That he was perhaps untainted by angelic DNA is one view and one that I tend to support. But I think there's more here than that.

And you think about Jesus in his discussions with the Pharisees about the sons of Abraham. Just because you're genetically a son of Abraham doesn't mean you're going

to inherit. Just because you have the DNA, the right DNA, or the right heritage, doesn't mean that you are in, that you're blessed and you've got to get out of jail free card and pass to the front row.

Generations, he was perfect in his generations. And I think that while this does probably allude to an untainted human genome, so to speak, not necessarily so his daughter's in-law, but I think Mr. and Mrs. Noah, and therefore their sons were not compromised in that way. But generations, plural, I think also speaks of his moral status, his spiritual status, and more about that to come.

But you get the idea here that God tolerated an increasing level of iniquity, evil, corruption, and there was a point at which it reached its fullness. And in verse five, when the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was at a certain level of magnitude, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually, this is when God made a decision for judgment. The iniquity was full.

Turn 10 chapters over to Genesis chapter 15. Maybe that's only nine chapters. Genesis 15, verse 16 is where we're headed.

God makes a covenant with Abram in this chapter and says that he is going to inherit this land in verse seven. Abram says in verse eight, Lord God, how shall I know that I will inherit it? He says, bring the heifer, bring the goat, bring the ram, bring the turtle dove, bring a young pigeon. You remember this smoking lantern that passes between these pieces after dark.

And God says to Abram in verse 13, no, certainly your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs. They will serve them and they will afflict them 400 years. We've talked about the details of this 400 year prophecy, how much of it is in the land of Egypt, how much of it is in the promised land itself.

But here's the point. Now stop and think about this. Abram is God's chosen individual.

God makes a covenant uniquely with Abram and with his descendants. The Abrahamic covenant is unique in history. Abram is God's favorite man on the earth.

If you want to sort of put it in the vernacular and his descendants are going to be blessed for the sake of Abram, for the sake of Abraham, for the sake of Isaac, for the sake of Jacob, these people are going to be special and unique. They are going to be God's chosen people. He's going to make them a nation.

Through them, all the nations of the earth are going to be blessed. And yet, and yet, God says, I am going to allow these surrounding people and these inhabitants of the land to afflict your descendants for four centuries. 400 years.

They are going to be persecuted. They are going to be hounded. They are going to be

cheated.

They're going to be despised. They're going to be embattled. They're going to be attacked.

They're going to be robbed. Why doesn't God just put a giant wall of fire? Why doesn't he create another sort of garden of Eden around the promised land? Abraham and his descendants just dwell in this divinely protected realm. It's got impenetrable borders and cherubim posted at the gates.

And he's richly blessed because he's God's favorite. He's in covenant relationship with God, uniquely so. The answer to that question is the same reason that you and I face hardship, persecution, resistance, friction, opposition, attack.

The answer is the same. God doesn't like it. It's not God's immediate preference, but it is a necessity to the overall outworking of God's purpose.

It isn't fun, but it's necessary. It's not enjoyable, but it is essential to God's salvation. I personally believe the reason the angels followed Satan out of heaven and fell, joined him in his rebellion in Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28, is they had never seen what that would lead to.

There was no precedent. There was no Bible recording the dissolution of perfection, the corruption and denigration and disintegration of God's perfection. Freedom sounded like a good thing.

Independence sounded like a wonderful status. And they didn't see what was coming. Now they have.

Now they know. We are born into it. We see it.

What will be the difference? I've been asked more than once by numerous people. Well, because I have pointed out from scripture, there is nothing that says that God is going to alter our free will. The free will that enables us to choose for or against God and for or against Christ now, from what I see in scripture, is not going to be limited or inhibited in any way in the eternal future.

So should we be scared of making the same mistake that the angels made in following Satan? My answer to that is, that is exactly why we are allowed to endure the 400 years of persecution, affliction, hardship in the land of the Amorites to experience what sin and evil produce within us and without us, outside of us. That is like an inoculation. We will know in the eternal future the 40 miles of bad road that rejecting God produces.

And that's the understatement of the entirety of human history. It is just the worst. Look around in our world today.

You can't even watch the news without seeing commercials that plaster evil directly in our faces. And it is the evil faces of other people plastered into my face when all I want to do is see the news. But we've got to celebrate something.

We have to support something. We have to be politically correct in celebrating. You know, they say celebrate diversity.

This is celebrate perversity. We're celebrating perversity. And it's difficult.

You talk about Lot vexing his righteous soul in Sodom. Well, why does God allow this? Why didn't God start winking these angels out as soon as they started taking the daughters of men as wives? When the iniquity started to grow, why didn't God do the Barney Fife thing and nip it in the bud? Why does God allow evil to seed itself, to grow, to produce buds and then flowers and then more seeds and more fruit of corruption and destruction, hardship, and incredible, just almost insane levels of perversity? Why? Why? It grieves him. He is sorry for it.

In the same way that disciplining a child and in some cases incarcerating and even executing criminals is not a happy occasion. We don't celebrate it. We're not happy about it, but it is necessary to the future.

We look to the future. When we discipline a child, we're not taking vengeance on them for something they did wrong. We are attempting to teach them something that will benefit them in the future, that will enable them to have healthy relationships and productive paths through life.

It's hard at the time, but it produces the peaceable fruit of righteousness, right? This is what God is doing. So he allows it. So there is a cup.

This is our concept here. There is a cup of iniquity, and it is filling and filling, but it takes time. It is a process and more and more gets poured into it.

Sometimes this iniquity is the blood of the saints. And you know what I'm talking about there. You get over to Revelation 17, you talk about that woman with the cup, she's drunk with the evil that is within it, which includes massacring the saints.

So what God says here in Genesis 15 to Abram is, as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace. You shall be buried at a good old age. But in the fourth generation, your descendants will return here.

The fourth generation. Notice once again, the word generation. In the fourth generation, they shall return here. Why is it going to be four generations? Because when they return, there is going to be a judgment on those who have been perpetrating this hardship.

But right now the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full, not yet complete. I'm going to

take your descendants out of the land. The Amorites are going to prosper and fill the land and their iniquity is going to accrete.

It's going to add up. It is going to grow. And when it is full, God is going to bring the descendants of Abram back to the land and judge the Amorites.

We've seen this in the days of Joshua. With God's enablement, the Amorites are largely wiped out. If the Israelites have been fully obedient, the Amorites would have been fully wiped out.

But there is a lesson in that as well. You go to, in regard to this, along with Genesis 15, 16, be sure to write down Leviticus 18. Leviticus 18, 24 to 28.

The fulfillment of this four generations later is found here. Leviticus 18, 24. Do not defile yourselves with any of these things.

He's been talking about all kinds of uncovering of nakedness and perversity. In the preceding context, you can read that. All I have to say is these are manifestations of perversity.

It's sexual perversity. Don't mate with any animal in verse 23. Need I say more? Verse 24, do not defile yourself with any of these things for by all these, the nations are defiled, which I am casting out before you.

These are the Amorites we just saw in Genesis chapter 15. This is why I'm casting them out, God says. The land is defiled.

Therefore I visit the punishment of its iniquity and the land vomits out its inhabitants. You shall therefore keep my statutes and my judgments and shall not commit any of these abominations, either any of your own nation or any stranger who dwells among you. Not only should you not do it, but you should not tolerate it in your midst.

Do you hear the words of God to his people? Not only do you not practice it, but you do not tolerate it, you certainly do not celebrate it in your midst. Verse 27, for all these abominations, the men of the land have done who were before you and thus the land is defiled. And if you do these things, the land will vomit you out also when you defile it as it vomited out the nations that were before you.

For whoever commits any of these abominations, the persons who commit them shall be cut off from among their people. Therefore you shall keep my ordinance so that you do not commit any of these abominable customs which were committed before you and that you do not defile yourselves by them. I am the Lord, your God.

This is what defines you. This is who you are. You are the people of God.

I am the Lord, your God. Do not tolerate perversity in your midst. What happens when

this charge from God is disregarded? Turn to 1 Kings chapter 21.

We were just talking about the sending of Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord. These are the days of Elijah. 1 Kings 21, verse 26.

We're talking about the days of Ahab. You look at verse 25. There was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do wickedness in the sight of the Lord because Jezebel, his wife, stirred him up.

Ahab actually gets a pass because in his heart, he was not as evil as Jezebel drove him to be. He would not have slain Naboth for his vineyard except for Jezebel. He wouldn't have done a lot of the things that he did except that he listened to his wife.

Harks all the way back to Adam. There was no one like Ahab, sold himself to do wickedness in the sight of the Lord because Jezebel, his wife, stirred him up and he behaved very abominably in following idols according to all that the Amorites had done. Amorites, all the way back to what we just saw in Leviticus 18, whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel, that the land had vomited out.

So it was, when Ahab heard these words, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth, fasted, laid in the sackcloth, and went about mourning. The word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite saying, "'See how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself before me, I will not bring the calamity in his days.'" You see God willing to recognize any scrap of repentance, any sign of regret or sorrow over evil, and God gives Ahab more wicked than his father Omri, more wicked than his predecessor Jeroboam, but he has this period of mourning and regrets what he's done, and God said, you know what? Ahab won't see the destruction I'm gonna bring on his house. He won't see his children die.

He's not gonna see this judgment. I'll spare him that because of his repentance. The mercy of God, it is like the love of God, that song that says, you know, you could, if the seas were all ink and every stalk was a quill, you could never write down the love of God because it is so immense, and you see a reflection of it here.

The same thing in the southern kingdom. Turn over to 2 Kings chapter 21. 2 Kings chapter 21, we're talking about the days of Manasseh, wicked King Manasseh, 21, 11, and 12.

Because Manasseh, king of Judah, has done these abominations, he has acted more wickedly than all the Amorites who were before him. Do you see the link back to Leviticus 18? More wicked than the Amorites. I told you if you do these things, the land is gonna vomit you out and I will destroy you the way I destroyed them.

Ahab and Jezebel didn't listen. Manasseh didn't listen. He has made Judah sin with his idols.

Therefore, thus says the Lord God of Israel, behold, I am bringing such calamity upon Jerusalem and Judah that whoever hears of it, his ears are gonna tingle. I will stretch over Jerusalem, the measuring line of Samaria and the plummet of the house of Ahab. I will wipe Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down.

I will forsake the remnant of my inheritance, deliver them into the hand of their enemies. They shall become victims of plunder to all their enemies. Because they have done evil in my sight, provoke me to anger since the day their fathers came out of Egypt even to this day.

Manasseh has spilled very much innocent blood. He has filled Jerusalem from one end to another, filled. This is, God has been tolerating iniquity in the Northern kingdom all the way up to and through the time of Ahab.

He has tolerated it in Judah to and through the time of Manasseh. But when it reaches a certain level of fullness, judgment comes. This is a principle where the carcasses, the eagles are going to gather.

Well, we have much more to see and to say about this and its pertinence to our own time, but by way of application for this session, just look around. Do you think that we can escape the gathering of the carrion birds given the level, the consummation, the fullness of evil, not just localized? You can look back to the time of the French Revolution and see decadence and evil. You can look at various periods and various places over the last many centuries.

You can look at the time of the Crusades. You can look at the time of the Inquisition. You can look at the time of the Dark Ages.

You can look at different places and spots where evil had festered and become an infected boil, but that boil was lanced, things changed. There was some measure of recovery. The immense evil that was in South and Central America and God sort of used the Spaniards to wipe out these horrible human sacrificing, drink out of the skull evils.

People say, oh, it's so bad that the Spaniards came down. Well, God used one evil to extinguish another and to lessen it. If you can believe that, the Spanish were less evil than the people they wiped out, but what's different today is the universality.

Where can you go now on the earth that is free of this perversity, that is not on a hockey stick graph of embracing evil and rejecting the truth of God? The cup is almost full. Very little space between the level of iniquity and the brim of the cup. The time of judgment is near.

The iniquity of the Amorites has been matched and exceeded, and it's only getting worse. You don't see reports of wonderful revival and thousands and tens of thousands of people coming to Christ as you did maybe in China 30 or 40 years ago. These, the

great revivals in Asia have waned.

You don't see that happening anymore. That fire has cooled. Where is the current place of revival? Where do you hear about evangelists? Where are the Billy Graham crusades? There's only one place left that I know of where crowds like that are assembling, and that's India.

And that is the final few feet of the circle. This gospel will be preached, this gospel of the kingdom to all nations, to the whole earth, then the end will come. So be ready.

There are instructions for those who are faithful when judgment is near, and we want to heed those instructions. We want to pay close attention, not be caught unawares. If the man had known what hour the thief was coming, he would have been waiting there with his double-barreled shotgun.

But because he wasn't prepared for a thief, because he didn't have any security and was dwelling in unthinking safety in his own mind, he loses everything. That can't be us, it won't be us if we heed the words of the Lord Jesus. Let's pause here and take our break.

When we come back, we have a lot more to see in this section of Matthew chapter 24 via the Old Testament scriptures and some New Testament warnings as well.