

## Session 4

May 15, 2022

### TRUST GOD'S TIMING

#### Matthew 24:32-41

Once again, the Lord was reminding His disciples of the *signs of the times*. Just as they wanted to know the *what, when, and how's* of Christ's return, so do our church folks today. But while theologians debate all the details, Jesus reminds us to be prepared, and leave the details to Him. In these verses, three themes emerge.

**Indicators (vv. 32-33).** People have always used the cycles of nature to predict the future. There is nothing wrong with that when it comes to the climate, the seasons, or the weather. *The Old Farmer's Almanac* has endured since the time of George Washington by doing the exact same thing! In some cases, Eastern religions have developed elaborate methods for reading signs depicted in nature as a means of fortune-telling. But the Bible never advocates for this type of *divination* (see Deut. 18:10; 1 Sam. 15:23). Here, Jesus is not suggesting that a fig tree offers some hidden message. Rather, He is talking about the natural, observable cycle of the plant's budding; something that everyone sees and understands. The Mount of Olives had both olive trees and figs, and it is likely that a live example was right before them. The object lesson is quite simple: the budding shoots of the fig plant indicate that summer is just around the corner. "In the same way" (v. 33), the various signs Jesus mentioned throughout this discourse would indicate the imminence of Christ's return. For reflection: *Some people interpret parables as allegories, seeing every aspect of the illustration as symbolic of something. What is the danger of reading the Bible this way?*

**Assurances (vv. 34-35).** Generations of theologians have argued what *generation* Jesus means here. As I mentioned earlier, 1) the End Times are painted in very broad strokes; and 2) prophecy is often fulfilled in stages, with certain previous fulfillments foreshadowing the ultimate fulfillment. We know that Jesus is referring in part to the fall of Jerusalem that would occur within the forty-year generation of His day (in AD 70). But "all these things" (v.34) did *not* happen at that time. Notice the cosmic and global calamities Jesus mentioned (see especially verse 21). That leads me to believe that some events are still in the future. If that's the case, then the generation of Jesus' day would see the destruction of the city as a foreshadow, but the ultimate fulfillment would occur in the generation of the End Times. Regardless, Jesus' emphasis was not on the *timing* of these events, but rather on their *certainty* (v. 35). For reflection: *Do you see why studying the End Times is both fascinating and frustrating!? What should that tell us about people who "have it all figured out?"*

**Exhortations (vv. 36-41).** The verses that follow tell us two things. First, that the timing of these events is *not* our primary concern; and second, that being prepared for these events *is* our primary concern. In regard to the *timing*, Jesus pointed out that try as we might, we really cannot know such a thing. Obviously, we should be looking for the signs (that's a major theme in this discourse). But how could we predict the exact timing with any certainty when even the angels are not privy to such information? (v. 36). The words "nor the Son" (included in Mark's account as well) should not trouble us, as in this case it should be taken as the human aspect of Jesus at the time He was speaking (He most certainly knows now!). The notice to *be prepared* is inferred

by the suddenness in the illustrations given. Just as the people of Noah's day ignored the preaching of Noah (see 2 Peter 2:5) and went on with their lives, so the End Times generation will ignore the warnings of Christ's church, go on with theirs, and be caught suddenly, urgently, and unaware. For reflection: *Do you think that you and your loved ones are really ready for Christ's return? What is going on in our lives today that might lull us into complacency?*