

## Now Learn This Lesson     July 23, 2017

### Matthew 24:32-37

32 "From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. 33 So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates. 34 Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. 35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. 36 "But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 37 For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

In today's Scripture Jesus was in Jerusalem where he was challenged by the religious leaders. He leaves with his disciples and they go to a serene setting known as the Mount of Olives. When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately asking for some information about when the end of the age and his return will be. The Scripture today is part of this personal dialogue with the disciples. He has his final passionate farewell lessons with them telling them about the end of the age, persecution, and his return. The lesson of the fig tree is that you know summer is near due to the change in the tree. It is a metaphor, a figure of speech, where one object is applied to another. It is easy to recognize the change of the seasons due to the signs within the environment. Exactly when will Jesus return? We don't know. However, when you see the changes you will know that he is coming soon. Jesus could have used any number of examples. You can look at most any plant and tell by the change in the texture of the plant or if it is budding. You can tell by the natural environment, the length of day, the amount of sunlight, the change in temperature. You can tell by the behavior of animals, the migration of birds, or by hibernation behavior, etc. Jesus chose a fig tree probably because there was one there that he could point to and they could see it, recognize how it changes and associate that with his lesson. Jesus often used the things that were around him as tools to help educate the audience.

His return will be like it was in the days of Noah. The Old Testament Genesis story has two lessons that I will point out; the fall of humanity and the surprised population. In regards to the fall of humanity the Scriptures tell us that the Lord saw a great amount of human wickedness. It was so bad that the Lord grieved the evil, corrupt, and violence in the world. In regards to the surprised population, the people were unprepared for what was coming. As Noah builds the ark the neighbors are clueless. When the rain starts falling the neighbors are still clueless. It is when the flood comes that the neighbors are desperate but then it is too late. The lessons of Noah apply to Jesus' audience in regards to the fall of humanity and the surprised community.

The lesson for us is how the Scripture speaks to us today. The Scripture is always current because the Bible is about the relationship between a fallen humanity and the divine. The lessons of Noah apply to Jesus audience and they apply to us today. As the days of Noah were, so will be the return of Jesus. In the days of Noah humanity was evil, corrupt, and violent. I could list examples but I think it is safe to assume that the world we live in today is also evil, corrupt, and violent. Originally I had some statistics to back up this claim. However, I found the information to be too depressing. It is enough to know that we live in a changing world that matches the world foretold by Jesus. Our world today is like the days of Noah when humanity was caught by surprise. As violence and apathy increase God's message becomes more fitting. It is easy for us to see evil in the world but the lapsed and the absent do not recognize the reality of the text. If people followed Jesus there would be no greed, evil, or corruption.

We don't know when it will get so bad that Jesus will return. The Bible tells us that no one knows, not the angels, not Jesus himself, only God knows. Unfortunately history shows that some people have failed to learn that lesson. There is a long list of people (monks, popes, theologians, radicals) that have predicted the time of Jesus return and have failed. Personally I think it is better to trust what Bible says.

Jesus knew what was important. It is not a matter of where, how, or when he will return. It is a matter of the condition of the human heart. Jesus teaches the importance of being ready. Be alert and be ready. There are several scriptural lessons that we can discuss from time to time on their own. In Matthew 24:42-43 the lesson is to be alert for you do not know when. This lesson connects with the parables of Matthew chapter 25 where there are three beautiful lessons. The parable of ten bridesmaids demonstrates the necessity of being ready. The parable of the talents demonstrates the necessity of being diligent. The parable of the judgment of nations demonstrates the necessity of outreach and missions. For today the main point of the lesson is that we do not know the day our Lord is coming so it is vitally important that you are alert, prepared, and ready.

I encourage you to trust the Bible. Jesus knew what was important – you, your faith, and your readiness. Jesus will come unexpectedly with full power and glory while people ignore the warning messages and reject God. When people fail to come to worship, they are actually, physically, rejected the opportunity to worship. As such, they are rejecting God, and God's son, and rejecting the opportunity to learn more about God's righteous ways. I imagine a lot of people made fun of Noah. Today after all of the Bible lessons that have been taught and all of the chances to learn there are a lot of people that continue to ridicule the righteousness of God. When the time comes for Christ to return people will make excuses such as "if I had only known" while God's love and mercy has been reaching out to them and offering multiple opportunities to repent. Now learn this lesson of the fig tree. It is not about when Christ will return. It is about you being ready. The lesson demonstrates urgency because you will see the signs as they are all around us.