



THE GOSPEL OF
Luke

SESSION OBJECTIVE: LUKE 21:29-38

To understand more about the importance of being aware of the signs that precede the end.

Awareness Leads to Preparation

In 2004, a major earthquake with a magnitude of 9.1–9.3 struck with an epicentre off the west coast of northern Sumatra, Indonesia. The undersea megathrust earthquake, known by the scientific community as *the Sumatra–Andaman earthquake* led to a massive tsunami with waves up to 100 feet high, killing an estimated 227,898 people in 14 countries in one of the deadliest natural disasters in recorded history. The shoreline of Sri Lanka in particular faced devastating fallout. The destruction caused in just a few minutes was unimaginable, with thousands of homes wiped out in addition to the thousands of lives lost. It took months to recover.

As the rebuilding process began, however, a strange discovery was made. Scientists figured out that prior to the tsunami, animals in the wildlife reserves close to the sea instinctively seemed to sense the danger that was approaching. As a result, they moved to higher ground or further inland and escaped the effects of the killer waves. The awareness of the animals led to preparation and ultimately to saving their lives. Awareness, as it turns out, leads to being more prepared for what is to come.

In Luke 21:29-38, Jesus continues teaching about the end of all things, and warns His disciples to stay alert: “But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap” (Lk. 21:34). Believers must guard themselves against

the distractions that come from the problems and pleasures of life in order to be sober-minded and aware of their context so that when the Son of Man comes, the church will be prepared.

The Fig Tree

Jesus continues His thoughts concerning the last days. He has just laid out the three phases (the destruction in Jerusalem, “the times of the Gentiles,” the cosmic signs), and now He speaks of the importance of this “signs” as they pertain to His return by using both His surroundings: “And he told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree, and all the trees” (Lk. 21:29). Pointing to the trees, he says: “As soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near” (Lk. 21:30). Horticultural observation was common in the ancient world because this was a practice with which most people were intimately familiar. Bear in mind that the ancient person looked to natural phenomena to know what season they were in. In our connected world today, we have digital calendars, news, the weather channel, and a variety of other means to inform us exactly what time, day, month, and season we are in. This was not so two thousand years ago. The ancient person would know “that the summer is already near” based on the blooming of trees and other plants.

Based on this “sign interpreting” process, Jesus continues: “So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near.” In the same way that a person would look to the trees to know what season they are in, Jesus says that believers should be aware of the cosmic signs when they begin to happen in order to be prepared for His second coming. It’s important to note that, at least in the opinion of the author of this material, we are not yet out of the second phase, “the times of the Gentiles” (Lk. 21:24). However, when they begin to appear, it will signal a greater need for Christians to be more and more aware of their surroundings.

What Passes Away?

Beyond this, Jesus continues: “Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.” Below is a brief breakdown of this fairly difficult-to-understand passage.

THIS GENERATION

This is perhaps the most difficult phrase to interpret in Luke’s Gospel. What, or whom, does Jesus mean when He says, “this generation will not pass away.” Several suggestions have been made. Some suggest that Jesus is referring to His contemporaries, but given that Luke is writing after the destruction of Jerusalem, this doesn’t make much sense. When Jesus says, “until all has taken place,” it almost certainly means all three phases of the end things including the cosmic signs and not simply the destruction of Jerusalem. Some have suggested He means the Jews in general, but again, there is no such evidence to support this other than opinion. Some have suggested humanity, which seems too broad. Likely, “this generation” refers to the generation of the third phase, the ones who will see the cosmic signs (as they see the fig tree blossom) and know that the end is near.

HEAVEN AND EARTH

The cosmic signs Jesus describes coupled with John’s assessment of the end in Revelation indicate a full destruction of the heavens and the earth before the Lord remakes both of them (Rev. 21:1-8). The current world we know and all that is in it will eventually be destroyed as a part of the full eschatological fulfillment.

MY WORDS

Unlike the heavens and the earth, Jesus' words will endure forever, and this is a truth that is attested throughout all of Scripture. Isaiah 40:8 says, "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever." Psalm 119:89 reads: "Forever, O LORD, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens." Given the attestation of the Old Testament concerning the enduring nature of God's words, this is also a good argument for the deity of Jesus. Only the words of God last forever, and yet Jesus' words last forever. That can only mean that Jesus is, in fact, God.

Be Prepared

The last exhortation in this passage has to do with being alert and prepared for the day the Lord returns. Jesus juxtaposes two different plans of action. We are to avoid one set of behaviors in place of a second set of behaviors. Jesus says: "But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap." The idea of dissipation involves behavior that would lead to drinking excessive amounts of alcohol. This first qualifier leads to the second one. In other words, giving yourself over to excessive drinking leads to drunkenness, which is always qualified as a sin. This along with "cares of life" (or anxieties) distract a believer from being appropriately aware of their surroundings. This is why the New Testament warns us to be "sober-minded" in all of our affairs (1 Pet. 4:7). In exchange for these behaviors, we should instead: "Stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man" (Lk. 21:36). In other words, Christians should be alert of their surroundings, and constantly yielded to prayer in order to live a life of obedience to the Lord until His global return (Lk. 21:35).

What About Now?

The main thrust of this passage is the importance of being alert and sober minded in all things as we carry out the mission God gives us. There are distractions in the world both in problems and pleasures; we as Christians must do all we can to stay the course, undeterred, and ready for action.

Study Questions**Day One**

1. Read Luke 21:29-30. What parable does Jesus tell? What does He specifically reference concerning the trees?

2. Read Luke 21:31. Based on the parable of the fig tree, what are Christians supposed to do?

Day Two

1. Read Luke 21:32. What will not pass away? To what does "this generation" refer? (Hint: See above notes)

2. Read Luke 21:33. What *will* pass away? What *will not* pass away?

Day Three

1. Read Luke 21:34. What behaviors should Christians avoid? Why?

2. Read Luke 21:35. Is the second-coming of Christ a local affair, or a global one?

Day Four

1. Read Luke 21:36. What behaviors should Christians exhibit? For what purpose?

2. Read Luke 21:37-38. Where was Jesus during the day, and what was He doing? Where would He go at night? Why did people come to Him?

Week 77 Discussion: No Distractions

In Luke 21:29-38, Jesus talks about the importance of being alert enough to recognize the cosmic signs when they come. Believers should avoid the distractions of life and remain committed to the mission and prayer. Talk as a group about the things that most often distract you and what you can do to eliminate those distractions in your life.

1. Icebreaker: In what context of life do you get the most distracted? Give some examples.
2. What “spiritual distractions” have you faced recently?
3. When you get distracted, what do you do to get back on track?
4. Why does the enemy want Christians distracted? How do you work against this?
5. What behaviors do you need to avoid in order to not be distracted?
6. How can the church avoid distractions as a whole?

Takeaways:

1. Jesus talks about the way in which believers should aware of the signs that will appear before He returns.
2. Jesus commends believers to avoid behaviors that will bring distractions and remain focused.