

Matthew 22-07-17a

Good morning, welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is the 17th of July, 2022. We're in Matthew chapter 24.

And after many, many weeks, we have worked our way through the exciting description that the Lord Jesus gives in answer to the question that was asked by the disciples in verse three. And we covered last time, verses 32 through 35, which is the parable of the fig tree. We'll do a quick review of that and then move into verses 36 and following.

Of that day and hour, no one knows. And there's quite a lot to cover this morning. We'll be moving with alacrity.

Let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our fellowship and on our study. And we'll begin. Father, we're so grateful for another opportunity to spend time together, being nourished and strengthened through the truth contained in your word, and especially these wonderful portions where the Lord Jesus Christ is speaking and representing your divine truth to us, both in his person, in his work, and in his words.

We pray that as we look at this portion together, that your Holy Spirit will give us clarity and insight, that it will be impressed on our hearts in a way that is memorable and effective in producing change of mind, in generating love and good works that will reflect your glory and draw others to the Lord Jesus as their Savior. We pray all these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Let's take a quick look at our passage. Once again, we have just seen beginning in verse 32, now learn this parable from the fig tree. And this parable is given in all three synoptic gospels.

It's important. It seems short. It seems obvious at a first glance, but Jesus emphasizes.

He doesn't just say, hear the parable. He says, learn the parable, 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.

Learn this parable from the fig tree. So we looked at this last time and you will remember that this is not an instantaneous sign. This is not a lightning bolt.

This is not a sudden appearance. It's not the star that the wise men saw in the East. It is a seasonal and somewhat gradual circumstance.

Branches over the course of days and weeks become tender. Leaves bud and appear in periods of time, not instantaneously. So when its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, that's when you know that summer is near.

We like to think of summer the way the beach boys do. It's fun, fun, fun. It's, you know, little deuce coupes and girls on the beach and surfing, and it's all going to be great all summer long.

That does not seem to be Jesus intention or meaning here. Why would I say that? Keep your finger here and turn past Mark. We've seen this in Matthew, so we'll look at it in Luke chapter three.

Luke chapter three. If you remember the geography of the book of Luke, you have the story of Zacharias, Elizabeth, and the birth of John the Baptist in the first few chapters. And in chapter three, John, after some notices about the youthful days of the Lord Jesus, begins to prepare the way.

And in the days of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate, Herod, uh, he goes in verse three into the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Interestingly, he is not preaching the soon coming of the Messiah as his primary subject, his primary subject, the coming of the Messiah is preceded by a message of repentance, change of mind. In other words, preparation for this is what Malachi said he would preach.

He will prepare the way he will turn hearts repentance. We saw this in the closing verses of Malachi. So he is the voice of one crying in the wilderness in verse four, prepare the way the Lord make his path straight.

The valleys we fill the mountains will be brought low, crooked places made straight and the rough places smooth. I don't know if you've ever thought about this, but suppose that, uh, the Lord Jesus is going to be coming back to Israel from the East, the direction in which the glory of God departed in Ezekiel when it left the temple. And so he is going to come to the brow of the Mount of Olives.

He is going to descend and cross the Kidron Valley. He is going to ascend Mount Zion. He's going to enter the Eastern gate and the Lord will come suddenly to his temple.

Ideally, the Mount of Olives will be lower and the Kidron Valley will be higher, right? Isn't that what God said? Every valley shall be exalted. Every hill and mountain be made low. So this ground should be flattened.

So if there is a task assigned, if there is a mission given to the people of God to prepare the way, what should those people be doing? This is, when I was a kid, we called them steam shovels. I'm pretty sure they haven't run on steam in quite some time, but road grading equipment, backhoes, dump trucks, right? You've got the need to prepare the

ground, to prepare the way. This is the voice crying in the wilderness in the spiritual sense, prepare the way of the Lord.

If there are obstructions and impediments, they need to be cleared out of the way. Here's my question. If that mission is given to prepare the way, but the way is not prepared, the hills are still in place, the valleys are still difficult to traverse, and it is time for the Lord to come.

What do you think is going to happen in that circumstance? Is he going to be impeded and delayed and prevented from coming because there are these hills and valleys that the people of God failed to prepare? I think we could affirm with a hearty amen that that is not going to stop the Lord God on his path. When he's coming to the city, coming to his temple, coming to his people, this mission was assigned primarily for the people, right? This is work on our behalf. God can think a thought and mountains will disappear, valleys will fill in, but he has given this task to his people.

So if that task is not accomplished, what two things are going to take place? A, the mountains are going to be leveled and the valleys are going to be flattened anyway, but what do you think is going to happen to the people given the assignment who failed to do it? It isn't going to be peace, love, and happiness and, oh, that's okay. I know I told you to make the mountains low and fill in the valleys, but it's all good. I've got the power to do it anyway.

There is no such casual treatment of apathy, indifference, and disobedience, much less the self-centeredness and self-gratification behind it anywhere in scripture. God does not put up with that. So the voice crying in the wilderness is crying for a reason.

There is a call to preparation. There is a call to obedience. Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

Why doesn't God make his own paths straight? There is benefit and there is utility and there is purpose in our call to do this. We are implicated. We are involved.

We are commissioned by God to do work that he could easily do himself. It isn't for his benefit. He can do it far more efficiently than we could ever hope to.

It is for our benefit. It is needful. That's one aspect.

A second aspect, not only is needful and beneficial for us, but it is a filter. It is a sorting mechanism. There are those who will endeavor to follow this exhortation, this injunction, and there are those who won't.

If the command had never been given, how would you tell them apart? But once there is a command, now we see who obeys, who cares, who truly loves God. Jesus said, the one who has my words and keeps them, he is the one who loves me. Well, if someone has his

words and doesn't keep them, or doesn't even bother to have his words, he doesn't love him.

So this is the means of demonstrating for purposes of observation who loves God and who does not. Those who love God have his words and keep them. All flesh shall see the salvation of God.

You get the idea that part of the mountain removal and valley leveling is for visibility. Can't see through a mountain, can't see out of a valley, but if the impediments have been removed, now there is visibility. That's what verse six says.

Crooked places are straight, rough ways are smooth. You don't have to worry about seeing around a curve. You don't have to worry about obstructions, obstacles.

All flesh shall see the salvation of God. They see it in the work. Visibility of God and his glory are an intrinsic part of accomplishing this mission.

So then in verse seven, John says to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, I'm so glad you came. We've got a lemonade stand over here with refreshments. We've got some nice bread and here's some shade that's been set up these canopies.

It's so wonderful that you came all this way from the city out to hear me. Welcome, welcome. Here's some cushions, set your ladies and children down and refresh yourselves with this cool water that my disciples have provided.

This is absolutely the antithesis of anything any human being would plan. All of these people came out to be baptized by John. He is John the baptizer.

They come out here and what's the first word out of his mouth? Hello there, you snakes. Hello there, you rascals, you ne'er-do-wells, you falsely motivated posers, brood of vipers who warned you to flee from the wrath to come. You're like snakes exiting the firewood as soon as the thing is lit.

And he immediately chides them. He chastises them and exhorts them to bear fruit in keeping with repentance. If you're going to bear fruit in keeping with repentance, you have to first of all have the repentance.

So repent and once you have changed your mind, live that way. Bear fruit worthy of repentance and do not begin to say to yourselves, I don't need to do that because I've got other qualifications. I've already got the get in free card.

I've got an in with God. I have special circumstances. We have Abraham as our father.

I say to you, God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these rocks. Even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. This is our passage.

Watch the fig tree. They don't cut these trees down in the wintertime. Why? Why would you not cut your fruit trees down in the winter? You can't tell the good ones from the bad ones in the winter.

They're all molting. They're deciduous. Their leaves have dropped.

It's not the time for fruit. You can't tell one tree from another in the wintertime. Even in the spring when their branches become tender and their leaves come out, that's not the time you distinguish between which trees to keep and which trees to lay the ax to their root.

How and when do they take the ax to the trees? When it is easy to distinguish which ones bear fruit and which ones don't. How do I know this? Turn forward in Luke about 10 chapters to Luke chapter 13. Luke chapter 13.

They were present at that season, some who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. They suffered an awful fate. Jesus answered and said to them, do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered such things? I tell you no, but unless you repent, you will likewise perish.

Their perishing is notable because of its manner, but Jesus said instead of being horrified at Pilate mingling their blood with their sacrifices, it's the perishing you should focus on because if you do not change your mind, you will perish similarly. Now, how many of these Galileans are ever going to be executed by Pontius Pilate and have their blood mingled with their sacrifices? And yet Jesus says likewise perish. Jesus said, don't put the accent on the wrong syllable.

Don't draw the wrong conclusion and be impelled and fascinated by the wrong details. It isn't that these people perished due to Pilate and his violence and the horrific aftermath. You should think about perishing period.

And in the time that remains in this life, what is your attitude going to be unless you change your mind? Now, how does Jesus know that the people he's talking to need to change their mind? Because they're coming to Jesus and telling him this story about what Pilate did to these Galileans. And as Jesus listens to them, he can see what their concern is. He can see what has impressed them.

Let me ask you a question. If the Lord Jesus walked into the room you currently inhabit sometime in the next few minutes, would you tell him to have a chair because you've got some news for him? Lord, if you'll sit right here, I've got a story to tell you. I've experienced some things.

I've seen some things. I've heard some things. You probably don't know this.

And then you start telling the Lord Jesus this long horrifying story. What should people do who come into the presence of the Lord Jesus? So the Lord Jesus comes into their presence. Silencio.

Pay attention and let the Lord of glory speak. This is the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the incarnate Savior. You want to tell him stories? Excuse me.

I need to stop Bible class for a moment here because let me tell you a story. This is one of the hazards of being a pastor or a teacher is to insert stories instead of focusing on the word of God. Jesus should speak.

Do you think these Galileans were worse sinners because they suffered these things? No. But unless you change your mind, get your mind off of current events and pay attention to your status as the people of God, you will likewise perish. Your spiritual future is going to be every bit as ugly as those people's physical demise.

Or he says in verse four, those 18 on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think they were worse sinners than all men who dwell in Jerusalem? This is the pool of Siloam, by the way. Good things happen at the pool. Bad things happen at the pool.

If you were listening to the miracle series that plays when I'm not here live, uh, we recently reviewed the blind man and Jesus spits in the dirt and puts the mud on his eyes. And it doesn't say he instantly was able to see Jesus spits, which would normally be unclean emission from the body onto the cursed earth. He mixes the two together and he smears it on the guy's eyelids.

And then he says, what you need to follow some instructions. You need to be obedient and you need to trust that these instructions make sense. Go wash in the pool of Siloam.

It's all he said, no promise, no explanation, go wash in the pool of Siloam. The man has a choice at that point. You spit and put mud in my eye and he just gets his hands and scrapes that stuff off.

Do you think he would have been able to see if he had done that? I am sure he would not, but he listened to the voice of the Lord that didn't really make a lot of sense at the time. This is not Bethesda. This is not where the angels allegedly stir the water, where the crippled man was waiting and there's nobody to put me in so that I can be healed.

Pool of Siloam is not magic water, is it? Not in the Jewish mystical mind. Go wash in the pool of Siloam. He does it, then he can see.

It's a faith test. It's an obedience test. And as a result, he receives the blessing of his sight.

So the tower that fell and killed 18 people, were they worse than others who dwell in

Jerusalem? I tell you, no, but unless you change your mind, you will all likewise perish. Now, verse six, he also spoke this parable. A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard.

Now we're getting to the point. Here's our fig tree. Watch the fig tree, Jesus says.

So a certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard. He came seeking fruit on it and found none. You remember this in Matthew chapter 21, three chapters ago, probably more than three months ago, we looked at that.

You remember what happened to the fig tree that Jesus came to and it had no fruit in passion week? What happened to it? It had leaves. It had tender branches. What did Jesus say when he found no fruit? No one eat from you ever again.

And within 24 hours, the tree had withered and was dead. Well, here, certain man has this fig tree planted in his vineyard and he came seeking fruit and found none. Then he said to the keeper of his vineyard, look for three years, I've come seeking fruit on this fig tree and I find none.

Cut it down. Why does it use up the ground? But he answered and said to him, sir, let it alone this year also until I dig around it and fertilize it. Let me give it a little more encouragement.

If it bears fruit and there's nothing said, if it bears fruit, the result is left unsaid. The idea is perhaps it will bear fruit, but if not, after that, cut it down. The fig tree, summer is near.

When we think about summer being near, what should we think of? It is the time of judgment. It is the time when God is looking for fruit. If he doesn't find it, the ax is already laid at the root of the trees.

The fig tree is about to be cursed. And looking at Israel, we could say, well, they're like 18 people that the tower fell on in Salome. They're like those that Pilate executed and mingled their blood with sacrifice.

Jesus said, what you really ought to be thinking about is unless you have a change of mind, you will suffer an equally disastrous fate when summer comes. We look at 1948 in Israel, the 1967 and 73 wars, Israel's back in the land. One of the few, if any, ancient peoples that have survived, not only as a people, as an ethnicity, but now they have their land back.

They have their nation back in a sense. I've often heard it said that they're the only ones, but you got to look at Egypt. Egypt's still there, which I think is interesting because what is Egypt a picture of? And what is Israel a picture of? You've got the people of God and you've got the people who put the people of God in bondage.

And yet you have Joseph who delivers the people of Egypt from a horrific famine. Those in Egypt who responded and did what they were supposed to do. So Egypt and Israel, you've got them today out of the entire ancient near Eastern milieu.

Those are the two that are present now. So we say, well, we're watching the fig tree. The fig tree is Israel.

Well, we just want to be careful to not be looking at the people at the tower or the people whose blood got put on the altar. It should be an encouragement to us to change our minds and be sure that we are ready. When the master comes looking for fruit, I don't want to be the tree that has the axe already laying there at the root.

It's like he came by and said, you know, I haven't seen any fruit on this tree in a long time. I'm just going to lay the axe right here. Maybe that'll wake up the tree when it sees the axe.

The axe is laid at the root of the tree. It's not chopping the root of the tree. It's just laid there.

Judgment is about to come. If that tree suddenly blossoms out with a bunch of late fruit, axe is not going to chop it. So we are being dug around.

We are being fertilized. And the objective is to bear fruit, prepare the way of the Lord, make his path straight. Preparation is individual as well as national for Israel.

What goes for the nation applies to us as individuals. So this barren fig tree, turn a few pages further over in Luke because our passage says, when you see the tender branch and you see the leaves having come forth, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near at the doors.

Some translations say he is near at the doors. There is no specificity here in Greek as to what it is that is near and at the doors. But we know exactly what Jesus is talking about.

If you turn to Luke 21 verse 31, which is the parallel to this passage beginning in verse 29, look at the fig tree and all the trees. This is not just true of the fig, i.e. Israel, but all trees. And this is even more generally directed at us.

Remember, Luke seems to be much more with a Gentile audience in mind. Matthew focuses more on Israel. So in Matthew, for Israel, you get the fig tree.

In Luke, writing with more of the Gentile point of view, you have a fig tree and all trees. When they are already budding, you see and know for yourselves that summer is now near. So you also, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near.

The kingdom of God is what is near, even at the door. Why is this important? Are we

specifically looking for, waiting for, planning to dwell in the millennial kingdom? Kind of. It is the promised kingdom to the first people of God, to the older brother, if you will, who through disinterest, apathy, lack of preparation, lack of repentance was set aside.

And we as the younger will end up, and it is very politically incorrect to say, but the Bible says over and over again, the elder shall serve the younger. And if we rule and reign with Christ, as Paul tells us multiple places, then part of that is going to be the millennial kingdom. The sons of David are going to rule.

David himself is going to rule. The Lord Jesus is going to rule from the throne of David. All of those individuals are prophetically stated to rule during the millennial kingdom.

And we are told that if we are faithful, we will reign with him. Overcomer promises in Revelation, I will grant to the overcomer to sit with me on my throne. This is not the throne in the kingdom of the father.

The father is in too close a proximity to the throne of the lamb for us to be sitting in or anywhere near it. This is the millennial throne. If we are overcomers, if we are faithful, Jesus says, I will grant to him to sit with me on my throne, the millennial throne.

So it would appear that as the angels in this age, ascend and descend, they commute to work. Jacob saw the highway there at Bethel. We will commute from that place that the Lord Jesus is now preparing for us.

He will return and take us to himself so that where he is, we may be also. Well, for the vast portion of the 70th week of Daniel, the Lord Jesus will be in heaven, cracking open the seals and we will be with him. When he returns to supervise the rulership of the millennial kingdom, we who are qualified will be with him.

So will we dwell in the millennial kingdom? Will we be present for the millennial kingdom? It requires a bit of explanation, but our point here is the parallel that the kingdom is near at hand. And what is the level of preparation? We should be preparing for work and service and function with Christ in and through the thousand years of the millennial kingdom. There will be things for us to do.

We will not be spectators. We're not going to be sitting up in the cheap seats with a sack of popcorn. We want to be qualified.

He that is faithful in that which is least, you've been faithful in a few things. I will make you ruler over many things. So preparation is the key because the kingdom is near even at the door.

So turn back with me to Isaiah chapter five. We have a similar picture to the one given in Luke. Isaiah chapter five, you'll remember this, the song of the well beloved regarding his vineyard.

My well beloved has a vineyard five, one of Isaiah on a very fruitful hill. If you establish a vineyard on a fruitful hill, what do you expect from that vineyard? If it's a fruitful hill, it ought to be a fruitful vineyard. So he dug it up and cleared out its stones and planted it with the choicest vine.

Isn't it something that in preparation for growth and productivity, the well beloved has removed stones. He's filled in valleys and taken away obstacles so that this is not rocky soil. This is not thorny soil.

It's been cleared. It's been cultivated. Every possible advantage.

It has been dug around and fertilized as it were by the well beloved. He put a tower in its midst and made a wine press in it, expecting it to bring forth grapes, but it brought forth bad grapes. Now, oh, inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge please between me and my vineyard.

What more could have been done to my vineyard that I have not done in it? Why then, when I expected it to bring forth grapes, did it bring forth wild grapes? And now please let me tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will take away its hedge and it will be burned. I will break down its wall.

It shall be trampled down. I will lay it waste. It shall not be pruned or dug, but there shall come up briars and thorns.

I will command the clouds that they rain no rain on it. When we see the signs of the times, when the branches tender and leaves have come out, this is preparation. It is time for fruit.

Summer is near. The kingdom of God is near even at the door. And our thought should be, oh boy, I can't wait for the kingdom.

Is that, should that be our first thought? It is as bad to be distracted by the blessings of the kingdom and forget the need for preparation as it is to be distracted by the victims of Pilate's violence or the victims of the collapse of the tower in Siloam. Wrong emphasis, wrong conclusion. If summer is near, I need to be sure that I have taken advantage of all of this care and preparation and that I am pushing out maximum fruit.

The axe is laying here at the root. I don't want to be one of the trees that gets chopped down. I don't want to be the tree that Jesus passed, found no fruit, spoke to, and it withered and is no more.

I will lay it waste. No more pruning and digging. There was a time to respond to the pruning and the digging, the hedge, the tower.

There is a time to avail ourselves of the grace of God. And if we miss it, it doesn't come

again. At that last and ultimate judgment, there is no recovery.

It's not going to be pruned or dug. Well, this leads into our observation from the Lord Jesus as it was in the days of Noah. There was a similar decision to be made in the days of Noah.

And as you turn back to Matthew chapter 24, verse 36, this is where we're heading after the break. Of that day and hour, no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but my father only, but as the days of Noah. As the days of Noah.

You can see how this fig tree parable sets up the discussion of the days of Noah, right? There was a chance to prepare. Noah did, others did not. And then the flood came.

Well, we'll take a close look at that, but our opportunity is to redeem the time. The days by default are inherently evil, but God has given us every advantage. He has put a wall around us.

He's put a watchtower in our midst. The stones have been removed. We can be that fruitful soil that yields in the other parable, 30, 60, or a hundred fold.

I don't know about you, but I figure as long as we're going to yield, let's shoot for the hundred fold. I suspect that there's diminishing numbers. There's more 30 fold fields.

There's less 60 fold fields, and there's very few hundred fold fields. So let's do that. We'll pick up in verse 36 when we come back from our break.