

Luke 21:29-38
Watch and Pray!

- 29 Then He spoke to them a parable: "Look at the fig tree, and all the trees.
 30 "When they are already budding, you see and know for yourselves that summer is now near.
 31 "So you also, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near.
 32 "Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all things take place.
 33 "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.
 34 " But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly.
 35 "For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth.
 36 "Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man."
 37 And in the daytime He was teaching in the temple, but at night He went out and stayed on the mountain called Olivet.
 38 Then early in the morning all the people came to Him in the temple to hear Him.

In late December of 1776, the last thing that the Hessians defending Trenton expected was to be attacked by the American Rebels. After a series of disastrous defeats, American support for the Revolution was dwindling, the weather was appalling, and the rate of desertion in the continental army was catastrophically high. On December 22nd, the total number of troops of all ranks fit for duty that General Washington could muster was 4,707. But against that Washington had two factors in his favor, 1st the very fact that no one expected an attack, and 2nd Christmas. Now I've mentioned this before, but at this time in history, very few Americans celebrated Christmas. The majority of them belonged to denominations descended from Puritans - Congregationalists, Baptists, Presbyterians, and so they didn't follow the church calendar. The Hessians over the river however, were from Europe and were overwhelmingly Lutheran, and they celebrated Christmas in the manner of most European armies. First, no one in Europe fought on or around Christmas, rather they spent that time partying. So they could be expected to be drunk on Christmas night, and monumentally hung-over on the 26th.

So in a terrible breach of European military etiquette, Washington led his troops to the banks of the Delaware on the 25th and famously crossed over the river in the darkness of early morning on the 26th. The battle of Trenton therefore, consisted of Americans killing 102 and capturing 868 incredibly surprised Hessian troops as they spilled out of their barracks. All that for a loss of 2 or 3 Americans.

Now, let me ask you, had the Hessians known that Washington was coming, would they have spent the night of the 25th partying? Hardly. Now they had been warned that Americans were in the area, but they didn't think those reports were credible. They accepted the generally held feeling that the Americans weren't coming and acted accordingly.

Now, I want to suggest to you that the church is figuratively filled with Hessians. Now by that I don't mean Germans from the province of Hesse. I mean people who, though they have been warned that Christ is coming, have practically accepted the generally held feeling that He isn't coming, and are acting accordingly.

What is particularly sad about that, is that Jesus gave us more parables specifically oriented towards being prepared for the final judgment than any other subject: Here are just a few examples - The parable of the rich fool, the parable of the watchful servant, the parable of the wedding feast, the parable of the virgins, the parable of the minas, and now the parable of the fig tree. Brothers and

Sisters, if there was one thing that the Lord wanted his followers to know, it is that He is coming back, and if there was one thing he wanted them to do, it is to live in accordance with that knowledge.

That in fact, is the central point of all the end time teaching in the bible. Not to encourage speculation about the date of the end of the world, or the identity of the antichrist. Both points upon which even the greatest of Christians have been notoriously inaccurate in their predictions, let me give you an example:

"The world cannot stand long, perhaps a hundred years at the outside." – Martin Luther, August 1538

In fact, there is a good reason that God doesn't want the day of Christ's return to be known, which the last section of the Westminster Confession, tells us: go ahead and open your Red Trinity hymnals to page 867 go to the bottom of the page Chapter 33 section 3:

"III. As Christ would have us to be certainly persuaded that there shall be a day of judgment, both to deter all men from sin; and for the greater consolation of the godly in their adversity: so will he have that day unknown to men, that they may shake off all carnal security, and be always watchful, because they know not at what hour the Lord will come; and may be ever prepared to say, Come Lord Jesus, come quickly, Amen."

Be ready. Be watching, know the times. Jesus uses the example of the fig tree, farmers see the buds forming, and they know that winter is over, the sap is running again, soon Summer will come and then the harvest.

Kids, how many of you have read or seen, C.S. Lewis's "The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe?" Well then what season is it when the children first enter Narnia through the wardrobe? Is it sunny? No it's winter. The reign of the evil White Witch over Narnia is symbolized by the fact that its always Winter. No new life there.

But when Aslan comes into Narnia, what season starts? Spring! The thaw comes and then the trees start budding again. That's how they know the power of the witch is fading.

Jesus came into the world, and died on the cross, and the power of the Devil was forever broken. Now the signs that he warned would come, wars, earthquakes, even the destruction of Jerusalem, those birth pains, are all like the buds on the trees. They aren't the harvest, they aren't the figs that the farmer is looking forward to, but they tell him that the fruit is just around the corner. The thaw told the inhabitants of Narnia that Aslan was coming and that the Witch would be destroyed. Just so, these signs are given to tell you Jesus is coming again, and when he comes, the Devil, and every other vestige of evil and the fall, even death itself will be forever destroyed.

The meaning of verse 32 *"Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all things take place."* Is tricky –

- 1) Either Jesus was referring specifically to the initial part of his discourse when he spoke about the destruction of Jerusalem and that it would happen before this generation had died, or
- 2) By *Genea* which means generation or race, Jesus means all the Jews and is saying that they will endure till the end.
- 3) or what I believe is most likely is that this generation would see these evidence of the beginnings of the birth pangs, the buds that will produce the harvest, the signs that the final judgment is coming.

And Jesus gives an assurance, to believers that his words here are absolute. His assurance that the day of deliverance is coming is more certain even than heaven and earth. How can he say that? That his words will last longer than the mountains and the stars? Now if Jesus was just a good teacher, that would be a ridiculous statement. *If I said, "my declarations will last longer than the Sun!" You'd look at me and say "Andy, you're a looney!" and you'd be right.* Jesus can say it though because He is not a mere teacher, his words are the words of God Almighty. Isa. 40:8 *"The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever."* Doubt what you will, but don't doubt these words.

Then he comes to the application of the whole discourse in verses 34-36:

But what is all that information given for,

- 1) it is to warn unbelievers to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ today,
 - 2) to provide constant encouragement to believers no matter what they are going through
 - 3) to teach believers to live in accordance with the certain knowledge that the day of Christ's Return is Coming, and live to watch and to pray that they might be prepared for it whenever it comes.
- 1) ***How do unbelievers live?*** Well they don't live looking forward to the return of Christ and his judgment. They tend to break down into two camps, there are the hedonists and the materialists. And there are many with a foot in both camps. Both groups are fixated on the world, this present life, matter, that's all that really exists. and they are either the eat drink and be merry kind, who are frantically pursuing pleasure while they can get it. Or the worrying barn builders, like the rich fool. You know the type, the men and women who are constantly trying to figure out how to get as much stuff as they can and hold on to it. Money, fame, pleasure, comfort, power. Every other consideration is secondary.

They are usually worried about something, anxious for everything, because of course they live in a world where everything they are concerned about and trying to hold onto is constantly turning to dust and slipping through their fingers. You build your dream home on the beach, and then a Hurricane comes along and wipes it out. You fight to be beautiful and strong, and everyday both incrementally ebb away. You pour your life into your children, and then one day a drunk driver falls asleep and crosses the median and they're gone.

Either way, they won't be ready for the return of Christ.

2) ***But what about believers?*** Well, they're different, they know that Jesus is coming back, and that all things are passing away. But to ask Peter's question? In 1 Peter 3:11 *Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness,*

Well they shouldn't live in a manner that denies that knowledge, living in a manner where the return of Christ will be like the sudden snapping closed of the jaws of trap. Living in a manner that will leave them like teenage kids holding a party when their parents come home suddenly. But way too often, they are acting like those Hessians in 1776. They aren't watching or praying. They confess one thing, but act in manner that denies what they confess. Let me ask you, Christian are you like the waterman in Bunyan's Pilgrim's progress? Looking one way and rowing the other.

Are your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. Christian where is your heart?

Let me give you a few quick tests you can run to help you in answering that question, they aren't infallible. In fact their value may only lie in helping you not to be self-deceived.

Think about your circle of friends, it's a quick test. Saints or Sinners? Who do you feel more comfortable with? When you are amongst God's people, are you real with them, or do you put on mask that isn't you, and take it off when you leave the church, and wipe your brow and inwardly say, "Phew, I'm glad that's over!" Does the idea of spending eternity with Christians seem like something you'd like to do?

Think of the Bible. Is God's word a delight to you? If it was gone from your life, would it make a difference?

Just think of your priorities your goals, are they primarily or even mostly this worldly?

Christian think of the trajectory of your life and the example of the boatman.

Lets say we met on the street and while we were some distance away, I started saying "*Boy, I'm really eager to meet you, but all the time I was backing further and further away. What would you think?*" *Some people in the church do that to Jesus others act kind of like wild bunnies, a few steps towards, and then they get nervous and start backing in the opposite direction.*

Well what do you do, if you are somewhere in there. Don't despair, remember Peter and the Apostles where exactly where you are now at one point. Draw encouragement from the words of Christ. HE tells you two things:

FIRST take heed to yourself, be honest with yourself, know yourself, wean yourself, from this world:

"wean yourself from this world. "And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares" Luke 21:34. A tree which has burrowed its roots deep in the earth can only be extracted from the earth with much pulling and tearing, whereas a young tree not yet deeply rooted can easily be extracted from the earth. Such is also true for a person who greatly cleaves to this earth. His thoughts are focused on the things of this world and these fully or partially occupy his heart. This quietly robs him of his time, and man finds himself overtaken by death without having prepared himself for it—and thus the dismay."

Secondly WATCH AND PRAY -

John said: 17 Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world.

Image of the boatman

Live looking forward to the return of Christ.

Are you going to live looking forwards or backwards?