

Matthew 22-07-10b

We're ready now to resume our study here in the Gospel of Matthew. We're going to pick up the pace a little bit. This is a subject that you could really explore in great depth, but I want to get to what I think is the point of Jesus using this particular parable in Matthew chapter 24, verse 32, the parable from the fig tree in connection with all of the dire information He has just communicated.

It's sobering, it could be depressing, it could be discouraging to see these signs, these portents, these predictions, these unhappy circumstances that Jesus says are going to come. And as we saw in Numbers 13, the report of the spies when they went to the land, they were specifically instructed by Moses to look not only at the good things of the land, but also the nature of the opposition. Are the cities mere villages and tents or are they walled fortresses? What is the strength of the opposition? And to not underestimate it, to not ignore it and say, well, God will provide.

They needed to know the details of what they were up against, among many other reasons to not be surprised. Scripture tells us in the New Testament, do not be surprised at the fiery trial that you may face. Count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.

Let patience have its perfect work so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. So a realistic picture is required. How did Satan deceive Eve? He only gave one side of what it would mean to have your eyes open.

Well, you'll be like God because you'll know good and evil. God knows good and evil, but he doesn't know it experientially. He knows it observationally.

And the lack of full disclosure is the nature of that deception. We should be informed. This is why Jesus is giving the details of hardship to come, and also the means of enduring and overcoming in and through that hardship.

Learn the parable from the fig tree. When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. We saw Genesis 3.7 with the fig leaves in the garden.

We saw Numbers 13.23 in connection with the spies bringing back that fruit. And you know that they are overcome with fear and doubt, and there is a 40-year delay before the descendants of these people enter the land. Only Caleb and Joshua, the two faithful witnesses, enter the land.

We have just seen the two faithful witnesses in Revelation who I believe are James and John that are going to represent God in that time preceding the last half of the 70th week, what's known as the tribulation period. And so in chapter 11 of Revelation, we

looked at that. The season being near, this is a sign.

It is something observed over time. Turn finally to 2 Kings chapter 20. Of many passages we could pick, you can use a concordance and look up figs and fig trees.

It's a fascinating study, and the more you look at it, the more it coalesces. But we only need to look at one more passage, which is the days of the Hezekiah. This is 2 Kings chapter 20.

And you will remember that Hezekiah is a mixture of faithfulness and foolishness. And the Assyrians that approach in chapter 19, the angel of the Lord went out and killed in the camp of the Assyrians. This is 1935 of 2 Kings.

185,000. When people rose early in the morning, there were the corpses all dead. Nobody saw that coming.

They were ready for defeat, destruction, the siege of this enormous outnumbering army. And with a word from God, they're gone. And Sennacherib departs and goes away and ends up dying.

Then in those days, chapter 20, Hezekiah was sick and near death. Isaiah, the prophet, the son of Amoz went to him and said, thus says the Lord, set your house in order for you shall die and not live. Turns his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord.

Remember, O Lord, I pray how I have walked before you in truth and with a loyal heart. I have done what was good in your sight. Hezekiah wept bitterly.

It happened before Isaiah had gone out into the middle court that the word of the Lord came to him saying, return and tell Hezekiah, the leader of my people, thus says the Lord, the God of David, your father. I have heard your prayer. I have seen your tears.

Surely I will heal you. God values, respects and rewards, repentance, acknowledgement. On the third day, you shall go up to the house of the Lord.

And I will add to your days 15 years. I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria. And I will defend this city for my own sake, for the sake of my servant, David.

Then Isaiah said, take a lump of figs. You want to talk about some compactitude in the word of God. We didn't really know what was the matter with Hezekiah.

It just says he was sick and near death in verse one. And then it says, take a lump of figs. It doesn't say what to do with it.

There's not a lot of mumbo jumbo. Isaiah just says, lump up some figs. So they took it and laid it on the boil.

Turns out he was suffering from an infected boil and he recovered. Actually, it's the context indicates that he began to recover. He didn't sink.

They thought he was going to sink and be dead in minutes or hours. Instead, he turns the corner. So Hezekiah said to Isaiah, what is the sign that the Lord will heal me and that I shall go up to the house of the Lord the third day.

So in this connection, you have figs, specifically. Figs are in the context. And now we have a sign that God is going to heal him on the third day.

Isaiah has told him, I've seen your tears. I will heal you on the third day. You shall go up to the house of the Lord.

But he wants a sign. This is ever the problem with Israel. A wicked and perverse generation seeks a sign.

In Jesus' day, no sign will be given it, but the sign of Jonah. How long is that sign? Three days. How long is this sign? It's got to sustain the faith of Hezekiah for three days.

This is the sign to you from the Lord that the Lord will do the thing which he has spoken. And then you have the episode of the shadow. It says a sundial, but it's actually the steps of Ahaz.

We went through this in Kings and Prophets. The shadow moves up the steps contrary to the normal motion of the sun. But the need for faith in God's promise of future blessing is the issue here.

And the application of figs and the beginning of recovery should have been enough for Hezekiah, but he wants a further sign. The sign is in the heavens. The sign is the backward movement of the sun, the reversal of the shadow cast by the sun on the steps of Ahaz.

And you think, what if it had been a cloudy day? But that of course is fulfilled and the sign is given to Hezekiah because he requests it. Jesus goes on to say, learn this parable from the fig tree. When his branches already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near.

Look past the storms of springtime, look past the difficulties and the lack of fruit. I don't think we need to go back and review the Lord Jesus with the cursing of the fig tree. And I think we need to go back and review which is the Lord Jesus looking and seeing the tender branches, seeing the leaves and looking for fruit.

This was back in chapter 21, verse 18. Jesus returned to the city, seeing a fig tree, 21, 19 by the road. He came to it and found nothing on it, but leaves.

What does Jesus say about the fig tree when you see its leaves? It is a sign that summer

is near, but not here. When summer is near, but not here, it's got tender branches and has put forth leaves. What should be the next step? It should produce fruit.

Implicit in Jesus' words here, you have the idea that when the fig tree has become tender and put forth leaves and you know summer is near, what should happen between now and summer? Fruit. Concentrate on the fruit. You want to be found full of fruit when the Lord comes to evaluate.

There will be an evaluation between summer being near and summer coming to pass. What kind of tree are you going to be? Are you going to be all show and no fruit? Tender branches and leaves, no fruit. The implication here is when spring is here and summer is near, it is the time to start concentrating on fruit bearing because an evaluation is coming.

You know what happened to the fig tree when it did not have the fruit that was expected by the Lord Jesus. So also you, Matthew 24, when you see all these things, know that it is near at the doors. There is no pronoun there for it or he, and you have to supply something in English.

Your New King James text note says he or it. Well, what is it? It is verse three, the sign of your coming and the end of the age. His coming and the end of the age are near even at the doors when you see all these things.

Now that is not the entirety of what he has communicated. All these things are the content of verse five through 14. When you see the great tribulation in verse 15 through 28, obviously verses 29 through 31, you will not see those things because that is the coming.

That is the resolution. That is when the new day will dawn, when summer will arrive. But I have told you beforehand as lightning comes from the east, and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.

By the way, verse 27, as the lightning comes from the east, this is the eastern parts. It is actually plural. As it flashes from the eastern parts to the western parts, it is a peculiarity of language that it is actually plural.

That peculiarity is something we first encountered at the beginning of our study in the book of Matthew. Keep your finger here and just turn back to Matthew chapter two. Matthew chapter two, verse one.

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of the king, behold, wise men from the eastern parts. It is the same word. Wise men from the eastern parts came.

Why did they come? They saw a sign. Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the eastern parts from which we have just come. We have

seen his star when we were over there in the eastern parts and have come to worship him.

Notice they say, where is he who has been born? They don't say, has he been born? Know any pregnant women in the royal line here? They know that he has already been born. Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? We have seen his star. We have seen his sign in the eastern parts, and when we saw that sign, we knew that his coming was at hand, and so we have come to kneel before him.

Worship literally means to bend the knee, to prostrate, to bow before him. Same thing in verse nine. When they heard the king, they departed, and behold, the star which they had seen in the eastern parts went before them until it came and stood where the young child was.

The same sign continues, and it is associated with the eastern parts. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. They came into the house, and they see the king of the Jews whom they have sought.

In the same way here in Matthew 24, so also when you see all these things, verse 33, know that it is near at the doors. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. We can experience that parousia, that presence that Jesus speaks of in Revelation 3.20. If anyone hears the sound of my knock, hears my sound, phonei, and opens the door, I will come in and sup with him, and he with me.

Parousia, presence, fellowship, sharing the table. We just saw on Wednesday how sacrifice in Malachi represents the Levitical principle of a shared meal, of fellowship, and to corrupt God's table is one of many charges that God levels against the Levites specifically and Judah in general in those days. In connection with that, turn back to Nehemiah chapter 13.

We want to think now about the response. When you know that it is near, even at the doors, and you know the fig tree has got tender branches and leaves, and it is the time to push out some fruit so that when the son of man comes looking for it, he finds it, what kind of repentance? This is the theme of Malachi. Change your mind.

Turn your hearts to the kind of hearts the fathers had. Return the heart the fathers had to the children, and return the children to the hearts of the fathers. Well, there was a need for repentance in the days of Nehemiah.

You turn to chapter 13. On that day they read from the book of Moses in the hearing of the people, and it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever come into the assembly of God, because they had not met the children of Israel with bread and water, but hired Balaam against them to curse them, and of course the Moabite women who come in and seduce the men of Israel. You remember that whole Balaam thing? So

it was, when they had heard the law, they separated all the mixed multitude from Israel.

They separated all the mixed multitude from Israel, not just the Moabites and Ammonites. They separated them all. Now, what about this Moabite Ammonite curse? We've talked about it when we did the book of Ruth.

She is a Moabitess. We've talked about this episode in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah where they condemn people for their marriages to women of the land and so on, and we've decided that we're not real sure they were in the right to drive these people hence and to create widows and orphans by divorcing and sending away these families. What about this Moabite Ammonite curse? Where does it come from? If you remember this, keep your finger in Nehemiah here and turn back to Deuteronomy 23 verse 3. They're reading the law.

Obviously they were reading Deuteronomy and they came to chapter 23. He who is emasculated by crushing or mutilation shall not enter the assembly of the Lord ever. There's no qualification.

If you have suffered an injury of this nature, can't come in. One of illegitimate birth shall not enter the assembly of the Lord even to the tenth generation. None of his shall enter the assembly of the Lord.

Is there a qualification on that prohibition? Someone of illegitimate birth, for how long shall he and his not enter? Ten generations. After ten generations, this curse does not apply. Notice there is no ten generation qualification on this or many other of the prohibitions that say shall not enter the assembly like in verse 1. This one, illegitimate birth, will persist for ten generations and that's it.

That's why it is ten generations. Why mention ten generations unless there is an eventual end to this prohibition. Now look at verse 3. An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter the assembly of the Lord.

How long? To the tenth generation. None of his shall enter the assembly of the Lord forever because they did not meet you with bread and water on the road because they hired against you Balaam the son of Baor from Pthor of Mesopotamia to curse you. Verse 7, you shall not abhor an Edomite.

Verse 8, the children of the third generation born to them may enter the assembly of the Lord. So for Edomites, it's a three generation prohibition. For Moabites and Ammonites, it is a ten generation.

So in reading the law in Nehemiah, no Moabite or Ammonite should ever come into the assembly of God. What did we say in the first session about these partial truths and twisted truths? Does the scripture say they shall not ever enter the assembly? It says for ten generations. The failure to meet the Israelites with bread and water by a first

generation of Moabites and Ammonites is the charge and the reason for the prohibition.

But after ten generations, that prohibition is dismissed. How long has it been in the days of Nehemiah in the circa 500 BC long has it been? 450 to 500 BC. It's been nearly a thousand years.

Even if people lived to a hundred, that would be ten generations. Typically, a biblical generation is 40 years. Divide 40 into a thousand, whatever you get at that point.

What is that? 20? It would be 8,000 years. So 25 generations, 25 biblical generations. It's been more than twice as long for this curse to have expired.

But they say should ever come into the assembly of God, no matter how long. So 25 generations ago, I told you in another context, I've actually been able to trace one small rivulet or branch of my family back that far and further, back to the Norseman, back to Charlemagne, 25 generations and more. I can show you, well, my great grandmother's father, father, father going all the way back, all the way back to AD 400 and 450 and back to, I think the earliest was like in the 200s AD.

There is one little track of the myriads of ancestors that goes back that far. Two of those tracks end up at Charlemagne. It's completely insignificant when you think about how many other people are related at that level, but that's God's point.

After 10 generations, it doesn't matter if 25 generations ago, you had a Moabite or an Ammonite in your ancestry that rejected Israel on its way to the promised land. It's not a forever curse. And we know that there are consequences for failures and disobediences and faithlessness in our own lives, but it does not last forever.

Those repercussions may persist for a while. God may not always deliver us from the effects of wrong in our lives, but it is not forever. There is eventually healing.

The poultice of figs is put on it, and after three days, we live again. We rise, we recover, and our past mistakes do not haunt us forever. There will be short-term consequences.

David made some mistakes. Look at his life. There is grief in his household, but it does not last forever.

His line is not forever tainted or corrupted or set aside. It is the line of David that results in the Lord Jesus Christ. How many generations is it from David to the carrying away to Babylon and from the carrying away of Babylon to the Lord Jesus and so on? You look at those generational notations in the beginning of the gospel.

There is an expiration, in other words, for these bad things. It is 10 generations. What is it that Nehemiah does not understand in chapter 13 in a nutshell? The Moabite Ammonite curse has expired.

He did not pay attention to detail. They just said, well, it is forever. So it was when they had heard the law, they separated all the mixed multitude from Israel, all the mixed multitude.

They just took any foreigners and separated them out. This is an abuse and a misapplication of scripture. The rest of this chapter goes on to detail the quote unquote reforms of Nehemiah.

So when he comes to Jerusalem, what he sees grieves him bitterly in verse 8. So he threw all the household goods of Tobiah out of the room, commanded them to cleanse the articles of the house of God with grain offering and the frankincense. I realized the portions for the Levites had not been given for each of the Levites and singers who did the work had gone back to his field. So I contended with the rulers, why is the house of God forsaken? I gathered them together and set them in their place.

All Judah brought the tithe of grain and new wine and oil to the storehouse. This is a good thing. It chimes in with what we saw in Malachi, bring the tithes and offerings to my house and see if I will not open the windows of heaven.

Some of what Nehemiah does is good. Some of it is not good. He appoints a treasurer and he says in verse 14, remember me, oh my God, concerning this and do not wipe out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God and for its services.

In those days, I saw people in Judah treading wine presses on the Sabbath, bringing in sheaves, loading donkeys with wine, grapes, figs and all kinds of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. I warned them about on the day that they were selling these provisions. You should not be buying and selling on the Sabbath.

Men of Tyre dwelt there. You can read all the rest of this where he makes these reforms. So he posts guards at the gates and prevents people from coming in on the Sabbath.

The merchants who used to come in on the Sabbath to do business camp outside and he drives them away. Why do you spend the night around the wall? If you do so again, I will lay hands on you. From that time they came no more on the Sabbath.

I commanded the Levites to cleanse themselves and go and guard the gates to sanctify the Sabbath day. Remember me, oh my God, concerning this also. Spare me according to the greatness of your mercy.

In those days, I also saw Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon and Moab. Half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and could not speak the language of Judah, but spoke according to the language of one or the other people. So I contended with them, and cursed them, struck some of them, and pulled out their hair, and made them swear by God, saying, You shall not give your daughters as wives to their sons, nor take their daughters for your sons or yourselves.

Did not Solomon sin by these things? Should we hear of your doing this great evil, transgressing against our God by marrying pagan women? And one of the sons of Jehoiada, the son of Elisha, the high priest, was the son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite. Therefore I drove him from me. Remember them, oh God, because they have defiled the priesthood and covenant of the priesthood and the Levites.

Thus I cleansed them of everything pagan. What's wrong with this picture? Can we cleanse each other? Can we force each other into external obedience? Why does Malachi close with an exhortation to make your heart right? I send you Elijah the prophet. He's not going to drive away your wives and children.

He's not going to strike you and pull out your hair, and issue occurs. God says if hearts don't change, I myself will smite the land with a curse. He doesn't say my prophet will smite you with a curse.

My representative will. Behold, I will send you Nehemiah, and he'll straighten you out. He'll post guards at the gates.

He will force external cleanliness, external purity. What is the problem? And what is the result of the reforms of Nehemiah? Was there a wonderful renewal and revival in Israel that resulted in the glory of God inhabiting the temple once again? Did the Shekinah come and glow forth because of the reforms? What is Nehemiah's interest in all this? What is his prayer in the midst of these efforts? Remember me for good. Look at what I have done to cleanse your courts and to purge your priests and to break up these marriages and interfere in the personal lives of these people.

Remember me for good. No prayer to remember Israel for good, to restore his favor, his grace, and his presence in the midst of the land and in the midst of the people, in the midst of the capital city. Remember me for good.

This is ever the motivation for legalistic external obeisance. This is the problem. And there is a little clue here in the goods that are being brought in and sold on the Sabbath, which include wine, grapes, figs, all kinds of burdens being brought in.

Should they pay attention to the law? What is the way to get people to observe the law and not buy and sell and turn the house of God into a place of merchandise? Teach. Teach. What was the charge against the Levites? You have broken the covenant of Levi.

His practice was to have my words on his lips. And he taught the people. You do not teach the people.

You are partial in the law. You pick and choose the parts that you want to emphasize. That was the charge in Malachi.

And it is very near to the days of Nehemiah. This is not applause worthy. God is not

going to remember Nehemiah for good.

He's going to remember him for the very things that he condemns the Levites for in our previous study. Well, back to. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near at the doors in Matthew 24, 33.

Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away. This generation will by no means pass away. This generation seeks a sign.

This generation is characterized as a brood of vipers. Jesus speaks of this generation over and over again. Very quickly, Matthew chapter 11, verse 16.

16. To what shall I liken this generation? Right after he says, all the prophets in the law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come.

He who has ears to hear, let him hear. But to what shall I liken this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplace, calling to their companions and saying, we played the flute for you and you did not dance. We mourn to you and you did not lament.

We tried to do what Nehemiah did. We've tried to get you to comport to our idea of righteousness and you didn't play along. John came either eating or drinking and they said he has a demon.

The son of man came eating and drinking and they said, a glutton and a wine bibber. This generation cannot discern between genuine faith and obedience and their own legalistic notions. Remember me, O Lord, for my righteousness in telling others what to do.

This generation. That's 11, 16. On the next page in Matthew, Matthew 12, 41 and 42.

After giving the evil and adulterous generation missive in verse 39, no sign will be given to it. This evil and adulterous generation, except the sign of Jonah. Verse 41, the men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah and a greater than Jonah is here.

The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation. This generation. It is not a chronological generation.

It is a type of people. It is the same type that Nehemiah represents in his last chapter. A legalistic, self-righteous generation.

This type. Verse 45 of chapter 12. The unclean spirit that went out of a man comes back with seven other spirits more wicked than himself.

They enter and dwell there and the last state of that man is worse than the first. So shall it also be with this wicked generation. Purged and cleansed, but nothing takes the place

of what was purged and it becomes sevenfold worse afterward because the heart doesn't change.

So it is with this generation. And it's not just those who were alive in Jesus' day. It is every generation that acts this way, that thinks this way, that fails in this way.

This generation. So we've seen 11, 16. We've seen 12, 39.

12, 41 and 42. 12, 45. A few pages forward in our book, Matthew chapter 16, verse 4. A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign.

Every wicked and adulterous generation. This generation. No sign shall be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.

Jesus leaves and departs. 23, 36, our preceding chapter. All the righteous blood shed on the earth from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.

Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation. This generation. Any generation that is like this is going to receive judgment, be held accountable.

So when Jesus says in 34 of Matthew 24, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. The earth is never going to be purged of this type. Nehemiah, you are wasting your time trying to reform society, trying to dictate to people how they should live, trying to impose your perhaps rightful standards on people who do not have the heart to fulfill them on their own.

This generation is not going to pass away. The message of 24, 34 is. You are always going to have this kind of generation.

It will never pass away until all these things are fulfilled. It is going to take the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to remove this generation, to bring upon it all the blood it has ever shed. It began with Cain.

Cain, with his own ideas of righteousness and imposing his righteousness and his standards and his frustration with people who do not comport with his ideas by slaying his brother. The blood of Abel is where this generation began, and it will continue until the Lord Jesus purges it. This generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.

You are going to see evil. You are going to see false Christ, false prophets. You are going to see deception.

You are going to see corruption. You are going to see wars and rumors of war. You are going to see famine, which is largely the result of mismanagement.

It has been pointed out that there is enough food to feed the world always. There has never been a lack of sufficient food to feed the world. The reason there are famines is those who have an abundance do not immediately send to those who have a lack.

They hoard it. There is enough toilet paper for everybody, but people run down to Walmart and scoop it off the shelves when they think a panic is about to ensue, and other people have to do without. There is hoarding.

There is insensitivity. There is a lack of love and looking out for the needs of others. This results in most of the famines of the world.

Even the famine in the land of Israel in the days of Jacob, in the land of promise, was met by grain from Egypt. There was grain in Egypt sufficient to feed the people in the land. It was just a matter of distribution.

Because there was a sympathetic leader in Egypt, the people of Israel did not starve, the family of Jacob. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will by no means pass away. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will by no means pass away.

This should ring a bell. It's a bell we're going to have to listen to next time to conclude this section, because this is not the first time Jesus has talked about the passing away of the word of the Lord. You will remember back in an earlier part of our book, in Matthew 5, verse 18, one jot, one tittle, one yode, one corner of a letter, will not pass away till all is fulfilled.

Not a single part of the word of God will pass away till it is all fulfilled. And Jesus closes that bracket here by saying, heaven and earth will pass away, my words will by no means pass away. This generation, adulterous and perverse, will pass away in God's time and in God's way.

God's word will continue, the words of the Lord Jesus will continue, long after those who reject it have passed away. There is that which endures, there is that which is temporary. It's up to us to recognize that our momentary light affliction is working for us an eternal, imperishable weight of glory.

Learn the parable of the fig tree. Jesus doesn't just say hear it, he says learn it. Learn the parable.

When you see the times, respond appropriately, not with a knee-jerk, overt, shallow kind of reformation or action, but with a responsive heart. The kind of generation that doesn't know what to do is going to pass away. Those who have God's words and keep them will never pass away.

Well, much more to say about this and the day and the hour in verse 36. Next time we'll close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the wonderful power in your word to

convict us, to encourage us to cleanse us, to equip us for every good work.

We pray that as we reflect on what we have seen in the words of the Lord and elsewhere in the pages of your word, that the Holy Spirit will minister them to each of our hearts in an individual and specific way. That we can indeed purge out the old leaven and that we can proceed with a pure heart and a cleansed conscience, having been sprinkled to approach your presence, to represent the Lord Jesus Christ in this earth, and to be prepared as we observe the signs of the times for what is to come. We ask all these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.