

Matthew 22-07-10a

Good morning, welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace & Truth Bible Church. This is the 10th day of July, 2022. We're in the gospel of Matthew chapter 24, Matthew chapter 24.

We'll take a moment to ask God's blessing on our investigations this morning, on our time of fellowship together, the blessing in music and in reflection that will be a result of our time spent. Let's pray. Father, it is a wonderful blessing to be held in your hands, to be provided for, to be protected, to be preserved, to be connected to believers of like mind, to enjoy all of the wonderful opportunities that we have in our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We're thankful for him and for his past work on our behalf, his present work of intercession and representation, even at this very moment at your right hand for us and his return, which in our case will be soon, whether it is by our departure from this life or the rapture. We pray that in the time that remains to us in this life, your Holy Spirit will guide us, that the word we partake of this morning will be profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction, so that we will be thoroughly equipped for every good work. We pray that each one participating this morning and any time in the future will be blessed by the truth from your word that we look at this morning and you will bless it to each one of our hearts.

We ask these things in Jesus' name, amen. In Matthew 24, Jesus is talking about the future. He is giving prophetic information that is designed to instruct and to inform.

It is designed to prepare his disciples for the work that remains to them and to understand when the age will end. And there are reasons for observing the time of the end. Otherwise, when they asked the question, Jesus could have just said, it is not for you to know the times and seasons, just do your daily tasks and let the future take care of itself.

In other contexts, he has given such a message, hasn't he? Sufficient unto the day, the evil thereof, take no thought for the morrow, give us this day our daily bread. So it is of great interest when Jesus does give instruction about anticipating the future. And our passage this morning is picking up in Matthew 24, verse 32, which is the parable of the fig tree or parable from the fig tree.

We have seen the earlier part of this chapter in great detail. We have an idea of the things that are going to take place in the age preceding the time of the end. Wars and rumors of wars, famines and earthquakes will be commonplaces throughout the intervening period.

Jesus says, the end is not yet. And it is not until the gospel of the kingdom is preached in

all the world as a witness to all the nations, then the end will come. That was verse 14.

Seen this in great detail. We have seen the abomination of desolation, what it has been historically, what it will be in the future. And that for us by way of application, when that which is abominable in God's sight is now located in the place where it should not be in the midst and in the center of worship for God's people, that's a danger sign.

There have been many kinds of corruption. There have been many kinds of deception. There have been a lot of years, decades, even centuries of apostasy, of heresy, of abuse and corruption of God's word.

And in the midst of God's people, even in the time of the Lord Jesus and ever since before his time in the age of Israel, there has always been corruption. There's always been apostasy. There has always been legalism.

There's always been a devil may care, excessive freedom. There has been ignoring God's word. There has been rebelling against God's word in the midst of God's people.

What is unique about the abomination that causes desolation or the desolating abomination is that it is ubiquitous. It's everywhere. When you see the one spoken of by Daniel the prophet, let the reader understand.

When you read Daniel, there are anticipations. There was an anticipation in the days of Antiochus. There was an anticipation in the days of the destruction of Jerusalem in 68 to 70 AD.

But those will pale in comparison with the one that will take place in the midst of Daniel's 70th week. Spiritually speaking, the application for us, looking at the nation of Israel and the signs that Jesus gives for them, when we as the people of God, when we as Christians, as faithful members of the body of Christ, see desolating abomination in the very midst and in the very heart of the church worldwide, this is a sign of the end. And that has never been the case as it is today.

There have always been faithful areas. There has always been a center of gravity. There's been a majority someplace that was faithfully following the Lord Jesus, paying attention to the word of God.

You see this in missionary efforts, where there is the desire to share the good news of salvation with others, to shine the light in dark places, to translate the scriptures into languages where they were heretofore unavailable. Obviously, there've been abuses and mistakes made even in missionary efforts to not only preach the gospel, but also preach, say, European culture and to perpetrate abuses in the name of Christ. But there was always a center of mass, a momentum of belief, of faithfulness, of obedience, and of opportunity to speak the truth in love to others that characterized the church somewhere, somehow.

And when belief began to grow rotten in the Middle East, there was a burgeoning in Europe. When Europe began to deteriorate, you had the Americas, North and South. When our continents began to lose their first love, it spread to Asia, to Japan, to China, to Korea, where there is still a very strong Christian presence.

But that is beginning to wane. And from there, it has spread to India. And India and North Africa are two of the hottest areas in terms of Christian growth and response to evangelism.

But that has now circled the globe. And you're back to contact on its Eastern border with the Middle East. The gospel of the kingdom has been preached to all nations.

Jesus said, when you see that, then the end will come. So at that same time, when that is completed, there is going to be this great abomination of desolation. In the church age, this is corruption of the gospel, corruption of a healthy view of scripture, corruption of understanding when it comes to what the Christian life is and should be, what faith and practice constitute, the essential nature of faith and hope as undergirding love.

You can't jump straight to love in the New Testament any more than you can jump straight to obedience in the Old Testament. Obedience by itself doesn't please God. It is obedience from a pure heart and a clean conscience.

Overt obedience is simply duty or legalism. And it doesn't please God in and of itself. So these are signs that we have seen.

We have seen that there will be great deceptions and falsehoods, which Jesus repeatedly warns against in this section. Then the description of the actual coming of the Lord Jesus, and this of course is unprecedented. This will only be fulfilled at the close of the 70th week of Daniel, when the sun is darkened, the moon does not give its light, the stars fall from heaven and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

You might see these in spiritual terms fulfilled in the latter days of our age, but they will literally be fulfilled at the close of the 70th week. And then it says, he will send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together his elect from the four winds from one end of heaven to the other. This is at the conclusion of the time when the cup of iniquity is full.

We have seen that. The notes in Matthew chapter 13, verse 30, and here in 24, 40 through 42, if you look forward a little bit, the two in the field, one taken in the other left, two grinding at the mill, one taken in the other left, is not the same. These are not equivalent.

The gathering of the elect from the four winds from one end of heaven to the other, meaning from horizon to horizon from all over the earth, this is accomplished by the angels. Neither one of these, of course, is the rapture, but the gathering of the elect by

the angels with a great sound of a trumpet, this is the equivalent of the rapture for Israel. This is Israel's rapture.

We are raptured at the sound of a trumpet. Israel will be resuscitated at the sound of a trumpet. That is not the same, and we will see this.

Two men in the field, one taken in the other left. The taken there is taken in judgment. The ones who are left are those who will be sort of transformed in the twinkling of an eye in the sense of receiving the enhanced resuscitation version of physical existence and will then begin the millennial kingdom age.

So a lot of people try to conflate those two, but they're not the same. You want to be gathered by the angels. You don't want to be taken in 40 through 42.

But with this brings us now, that's a review, since it's been two weeks. We pick up in verse 32. Jesus says, now learn this parable from the fig tree.

When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near at the doors. Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will by no means pass away. Well, there is a lot of information here in these four verses. Jesus says, now learn this parable from the fig tree.

Learn this parable from the fig tree. He doesn't say learn the parable of the fig tree or about the fig tree. It's an interesting turn of phrase.

Learn this parable from the fig tree. When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So in the normal course of your existence, you have a general understanding of the turn of seasons.

We know the difference between summer and winter and spring and fall. We know just based on how much time has passed. Nowadays, we have chronometers and calendars that really didn't exist in those days.

Their annual calendar was watching where the sun rose and where the sun set. The latitude in Israel is very close to our own. If you look at a globe and the progress of sunrise and sunset that we observe here, if you pay attention, if you're up at sunrise, if you see the sunset, you notice its progress across the horizon.

And you note that it progresses further and further to the Southeastern sky in fall and winter. Then in the middle of December at the winter solstice, it starts creeping back the other way and begins to move further and further north on the Eastern horizon. And

similarly for sunset.

And that reverses again at the summer solstice. So every three months, we can mark a meridian. The spring equinox is the halfway point, the fall equinox is the halfway point of those movements.

And the extremes are marked by the solstices. However, Jesus doesn't use the sunrise and sunset for his parable. He uses the fig tree.

There are many signs of summer. There are many signs of winter. Of all of the ones that he could have chosen, he chooses the fig tree.

So it would behoove us to spend a little time looking at fig trees in general and figs in particular. They are regularly featured throughout scripture. And we already have an instinct that tells us that the fig tree often represents Israel.

We have recently seen that in our own study with Jesus going to the fig tree and looking for fruit. And not finding it and then cursing the fig tree. So we understand in general that there is a symbolic significance.

But there's a lot that scripture has to say about the fig tree. The first thing I would suggest as we look at this passage is Jesus says, when its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So in the late spring, the extremities of this tree will have become tender.

Can't tell you how many times I've seen women in my family walk up to a shrub, grab a twig, and see if it bends or if it snaps. Is this thing alive? Is it going to blossom and bloom and prosper? Or did it die over the winter? And I feel particularly sorry for the ones that did manage to struggle through the winter and then keep bending that thing until it breaks to see if it's green inside. And it's like, really? You're gonna break me off after all I've been through? But the feature here that is prominent and isn't always remarked on is in the fig tree, this is observed over time.

You don't just wake up one morning and suddenly the fig tree has tender branches and its leaves are all out. This is observed over time. It's a process and you don't really note on a particular day that all of a sudden, the branches are tender, all of a sudden the leaves are out.

You notice that they are beginning to be supple and that there are little leaf buds and these leaves come out and you notice it over time. And this is I think why Jesus says, when its branch has already become tender, it gradually became tender as the sap flows, as the moisture comes up from the ground and it's in its spring growth phase, that's when new branches form, that's when they become tender and green and leaves begin to bud and appear. But it's a process, it's a process.

It's not a lightning bolt, it's not an egg that was laid by a bird, it's gradual. So it is observed over time, it's not instantaneous and it is a seasonal sign. It's not a day or an hour, it's a season.

Jesus says the season of summer is near. It's not here, but it is near. Now, what's particularly interesting about figs is they span the Bible.

Interestingly, if you check some references and look up fig trees, they leave out what I consider to be the most important and signal mention. Here's a trivia question for you, because obviously you know I'm thinking about the Garden of Eden. Of all of the trees in the garden, we don't know, were there apple trees, were there citrus trees, were there avocado trees? God planted this garden and put the trees, what is the one tree we know was in the Garden of Eden without any doubt? The fig tree, because Adam and Eve sew the leaves of the fig tree together to make their aprons before they are cast out of the garden.

The only tree you can with certainty name that grew in the garden is a fig tree. There is no other that you can confidently assert in terms of genus and species and fruit. You have the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but in terms of our trees that we have today, the only one you know for sure was in there is the fig.

So the fig tree is the first identified tree in the Bible in terms of our common trees. And it is also a sign that Jesus gives, a parable of the fig tree is a sign that the end is near. So what do we know about figs and fig trees? Well, you can begin by looking at Deuteronomy 8, verse eight, where it is given, Deuteronomy 8, verse eight, the land that the Lord your God is bringing you into is a good land in verse seven, a land of brooks, of water, of fountains and springs that flow out of valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey, a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron and out of whose hills you can dig copper.

An allusion in the days of the Exodus to metalworking, which secular scholarship doesn't believe was taking place in any great abundance, certainly not in 1440 BC. But God makes reference to the iron and the copper that is available to smelt and to make implements out of. And then in verse 10, when you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land which he has given you.

Beware that you do not forget the Lord your God. So it is one of the prominent features of prosperity in the good land that God is bringing his people into. So when Jesus says, when you see the fig tree with its tender branches and its leaves, you know that summer is near.

The summer is what you're looking forward to. The fruit of the fig tree, you're not looking for its leaves so that you can make aprons. You're looking for those figs so that they will

sustain you and be part of that abundance and blessing that characterize the land.

If you look at figs themselves, you have another interesting episode. Which is found in Numbers chapter 13, verse 23. So turn back to Numbers 13.

This is the adventures of the spies that are sent into the land. They are sent at the Lord's behest. In verse two, send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the children of Israel.

This land that we saw described in Deuteronomy. Of course, the words of Deuteronomy are reflected many places in the law. From each tribe of their fathers, you shall send a man.

And Moses sent them in verse 18 to see what the land is like, whether the people who dwell in it are strong or weak, few or many, whether the land they dwell in is good or bad, whether the cities they inhabit are like camps or like strongholds. Whether the land is rich or poor, verse 20, whether there are forests there or not, be of good courage and bring some of the fruit of the land. The time was the season of the first ripe grapes.

So this is late spring, early summer, the first ripe grapes. So they went up and spied out the land from the wilderness of Zin as far as Rehov near the entrance of Hamath. They went up through the south and came to Hebron, Ahimon, Sheshai, and Talmi, the descendants of Anak there.

Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt, an interesting detail there. Look at verse 23. Then they came to the valley of Eshkol and there cut down a branch with one cluster of grapes.

They carried it between two of them on a pole. It was such a, you know, you think about the clusters of grapes at your local grocery. This was so big, they had to sling it between them.

Two men had to bear the weight of this cluster of grapes. They also brought some of the pomegranates and figs. Remember the description in Deuteronomy 8? A land of figs, pomegranates, grapes, flowing with milk and honey.

They returned from spying out the land. Now, here's the thing. They brought back this evidence of the prosperity of the goodness of the land.

It is just as God described it. And God said, not only this will be the description of the land, but I am going to give this land to you. Think about it just for a moment in terms of our own experience.

God has described what our life is going to be like with its blessings and its challenges. And God has also promised to be with us, to sustain us, to provide for us, to protect us,

to preserve us, and to bring us into that spiritual prosperity that will eventuate in heavenly prosperity, in future kingdom prosperity. In this world, you shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer.

I've overcome the world. And in the future, your faithfulness and obedience will be vindicated. You are going to face difficulty, but be of good cheer.

I will never leave you nor forsake you. I have promised to bring you into this good land. Here is manifest physical evidence of the first part of that two-part communication from God.

There is a good, good land that I am bringing you into. Here is the physical evidence that it is a wonderful, prosperous, burgeoning land. The second part is I am bringing you into it.

I am going to give you this land. I promised it to your forefathers, and I am making good on that promise. So here's the evidence for the first part.

You would think that this would secure their faith in God's promise in the second part, but you know the story. Verse 27, we went to the land where you sent us. It truly flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit.

We have an earnest, we have a down payment on our own spiritual promised land. What is that earnest? Paul specifically says this is the earnest of our inheritance. What is it? It is the presence of the Holy Spirit.

It is the power of the Holy Spirit. What does the Holy Spirit do in terms of manifesting that earnest? What is our figs and pomegranates and cluster of grapes? Think about that cluster of grapes. Spiritually speaking, what is the most important cluster of grapes that we possess? I'll give you a hint.

What was in the cup in the upper room? Where did that come from? You see the connection? This is the new covenant in my blood, this grape juice, this fruit of the vine, this wine. It is an earnest. God, the Holy Spirit, makes that covenant and that salvation real to us.

This is our cluster of grapes. The blessings that we enjoy, the good things that God brings us in this life are just a foretaste. It's a sample of figs.

It's a sample of pomegranates. It's just the largest and most important that take two men to carry. You remember we've been talking about the two witnesses? We've got our two witnesses to the work of Christ, the word and the spirit.

This is how the power of God comes into our lives, right? In the mouth of two or three witnesses, a thing is established. But those grapes and those figs and pomegranates are

an earnest, they're a sample of what we will experience and enjoy when we enter in, when God fulfills not just the description of the good land and gives evidence of it, but actually brings us into it. If you believe the first part, if you can trust the evidence of your senses and you experience that first part, how can we not have total confidence that God is going to fulfill the second part? He has shown himself faithful.

He has shown himself true. But what happens? Look at verse 28. This is where you get the nevertheless.

Nevertheless, the people who dwell in the land are strong. The cities are fortified and very large. Moreover, we saw the descendants of Anak there.

The Amalekites dwell in the land of the South. The Hittites, the Jebusites, the Amorites dwell in the mountains. The Canaanites dwell by the sea and along the banks of the Jordan.

They didn't bring an Amalekite. They didn't bring a son of Anak. You know, they didn't knock one in the head and drag him back and say, look how big these foes are.

The fruit of the land is physical evidence. It is personally experienced by the Israelites that are looking on. They can see the grapes.

They can taste the figs and the pomegranates for themselves. The testimony of the witnesses is, but there's a challenge here. And it's a formidable challenge.

It is a challenge that we cannot overcome in our own strength and with our own numbers. Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, let us go up at once and take possession for you're well able to overcome it. This is Caleb who are the two witnesses who assure the people that this is the fulfillment of God's promise and can certainly happen.

We can go in and possess it. But the men who had gone up with him said, we are not able to go up against the people for they are stronger than we. Notice you have a vocal witness and you have a silent witness.

Who's the silent witness here that doesn't give this negative testimony? Who's speaking? Caleb. Who is totally with Caleb, but not speaking? Yeshua. Caleb is speaking.

Yeshua is not at this point. And if you just read this and didn't have other scripture, you would think that there were 11 against and one for. But there are so many pictures of Jesus Christ in the Old Testament, like Elihu and Job.

And in this scene, Joshua is silent at this point. So the men who had gone up with him said, we're not able to go up against this people. They are stronger than we.

They gave the children of Israel a bad report of the land, which they had spied out

saying, the land through which we have gone as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants. All the people whom we saw in it are men of great stature. This is not true.

This is not true. The Hittites, the Jebusites, the Amorites, and the Canaanites are not men of great stature. This is a twisting of the truth.

The sons of Anak are men of great stature, but they're only in one location. But now they are committing the fallacy of composition saying, well, if the sons of Anak are huge, they're all huge. And it is a land that devours its inhabitants.

If the land actually devoured its inhabitants, why are there any inhabitants at all? Why are they talking about Amorites and Jebusites and Hittites? Why are they talking about this? If the land devours its inhabitants, it ought to be empty, right? This now has gone beyond reporting to editorializing, to twisting the truth, to subtracting from it and adding to it. Twisted truth always leads to poor decisions. Why did Adam and Eve have to sow fig leaves together? Because a twisted truth deceived Eve.

Turn back with me real quickly, just before we go to our break here, to Genesis chapter three. Verse seven is where the leaves are mentioned, but I wanna point something out. That first six verses, it's so typical of scripture to have understatement and a great economy when it comes to something that is of just huge importance.

Look at this. The serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field, which the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "'Has God indeed said you shall not eat of every tree of the garden?' And the woman said to the serpent, "'We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden, but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said you shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.' Then the serpent said," We've been through these words many times.

You have a lot of memories of the great treasure that is in almost every word, but I'm gonna focus on one particular thing. "'Then the serpent said to the woman,' in verse four, "'You will not surely die.'" Is this true? Kinda. They ate the fruit and they didn't immediately die, right? But look at this.

God knows that in the day you eat of it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like God knowing good and evil. Take each of those phrases, which ones are true? "'God knows that in the day you eat of it, your eyes will be opened.'" True or false? Well, look at verse seven. "'After Eve eats and gives to her husband and he ate, then the eyes of both of them were open.'" So Satan speaks truth.

"'You will be like God.'" Are they now like God? False. Knowing good and evil, true or false? What's the name of the tree? The tree of the knowledge of good and evil. You eat the tree, you now have knowledge of good and evil.

So their eyes are open and what is it they see with their eyes that they did not see

before? It's a fascinating thing because it's mentioned twice. I don't know if I ever really gave this its due consideration. It doesn't say they became corrupt, they fell, they developed a sin nature.

It says their eyes were opened. In the moment when they eat, Satan told them, your eyes will be open. At the moment they eat the fruit, their eyes are open.

This is the main description of what happens at the point that they disobey and eat the fruit. Their eyes are opened. What does it mean? You know, if I was a literalist and if you wanna have fun with somebody who says, well, I take the Bible literally, ask them, so were Adam and Eve's eyes shut the whole time they were in the garden until they ate this fruit? How did they find it? Bible says their eyes weren't open until they ate this fruit, then their eyes were open.

So they must have been shut before that. What does it actually mean? It's interesting to speculate and to cogitate on everything that this implies. Their eyes were open and they knew evil.

It says they knew they were naked. Is nakedness evil? It depends. Naked came I from my mother's womb.

Naked shall I return, Job says. Was that evil? But they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings. Anyway, food for thought.

But as we look at this idea of figs, what have we seen so far? They are implicated in both good and evil. It's the first tree and the only tree specifically mentioned in terms of its fruit and its leaves in the garden. Actually not even its fruit, but its leaves are mentioned.

So we know there were fig trees in the garden and the first action after their eyes are open and they see that they're naked is they find a fig tree, they pull leaves off and they sew them together. Figs, this is a portent of bad things to come. You know those leaves are going to wilt now that they've been plucked and sewed.

You know that this is inadequate and insufficient as the story proceeds. Figs are implicated in the knowledge of evil and that there are bad things to come. Jesus says, look at the fig tree.

It is also a portent of good things to come. In this world you shall have tribulation, be of good cheer, I have overcome the world. Watch the fig tree.

Everything Jesus has said in the earlier part of Matthew 24 is trouble and tribulation. He doesn't say and behold, food will be abundant and summers will be cool and winters will be warm and people will prosper and have children in abundance who will grow up in milk and honey and figs and pomegranates. Everything in the earlier part is bad news

and the end is not yet and then it just gets worse.

Sun darkened, moon doesn't give its light, stars fall, the powers of the heavens are shaken. Jesus says, when you see the fig tree's branches becoming tender and putting out leaves, it's near, even at the doors, what's near? There's gonna be a whole lot of bad stuff, but summer is near, summer is near. Summer is what we're watching for.

We're looking past everything he just described to the summer of the millennial kingdom at first blush. We look past the hardships and tribulations of this life to the spiritual blessings, the cluster of grapes, the figs and the pomegranates that are a foretaste of glory divine, that are a sample, just a token of what is to come when God fulfills that second part of his promise to us, just as he did for Israel. The only thing that can interfere with it, just as we saw in Numbers 13, is inability to trust God for his promise.

I see the evidence, but I just don't believe God can do what he says. And what are they doing? They're looking to themselves and saying, we're not numerous enough, we're not strong enough. These formidable foes are tall.

They will just look at us like grasshoppers. Well, if they're looking at you, they're gonna be fooled because greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world. They've completely lost sight as they hold the tangible evidence of God's truthfulness in their hands, they lose sight of God's truthfulness in terms of his promise.

We can't make that mistake. No matter what we see in terms of tribulation in our lives, we've got to look past it to the sure mercies of God, the absolute certainty of the fulfillment of his promises to those who by faith and patience inherit those promises. We'll see more when we come back from the break.