



Mark 13:28–31

28 ‘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. 29 Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door. 30 Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. 31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never

pass away.

Reflection

As Jesus is leaving the temple in Jerusalem his disciples are overawed by the opulence of the temple and some of the great foundation stones. Josephus, who wrote in the first century, describes some of what so transfixed these rural travellers from far north,

The exterior of the building wanted nothing that could astound either mind or eye. For, being covered on all sides with massive plates of gold, the sun was no sooner up than it radiated so fiery a flash that persons straining to look at it were compelled to avert their eyes, as from the solar rays. To

approaching strangers it appeared from a distance like a snow-clad mountain; for all that was not overlaid with gold was of purest white. From its summit protruded sharp golden spikes to prevent birds from settling upon and polluting the roof. Some of the stones in the building were 21 metres in length, 2 metres in height and 3 in breadth.

But it is all coming tumbling down; just like your perfect life or mine some day. And like a bucket of cold water poured over their heads, or a dark and threatening cloud suddenly obscuring the midday sun, Jesus begins to prophesy about the sacking of Jerusalem by the Romans some three decades later in AD 70. And even more concerning than that, Jesus uses

the fate of David's city and its people in those days as an illustration of what it will be like at the end of days, at his Second Coming, when he returns in power not to save the world this time, but to judge it, and usher in the New Jerusalem, the capital city of the New Heavens and the New Earth. The day when your perfect life, or not so perfect life, and mine, has come to an end, and we are all called to account for how we have lived. For those found outside of Jesus on that day, something far worse than the sacking on Jerusalem awaits. And so in today's passage Jesus concludes this glimpse into the future with a call to vigilance. Here's what he says, from Mark 13:28–31,

28 'Now learn this lesson from the fig-tree: as soon as its twigs get ten-

der and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. 29 Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door. 30 Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. 31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

In prophetic language Jesus has just spoken of great political turmoil and upheaval. The smiles have been struck from his disciples faces and instead of perhaps thinking over where their new offices might be in the temple precincts when Jesus finally reveals himself as king, they're now faced with terrifying imagery of not only the sacking of the temple in Jerusalem but the sud-

den and violent end of the world. Here's some of the picture language Jesus uses to describe the great and terrible day of his Second Coming, taken from our last talk, but also from many, many Old Testament passages that use similar language about the end of days (Joel 2:30, 31; Isa 13:10; 34:4; Ezek 32:7; Hag 2:6, 21 etc.),

24 'But in those days, following that distress,

“the sun will be darkened,

and the moon will not give its light;

25 the stars will fall from the sky,

and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.”

26 'At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. 27 And he will send his angels and gather his

elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.

Jesus then moves to comfort his disciples, but to also warn all who would follow in their footsteps.

28 '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. 29 Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door. 30 Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. 31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

‘You know how to interpret the seasons,’ says Jesus. ‘When there is new growth on deciduous trees you know summer is around the corner. When you see these signs, you will know that my return is near.’

And then Jesus says something that comes across as a little confusing. He says,

30 Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. 31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

I don’t think Jesus is speaking about his disciples here. Elsewhere he mentions the manner, for instance, in which Peter will die. The generation that he refers

to as 'this generation' I think is the final generation that sees these world-ending signs. Those who see them will witness first-hand the Second Coming of Jesus that immediately follows. And they will have been warned and prepared by Jesus' words which, 2,000 years on, have not passed away and will still be there for the final generation in their day.

Think and Pray

But before we become complacent it is important to realise that every next generation could be the final generation. I like how Luke's account continues on at this point. There Jesus says,

34 'Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing,

drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap. 35 For it will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth. 36 Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.'

Hearts weighed by carousing, that is, drinking and making merry. Hearts weighed down by drunkenness which can mean alcohol or being drunk on one's own illusions. Hearts weighed down by the anxieties of life which can mean all manner of things. Jesus' timeless words are timely for our own generation caught up in all these sorts of things. Is your heart weighed

down by any of the above? Do you have a heavy heart, the pace and excesses and trappings of life not enabling you to see past the things of this world? If so, be careful says Jesus, because,

that day will close on you suddenly like a trap.

Instead, be soberminded,

36 Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.'

Take these final words from Jesus as your cue to pray this morning. Pray for vigilance to recognise the signs of the coming age.

Pray for sober mindedness amidst the excesses of our generation. And pray for a growing longing in your heart for the return of Jesus and the wonderful new age that he will bring with him. Set your vision on that day, as you go about this day.