



Matthew 24:32–35

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 Truly I tell you, 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.

Reflection

(Today's reflection is given by Craig Tubman)

It's important to be able to read the signs. Professional sportsmen and woman spend hours upon hours getting to know their opponents so they can read the signs of what they are going to do in the game. The 2015 movie *The Big Short* follows the path of several people who picked up the signs that the American banks were going to fold and whilst looking like complete fools to everyone else made a killing on betting against the banks. Parents can sometimes tell when something is wrong with their kids, because they are attuned to picking up the signs. The parable of the fig tree that Jesus tells in today's passage is quite

simple – have eyes to see the signs.

Of course, and to locate ourselves in chapter 24 of Matthew, this is a parable told by Jesus in response to a question the disciples asked at the start of the chapter. Last week as they were leaving the temple, Jesus remarked that not one stone will be left on another.

We reflected on how significant this prediction was – the temple was the very symbol and spiritual heart of the entire Israelite nation. So its destruction is, in the disciples' mind, closely linked with the destruction of the entire nation.

So back in verse 3 the disciples ask,

‘Tell us, when will these things hap-

pen? And what is the sign of your coming and the end of the age?’

We’ve explored Jesus answer which is in part clear historical reflection and in part apocalyptic language. In part the physical destruction of the temple will arrive in 70AD and aspects of Jesus words in Matthew 24 reflect this. But the end of the temple’s purpose and usefulness will occur much, much sooner.

It is when the disciples see the abomination that causes desolation standing where it does not belong that the ‘destruction’ of the temple has come. In other words, it’s as the disciples see Jesus, the Son of God, the King of God’s Kingdom, the eternal one, the perfect one, hanging on a cross that they will know the temple period is

over. And in seeming support of this Jesus says,

‘I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened’

They say some things you just can't understand until you've experienced them. Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection is one of these. No matter how much he tries to prepare the disciples for what is about to take place, they still flee on the day of his arrest, trial and crucifixion.

But here we have Jesus declaring to them that far from this being the end, it is in fact the beginning of God's gracious, loving salvation to all. It is the sign that all can be forgiven of sin. It's the sign that all can

approach God's throne through their unity with the Son. Through the risen Christ you and I can have a temple experience every single day of our lives – plugged into the God of the universe. The role of the temple and indeed the people of Israel has been fulfilled in Jesus.

And as soon as the fig tree's twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door.

You see if the disciples miss the sign, they will interpret Jesus' death as disaster. But if they read the signs, they will in fact rejoice in the beauty of salvation found in the ugliness of the Son's sacrifice.

And the weight of what is going to happen in the coming days is seen in that last sentence from Jesus,

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.”

I take this to mean that these events Jesus is speaking of have a depth and a resonance that will outlast the very universe itself. That his death and resurrection will secure something that will outlast even the current creation.

This chapter has been filled with some pretty heavy language, but this is because Jesus is talking about something more important, profound and lasting than anything else in all existence.

Think & Pray

Have a think right now what you consider to be the most important thing in your existence? Where does it stand in relation to your identity as a disciple of Jesus? How does your eternal life that has been secured by the death and resurrection of Jesus shape your day to day life?

Consider this question, 'If I knew I was going to live forever, what would look different about my life now?'

If Jesus' death and resurrection really is the sign that our lives have an eternal timeline and the presence of God is available now to us through his Son and Spirit, what would change in your own actions and directions now?

Jesus' parable today is an encouragement to read the signs and respond. Take the time to reflect upon this and pray.