

Matthew 22-07-24a

Good morning, welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is the 24th day of July, 2022. And as the bell tolls, it is time for us to make another excursion into the gospel of Matthew.

We are going to finish chapter 24 today. And if you don't already have a permanent crease at that point, you can quickly turn there. In your Bibles, let's ask God's blessing on our study, on our time of fellowship, and we'll begin.

Father, it is a wonderful blessing for us to not only be sustained and provided for in the physical realm, to know that you're weaving together the circumstances of our lives for good, but that in our inner man, in our spiritual self, your power is at work to cleanse us, to renew and restore us, and to enable and empower us to lay hold of righteousness by faith, to produce works that in a quiet and effective way are a testimony to those who have not yet come to you through Christ, and that your glory as it reflects in our lives can draw others to you through Him. We thank you for the Lord Jesus. We thank you for His words and His works and His ongoing ministry of representation and intercession at your right hand.

We look forward to the day when you send Him to come and get us. And we pray that in the meantime, our days and hours spent seeking to understand your Word better and to implement it in our daily lives, to follow the Lord Jesus' example of being good stewards of the truth that has been entrusted to us, will be enabled and encouraged by your Holy Spirit. We ask a special measure of His work on our behalf as we look at this portion of your Word together.

And we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Matthew chapter 24 concludes with an exhortation that is illustrated by two effective reminiscences beginning in verse 36 of that day, an hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but my Father only.

Jesus says, learn the parable from the fig tree, which we studied in detail a little bit earlier in verses 32 through 35. And as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be in verses 37 and following. The general import of this is pretty clear, isn't it? It is an exhortation to watch because we don't know when the next phase of God's plan is going to kick in.

And that is pretty straightforward and pretty understandable. There are two sort of conundrums here. The earlier conundrum we saw was where the vultures gather.

That's where the carcass is. Where the carcass is, there the eagles or the vultures will gather back in verse 28. And it is of a piece with one of the second conundrums.

One in verse 34, assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till

all these things take place. What is this generation? You would think at first blush, someone listening to the Lord Jesus would expect that, well, it's going to happen sometime in the next 40 years. And all of these things are going to take place before this generation passes away.

The second conundrum we're going to look at this morning is in verse 40 and 41. Two will be in the field. One will be taken and the other left.

Two will be grinding at the mill. One will be taken and the other left. Who is taken and who is left? This has been understood both ways.

I read two very respected commentaries this past week that take it one way. And I read two other very respected commentaries that take it the other way. Is it a good thing to be taken or is it a good thing to be left? If we were talking about the rapture, I'm pretty sure we want to be taken to meet the Lord in the air and so shall we ever be with the Lord, as Thessalonians indicates.

But in this context, Jesus is talking to a Jewish audience, Israelites, about His second coming as it was in the days of Noah. This is going to be a time of judgment. Well, are the ones taken to judgment or are the ones taken removed so that those who are left get judged? What would you say? What's your current predilection right now? Yeah, me either.

So I had to do some work on this and I'm going to offer you the support for each one of those perspectives and then we're going to draw a conclusion. But what I want to do first is resolve this one that we left behind somewhat. Left behind, get it? In verse 34, Assuredly I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.

What on earth does the Lord mean when He says this generation will not pass away? Well, it is helpful to look at the context, of course, and from the time that the fig tree begins to be tender and put forth its leaves, we exhaustively studied that picture. We looked at figs, we looked at fig trees and fig leaves. That is what introduces the statement.

Learn the parable from the fig tree. When you see all these things, know that it is near at the doors. This generation will not pass away.

I would suggest that in the same way we have many prophetic utterances in scripture that have at least a near and a far interpretation, if not several future fulfillments, that in the near term the generation to whom Jesus was speaking was largely still around 40 years later when Jerusalem was destroyed. Much of the earlier description that is primarily talking about the days of the great tribulation, but there was a foreshadowing of that in the years and about the same duration. The real cataclysm started taking

place in Jerusalem in AD 67 or so and got progressively worse until the legions of Titus came in three years later and destroyed.

So it was very close to the latter half of Daniel's 70th week in terms of duration. This is just 40 years hence from when Jesus is speaking, give or take. So that is a fair understanding.

This generation will not pass away. This generation is going to see a terrible catastrophe where those who see an abomination, who see Romans marching through the temple and so on, had better flee and pray that your flight is not in winter or on the Sabbath and so on. Much of this was literally fulfilled just a few decades after Jesus spoke.

It puts us in mind of Jesus' earlier prediction when he said there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in His glory. And you remember the fulfillment of that was not seeing the actual second coming. What was it? That's what he said right before the transfiguration.

And he said there are some standing here and those some were Yaakov, Ioannes, and Shimon. Peter, James, and John are the three who saw Jesus with Moses and Elijah and so on. And so when Jesus said there are some standing here who will not die, will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in His glory, and this was a prefigurement.

Well, in the same way, this generation will not pass away before they will see something that greatly represents, prefigures, foreshadows the actual days of tribulation. So I think that is a very fair way to understand this generation not passing away. But the word generation is very interesting to trace out and I'm not going to spend even as much time on generation as I did on figs.

I really get carried away with the figs. Fig poultice for Hezekiah. Figs are fun.

They just show up at the oddest times in scripture and there's always something interesting happening around figs. But this generation, Jesus says heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. And we've looked at these scriptures.

I think I gave them to you before, but turn back to Psalm 102. We'll just take a quick pass at this. Psalm 102.

I was tuning a piano this past week and looked up and right over the piano was a nice little wall hanging that had Psalm 91 verse 2. It brought the first several verses to mind that we've memorized. This part was, I will save the Lord. So here we're in Psalm 102 and verses 25 and 26.

Of old you laid the foundation of the earth and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you will endure. Yes, they will all grow old like a garment, like a cloak.

You will change them and they will be changed. So heaven and earth will pass away and it isn't the heaven in which God dwells. When you look at these Old Testament and many other references, you are the same in verse 27 and your years have no end.

It isn't God's heaven that is going to pass away. It is the heavens and the earth or the heaven and the earth, depending on which translation you read of Genesis 1.1. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. So you find this reflected in Hebrews chapter 1 verses 11 and 12.

And there's a reason we're reviewing this. Hebrews 1.11 and 12. This is the New Testament reiteration of that same passage.

Lord, in the beginning you laid the foundation, the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you will remain. Like a cloak you will fold them up, they will be changed, you will endure.

Your years will not fail. And he goes on from there, to which of the angels did he ever say, sit at my right hand till you make your enemies your footstool. So it is an important concept.

And in between the Old Testament Psalm 102 and the New Testament Hebrews, you have the Lord Jesus referring to the passing away of the heavens and the earth. And yet his words will remain. Other passages you could look at include 2 Peter chapter 3. But before we leave Psalm 102, I'm just going to point out one other thing, which is at the beginning of that Psalm, we looked at verses 25 through 27.

But at the beginning of that Psalm, in verse 2, it begins, Hear my prayer, O Lord, and let my cry come to you. Do not hide your face from me in the day of my trouble. Incline your ears to me in the day that I call.

Answer me speedily, for my days are consumed like smoke, and my bones are burned like a hearth. My heart is stricken and withered like grass, so that I forget to eat my bread. Because of the sound of my groaning, my bones cling to my skin.

But all generations have had this experience. At any given time, we recognize that the grass withers and the is set in contrast. And so when Jesus says heaven and earth will pass away, everything in them, including us, and our brief appearance here also passes away.

But my words will not pass away. The same thing is said of the law, and Jesus' words are compared with that. One jot and one tittle will not pass from the law till all is fulfilled.

And so the Lord Jesus' words are God's word. What is the upshot of this? To the extent that we are imbued with, partake of, hide in our hearts the living and abiding word of God, that is the way in which we transcend what is temporal and what is temporary, and

enter into that which is eternal and never passes away. Not just memorizing it, not just knowing it, but applying it, bearing fruit in keeping with it, having that seed sprout in the soil.

Jesus said the seed is the word. And that which sprouts to produce 30-fold, 60-fold, or 100-fold is an eternal crop. So when Paul says that we are redeeming the time because the days are evil, that is our handle.

That is how we grab hold of eternity. And it's useful to remember. You know this.

This is not a new or spectacularly surprising truth, but it is a truth that we are going to pass away. My challenges, the circumstances, the ups and the downs, the hardships, the sadnesses and sorrows, all of these things are going to pass away. We will remember them only to the extent that they remind us of God's grace, God's salvation, the wonderful love that was manifested in the Lord Jesus in raising us up out of an infernal world that is passing away and transferring us out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of the Son of His love.

That transfer is the subject of the latter part of Matthew 24. Being taken and being left is inherent in that. And keeping that in mind, heaven and earth will pass away, my words will not pass away, is helpful when we are trying to solve these puzzles.

So back to Matthew 24. Jesus says the generation, this is one of our riddles, and another way of looking at this generation is to think back to the fact that Jesus presented this in Aramaic, which is kind of a close cousin to Old Testament Hebrew. And the Greek word for generation is *genea*, G-E-N-E-A.

And it most often means as fathers and mothers give birth to children, sons and daughters. That is a generation. God's grace extends to a thousand generations of those who love Him, but there is the three-generation curse.

If there are three, you know, after the third generation in Israel, God would cut off a grandpa, a father, and a son who all were rebellious and disobedient. There was that three-generation curse. So generation typically means what you count when you're looking at ancestry.com or your genealogy.

But the Aramaic word that Jesus would have used here is helpful because *genea* translates *sharbeta*. It's S-H-A-R-B little E-T-A. And this was fairly evenly used for both the kind of generation we've just spoke of, but also the race.

And there are so many times when you see Jesus talking about a crooked and perverse generation seeks after a sign, and it's the generation of Israel. And generation after generation in Israel needed a sign to convince them of the veracity of a message that God sent. And we saw this back in chapter 23 when Jesus was talking to them and saying in verse 30, if we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers

with them in the blood of the prophets.

Therefore, you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. The murder of the prophets goes back hundreds of years, but being a son is to be a generation that partakes of that previous generation that rejected and persecuted the prophets. And so generation rises above the merely physical to talk about a type of people, a generation or brood of vipers.

A brood is offspring of snakes. And so when Jesus called the hypocritical Pharisees, a brood of vipers, it's this idea that a generation is, this is a group that's all around at the same time. They reinforce each other.

They are alike. They speak and practice that which is displeasing to God. And this generation that is ripe for judgment will not pass away until all of these judgments are fulfilled.

And we've seen this in the revelation where the blood of the saints that is in the cup of the scarlet harlot represents all the blood that has been shed as Jesus spoke of the blood of righteous able to the blood of Zachariah shed in the temple courtyard. All of this will come again, going back to Matthew 23, so generation, like much of this prophetic scripture, rises above the merely literal to talk about the kind of people who will be represented in the 70th week and will be judged. But those judgments speak of God's wrath against everyone who has lived and died and rejected him and rejected his word.

And most importantly, rejected his son. This generation will not pass away. They're not going to escape through death judgment because they will rise and be judged.

And the judgment in that day is going to be as severe as if they had lived through the tribulation. This is how bad the judgment is going to be. And on those who are believers and rise to judgment, this is why there is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth after the tribulation, when the judgment takes place on God's people and people are cut in two and outer darkness and so on.

The idea is the equivalent volume that is turned up on that judgment. The equivalent experience at the judgment is as though you had lived through the seals and the trumpets and the bowls. And it's something we can hardly enter into even in imagination.

But there have been the wicked who prospered, such as the rich man and Lazarus in Luke chapter 16. It seems as though no judgment struck for his apathy and indifference and his failure to heed the part of the law that says love your neighbor as yourself. And he ignored the plight of Lazarus at his gate.

And they both die and are buried. And observers would look and say, well, boy, that Lazarus had a rough life. But you've got to admire the rich man.

He really got his. But then you look at the subsequent conversation he has with Abraham from torments, wanting one drop of water on his tongue from the finger of the man that would have been considered unclean. And it is another picture of the severity of judgment.

God's love and his compassion and his grace are profound and limitless. But his wrath in judgment is not to be ignored. There is a huge and growing segment of Christianity today that wants to dispense with the wrath of God, that it really doesn't exist.

And it is of a piece with a lot of other things where people just want to pretend the things they don't like or don't want aren't around. And that's my reality. But everyone is going to partake of God's reality.

This generation will not pass away and escape God's judgment until all of these things are fulfilled. The litany of description that we've seen previously in this chapter is not one of blessing. And there's not a lot of divine preservation, not a lot of promise of have no fear.

Most of it is a description of awfulness. And this generation will not pass away until that awfulness is fulfilled. So all of the generations of those who hate God will experience judgment like unto the end times.

It's not unique. There's not something especially evil about the people that are in the 70th week. They are just representative.

And their judgment is representative. So it's important for us to remember that the judgment seat of Christ is sourced in the same God with the same righteousness and the same standards. And it is going to be difficult for him to overlook that in us which has not already been judged.

And we will be judged if we do not judge ourselves, if we do not make appeal to the judgment on sin that we committed at the cross. It's not automatically applied. All believers don't just simply file in and go to blessing and glory in the New Jerusalem.

We have to be conscious. We have to repent. We have to confess.

And we have to claim the grace of God that will exempt us from this kind of judgment if we're apathetic and indifferent. And if we do not, you know, the scripture says if we judge ourselves we would not be judged. The opposite is true.

If we do not judge ourselves we will be judged. And it is a grievous and tragic sorrow that there are believers who just obviate that whole side of the Word of God in the modern day. And the double judgment that comes on those who not only practice such things but teach others to do the same, it's grievous.

It is a sorrow. It is a tragedy that believers are being encouraged to not worry about judgment and not to judge ourselves. It's tragic.

And not only is there going to be a coming judgment that will be like unto what we have just seen, but in the current day you lack strength. If there is unjudged, unconfessed, unrepentant sin in our lives, it weakens us. And in the day when we need strength, the strength is not there.

In the day that we need perseverance, you have need of patience. This momentary light affliction is working for us an eternal weight of glory. But if we do not have the wherewithal in our souls to convert difficulty into treasure in heaven, we are weak now and we are useless and unrewarded in the future.

So when you think about this generation will not pass away till all is fulfilled, that is a declaration that these judgments are absolutely coming and no generation will escape them. The only deliverance is through the Lord Jesus Christ. This is why our salvation is not just avoiding the lake of fire, but it is avoiding judgment.

So that is one of the riddles here. What does it mean that this generation will not pass away? I think looking at the near fulfillment in 70 AD and recognizing that the judgment of God is coming, this generation that gets judged represents all generations with that attitude that needs judging and will be judged and no one will escape. Well, on a happier note, you skip on down and look at the scripture that says, as in the days of Noah, so will the coming of the son of man be.

Everyone is eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage until the day Noah entered the ark. I saw an interesting discussion of this, until the day that Noah entered the ark. We talk about the flexibility of the word day and when you go back to Genesis chapter 7 and the inception of the flood, there is an argument to be made that the flood did start on the day that Noah entered the ark.

And since it is in our passage, just flip back here. As you know, I learn and am not afraid to come to a new and better understanding. I have not fully studied this out yet, but my attention was drawn to this by our passage, the days before the flood until the day that Noah entered the ark.

When you look at chapter 7 of Genesis, the Lord said to Noah, Come into the ark, you and all your household, because I have seen that you are righteous before me in this generation. You shall take with you seven of each of every clean animal, male and female, two of each animals that are unclean, a male and his female, seven of each of the birds of the air, male and female, to keep the species alive on the face of all the earth, for after seven more days I will cause it to rain on the earth forty days and forty nights, and I will destroy from the face of the earth all living things that I have made. God is talking to Noah in the 600th year of his life on the tenth day of the second month

when he says this.

It is the tenth day of the second month. How do I know this? Because in verse 11 it says, In the 600th year of Noah's life in the second month on the seventeenth day, on that day all the fountains of the great deep were broken up and the windows of heaven were opened. So, if that happened on the seventeenth, then God is speaking in verse 4 on the tenth, right? So, He tells him on the tenth that you need to take pairs of all these clean animals and take them into the ark.

After seven more days I will cause it to rain, I will destroy from the face of the earth all living things that I have made. So, Noah did according to all that the Lord commanded him. Noah was 600 years old when the floodwaters were on the earth.

Noah with his sons, his wife, his sons' wives, went into the ark because of the waters of the flood. Clean animals, animals that are unclean, birds and everything that creeps on the earth, two by two they went into the ark to Noah, male and female, as God had commanded Noah. Do you notice that this is not really a sequential storytelling here? God says seven days from now the floodwaters are coming, take two into the ark.

A valid way to understand this, we have said and I have said several times that it seems to me that Noah and his family went in, God shut the door and seven days later the floodwaters came. Because when you read this you can draw that conclusion. You can also draw the conclusion that on the 10th God said time to go into the ark.

The ark has been a building for decades and Noah did not know until one week beforehand that it was coming. But it's interesting as it was in the days of Noah, people are carrying on, but God told Noah seven days before the flood it's coming. He told him exactly when it was coming.

Noah did not know the day or the hour until a week beforehand but then he did. It seems to me that you could argue that from the 10th to the 17th this is the seven days in which the animals are coming to the ark and being sequestered in their stalls and their fresh feed is being stocked and so on. He's got one week to finalize the preparations and get all the animals where they need to be.

If you've been to the ark experience out there in Kentucky you can get a one idea of how this might have been done. But you can't instantaneously ensconce that many animals. It's going to take a few days and so God says alright it's coming seven days from now.

Why does God tell Noah that it's coming in seven days? He needs to know because it takes time to get all the animals in, get his family in, get the freshest food stores. You don't want stale water that's been sitting there for months and months and months. You want nice casks of fresh water.

If you've read about the days of sale you know how important it was to have casks of

fresh water that had not overgrown with algae. Your fresh food, you want it as fresh as possible when you begin a voyage because the bread's going to get weevil-y and meat is going to go bad even if it's pickled in brine and so on. So to pack and get ready Noah needed to know.

But this is not really sequential. It keeps going back and recovering old ground. So when you get to verse 11 in the 600th year of Noah's life, second month, seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep were broken up and the windows of heaven were opened and the rain was on the earth forty days and forty nights.

On the very same day Noah and Noah's sons Shem, Ham, and Japheth and Noah's wife and the three wives of his sons with them entered the ark. On what very same day? Well evidently the seventeenth. They and every beast after its kind, cattle after their kind, every creeping thing that creeps on the earth after its kind, every bird after its kind, every bird of every sort.

And they went into the ark to Noah two by two. See now we're back during the preceding week from the tenth to the seventeenth. They're all going in two by two.

Those that entered, male and female of all flesh, in verse 16 as God had commanded him and the Lord shut him in. Then the flood was on the earth forty days. So it occurs to me and somebody made this point and I think it's fair that the week that we have talked about where God shut him in it would have been kind of strange for God to shut the door and these seven days to pass and the animals can't get in.

God doesn't tell him until the tenth that okay the flood's coming next week and he needs those seven days and then God would shut him in as the last of the animals come in and Noah's family comes in. God shuts the door and on the very same day as it says the Lord shut him in. So that's interesting because when we think about the time of the end and we've wondered well does that seven day period where he's sitting in the ark waiting for the rain, does that signify something? Is there a gap between the rapture and the start of the seventieth week and so on? So I wanted to share that with you because it's possible and I think at this point likely that Noah was shut in on the 17th on the self same day that the rain started and that week that we have always thought of that I have thought of in the past was actually door open animals coming in.

That's important for what we're about to see because we're going to look at our second conundrum which is who is it that's taken and who is it that's left? Seems like it would be helpful to know. Jesus specifies it and it seems a bit unclear. It's been taken both ways for generations and centuries and would be interesting to find out is it like the rapture where being taken is good or is it like the flood where being swept away is bad and you want to be taken to a place of safety.

So which is it that Lord is talking about here. We'll look at that when we come back from the break but our application here is there is the absolute certainty of judgment. When Jesus says this generation will not pass away he's not just trying to give us a clue as to the timing.

He is specifying. He is declaring. He is emphasizing the certainty of this judgment and it is helpful for us to remember there is a certain judgment on sin.

There is a certain judgment especially on those who are unrepentant. The only reason we are able to escape this judgment is because of the Lord Jesus Christ and He bore our judgment. But in the same way that salvation in the absolute and eternal sense has to be claimed to be enjoyed, exemption from judgment has to be claimed to be enjoyed.

It is not automatic with accepting Christ as our Savior. Exemption from the certainty of coming judgment depends upon confessing our sins so that He can exercise His faithfulness and righteousness in forgiving our sins and cleansing us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1.7, 1 John 1.9. There is no fellowship with the Father without this confession, without this repentance and change of mind away from dead works and faith toward God.

We are enjoined, we are exhorted to be conscious of the reality of judgment as a motivation to live as we should, to flee lust, to stop patterned sins, to enter into the holiest of holies by the new and living way with our hearts having been sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. That's after salvation. This is our ongoing routine.

And if we don't give it its weight, bad times are a coming. Well, let's take our break. When we come back, we're going to look at this next portion here and finish our chapter in looking at whether we are taken, whether we are left, and faithful versus evil servants in verses 45 through 51.