

Jesus' Parables in Chronological Order

Parable #41 ~ Matthew 24:32-35 ~ Signs From a Fig Tree ~ Scripture

³² “Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. ³³ Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door. ³⁴ I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. ³⁵ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

The Day and Hour Unknown

³⁶ “No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³⁷ As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸ For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; ³⁹ and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. ⁴⁰ Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.

⁴² “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. ⁴³ But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴ So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

Parable #42 — Matthew 24:45-51 — Wise and Wicked Servants

⁴⁵ “Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? ⁴⁶ It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. ⁴⁷ I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. ⁴⁸ But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, ‘My master is staying away a long time,’ ⁴⁹ and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. ⁵⁰ The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. ⁵¹ He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Parable #41 ~ Matthew 24:32-35 ~ Signs From a Fig Tree ~ Questions

1. “Signs From a Fig Tree” is one of only six parables repeated in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. What does this tell us?
2. In Verse 24:33 and 34, what does “all these things” refer to? (Matthew 24:4-31)
3. What are some current examples of false prophets deceiving people?
4. In Verse 24:33, what does “it” in the phrase “it is near” refer to? (Luke 21:31)
5. In Verse 24:34, what does “this generation” refer to? Do you feel as though you are in the generation that Jesus speaks about?
6. Who knows when the end times will come? (24:36) Would you like to know when Christ will return? What are the pros and cons of not knowing?
7. What does it really mean in a practical sense for you to “keep watch” (24:42) or “be ready” (24:44)?
8. What would you do if you knew that a thief would try to rob your home tonight?
9. If a non-Christian looked at your life today, would he have any reason to accuse you of not believing of the imminent return of Christ? How can you have a sense of expectation about the imminent return of Christ?
10. What would you do if you hired a house sitter/caretaker to watch your home and children, left for a week-long vacation, and then returned a day early to find that your caretaker had neglected your kids, trashed your house, and ignored your other instructions?
11. But do we really have to worry about being ready for the end *today*? Yes, a few signs of the end times have appeared, but far from all of them. The second coming of Christ is probably a good way off. You’ve put the past behind you and you’re making progress with your life. You’re not doing anything really bad today. You’re entitled to a little fun today, aren’t you? Tomorrow is another day.
12. In what ways are you *not* ready to face the Lord *today*?

Parable #41 ~ Matthew 24:32-35 ~ Signs From a Fig Tree ~ Leader's Notes

1. "Signs From a Fig Tree" is one of only six parables repeated in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. What does this tell us?

2. In Verse 24:33 and 34, what does "all these things" refer to? (Matthew 24:4-31)

"All these things" refers to everything Christ just talked about: wars, famines, earthquakes (24:4-8), persecution of Christians (9-10), false prophets (11), the abomination that causes desolation (15), false Christs (24), the need to flee because of the Great Tribulation (16-28), and the stellar events (sun darkened, no light from the moon) of verses 29-31. All those things will signal the nearness of Christ's return, just as a tree with new shoots signifies that summer is coming.

Some of these signs had actually occurred during Jesus' lifetime and some occurred immediately afterward during the apostles' lifetimes. Others have happened in the last 2,000 years. But still others are yet to come. And Jesus said, "this generation will certainly not pass away until *all* these things have happened."

The "abomination that causes desolation" (Daniel 9:27, 11:31, 12:11, 1 Maccabees 1:54-57, and Matthew 24:15) means any deliberate attempt to mock and deny the reality of God's presence by using false idols at the Temple. When Antiochus IV Epophanes built an altar to Zeus on the Temple's altar and replaced the holy of holies as the center of worship, it is described in 1 Maccabees 1:54-57 – "Now on the fifteenth day of the month Kislev, in the year 145, the 'abomination of desolation' was set up on the altar of the Lord. In the towns throughout Judaea pagan altars were built; incense was offered at the doors of houses and in the streets. Every scroll of the law that was found was torn up and consigned to the flames and anyone discovered in possession of a Book of the Covenant or conforming to the law by sentence of the king was condemned to die. [REB]

Biblical scholars with a futurist perspective think that Jesus' prophecy about the abomination that causes desolation deals with a literal, end-times Antichrist.

3. What are some current examples of false prophets deceiving people?

4. In Verse 24:33, what does "it" in the phrase "it is near" refer to? (Luke 21:31)

Jesus was referring specifically to God's kingdom when He said, "You know that *it* is near..." When Luke relates the parable, he specifically says, "you know that the kingdom of God is near."

5. In Verse 24:34, what does "this generation" refer to? Do you feel as though you are in the generation that Jesus speaks about?

The new leaves on the fig tree are analogous to the signs preceding the second coming. So the phrase “*this generation*” clearly refers to the generation that is *alive* at the time those signs are fulfilled. Jesus was saying, “The generation that sees the signs of the second coming will not pass away until I return.” That was Jesus’ answer to the disciples’ question of how much time would pass between the sign of His coming and His actual return. So when Jesus said, “this generation, he was not referring to the disciples, the Jewish race, or the nation of Israel.

Looking back to the previous verses, we see that once the birth pains begin (Matt. 24:8), everything else will happen in rapid succession. Elsewhere Scripture specifies that the tribulation will last for seven years (Daniel 9:27—each week in Daniel’s seventy-week prophecy is seven years long). It’s a time period known as Jacob’s trouble (Jeremiah 30:7). In the book of Revelation we learn that the worst part of the tribulation will be during the last three and a half years (12:14), which is 1,260 days (11:3) or forty-two months (13:5). Jesus referred to that period as the Great Tribulation with its beginning marked by the “abomination of desolation” (Matthew 24:15-21).—John MacArthur

6. Who knows when the end times will come? (24:36) Would you like to know when Christ will return? What are the pros and cons of not knowing?

Jesus says here in 24:36 that only the Father knows. No one else, not even him.

It’s good that we don’t know the exact date because we might be tempted to be lazy in our work for Christ. Worse yet, we might plan to keep on sinning and then turn to Christ for forgiveness right at the end. Heaven should not be our only goal; we have work to do here. And we must keep on doing it until our own death or until the return of Christ.

7. What does it really mean in a practical sense for you to “keep watch” (24:42) or “be ready” (24:44)?

The only safe way to “be ready” is to obey God and Christ today and every day. But think about what that means in a practical sense. Discuss this beyond surface platitudes!

8. What would you do if you knew that a thief would try to rob your home tonight?

Although the example Jesus uses is a thief breaking into your house, think about it in more general terms. If you’re going to visit a country with malaria mosquitos, what would you do in advance? If you’re going to be someplace where pickpockets are active, what do you do? What’s the Boy Scout motto?

9. If a non-Christian looked at your life today, would he have any reason to accuse you of not believing of the imminent return of Christ? How can you have a sense of expectation about the imminent return of Christ?

First of all, *specifically* how does the way you are living and what you are doing with your life show that you believe that Christ might return at any time? Do you have an obligation to anyone but yourself—not in general terms, but who *specifically*? And what are you doing about this?

10. What would you do if you hired a house sitter/caretaker to watch your home and children, left for a week-long vacation, and then returned a day early to find that your caretaker had neglected your kids, trashed your house, and ignored your other instructions?

11. But do we really have to worry about being ready for the end *today*? Yes, a few signs of the end times have appeared, but far from all of them. The second coming of Christ is probably a good way off. You've put the past behind you and you're making progress with your life. You're not doing anything really bad today. You're entitled to a little fun today, aren't you? Tomorrow is another day.

12. In what ways are you *not* ready to face the Lord *today*?