

***“You do not know on what day your Lord is coming...”***

**Matthew 24 v 29 to 44**

As we suggested last time, the ‘Olivet Discourse’ is one of the most important prophetic passages in the New Testament, and also one of the most widely misunderstood. Many assume that Matthew 24 parallels Mark 13 and Luke 21, but as we saw, the Luke passage has some important differences.

In the first part of Matthew 24, we asked the following questions: Is the destruction of the temple now past (70 AD), or is it still in the future, and what is the “abomination of desolation”?

In this second part, we ask: What does the parable of the fig tree mean? What does Jesus mean by “this generation” – the one he is talking to, or some future generation? What is the ‘doctrine of imminence’ (Jesus can come at any time), and how can we reconcile this with the signs of cosmic upheaval described in verses 29 to 31?

***The coming of the Son of Man (Matthew 24 v 29 to 31)***

“The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light...” (v 29) – several prophetic passages describe the cosmic disturbances that will precede and surround the return of Jesus (see Joel 2 v 10, Revelation 6 v 12 to 14, Isaiah 34 v 4). Jesus then says that the “sign of the Son of Man” will appear in heaven (v 30) – it is difficult to say precisely what this sign is, since it seems to precede Jesus’ return as described in Revelation 19 v 11. Perhaps this sign is related to the incredible cosmic disturbances described in verse 29.

- Why will all the tribes of the earth “mourn” (v 30) when they see the Second Coming of the “Son of Man” (v 30)? See Revelation 1 v 7.
- Who do you think are the “elect” (v 31)? Do you think they could be the same as the “remnant” of the sons of Israel spoken of in Romans 9 v 27?

***The lesson of the fig tree (Matthew 24 v 32 to 35)***

The fig tree was a common fruit tree in Israel. It is mentioned many times in the Old Testament, especially as a description of the abundance of the land. In passages such as Jeremiah 24 v 4 to 7 and Hosea 9 v 10, fig trees are specifically used as a representation of Israel, and Jesus may be alluding to this in Matthew’s account. However, in Luke 21 v 29 Jesus says “look at the fig tree, and *all the trees...*” – indicating that in this public address to a more general audience, Jesus’ emphasis is on the way that the fig tree follows reliable growth cycles related to the seasons.

- “This generation will not pass away until all these things take place” (v 34) – which generation is Jesus talking about?
- It cannot be the disciples’ generation (i.e. the ‘first’ generation), because they never saw Jesus return in glory (v 30) – however, Luke’s account (21 v 32) *may* be referring to this first generation. In Matthew’s account Jesus is more likely to be referring to the ‘last’ generation.

***[MORE OVER...]***

### ***No one knows that day and hour (Matthew 24 v 36 to 44)***

“Concerning that day and hour no one knows” (v 36) – Jesus refers back to the original question in v 3 (“when will these things be?”), and his answer is unexpected: “no one knows”, except the Father. Based on what he has told us about the ‘abomination of desolation’, we might have expected that the exact day and hour could be known. After all, Daniel (12 v 11) set the day of Jesus’ return as exactly 1,290 days after the abomination of desolation. There is the dilemma: how can the day of Jesus’ coming be both unknown, yet at the same time be known to the very day?

“The days of Noah” (v 37) – Jesus explained that life would be centred around normal things such as eating, drinking, marriage; but remember those days were marked by violence and demonic oppression (Genesis 6 v 1 to 5).

“Then two men will be in the field” (v 40) – Jesus then points to curious disappearances; to a ‘catching away’ of some at the coming of the Son of Man. Verses 42 to 44 tell us to “stay awake” and be ready, for we do not know at what time the Lord is coming. Here again is the Second Coming dilemma: Is it at an unexpected hour or is it definitely predicted? Is it ‘business as usual’ or cosmic cataclysm? Is it meeting Jesus in the air (1 Thessalonians 4 v 16, 17), or is he coming with the saints (Zechariah 14 v 5b)? The dilemma is resolved by seeing that there are actually *two* second comings – the first is unexpected, when Jesus the bridegroom meets his bride (the Church) in the air (known as the ‘rapture’, or *harpazo*); the second is clearly predicted, when Jesus comes to the world, with the Church, “with power and great glory” (v 30). We must be ready, because his coming *for us* is without warning.

- In what practical ways can we be ready for Jesus’ return? See 2 Peter 3 v 10 to 14.