

## **Worthy to Stand** Luke 21:29-38

Our culture has a love-hate relationship with future things. On the one hand, the popularity of horoscopes, astrology, and other ways of foretelling the future are all very popular. People have always had a hankering to peer into the future.

On the other hand, descriptions of divine judgment are met with skepticism and scorn. Many people think of Jesus as a wise, religious teacher; but they reject the notion of Him as the supreme Judge. They say “God is a god of love; He wouldn’t send anyone to Hell.” Those are both true statements. But God’s love has provided a way by which every human being can escape eternal punishment. If they end up in Hell it will be because they chose that path, not because anyone sends them there.

As we noted in our previous study, “The Coming of the Son of Man,” Jesus provided clear indicators of the coming judgment and the end of the age. In the verses of our text today, Luke 21:29 to 38, He gives further instruction relating to this crucial point in human history.

In the earlier verses of Luke 21 Jesus’ prophetic words pivot back and forth from the near future (the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD), to the distant future (the return of Christ at the end of the age). In our text, He seems to be zeroing in on conditions existing at the climax of human history. The immediate context is verses 25 to 28 which deal with supernatural disturbances in the heavens and on the earth. These will culminate with the Son of Man coming in power and great glory.

Jesus reminded His hearers to be alert to the times they were living in. The words of our text are just as important to us today as they were to those who heard them from His own lips that day. In fact, His words have a greater urgency for us because we are nearly 2000 years closer toward that promised Day of Judgment!

And what was the main purpose of Jesus’ words in our text? It was that we might be counted worthy to escape judgment and to stand before the Son of Man. So I’ve titled this message “Worthy to Stand.” Let’s turn now to the text, **Luke 21:29 to 35**.

In this text Jesus gives several important **COMMANDS**. Obeying these commands will enable us to escape the final judgment and stand in righteousness before Christ.

The First COMMAND is,

### **Be Observant**

In this chapter Jesus uses several words to call attention to the seriousness of our task as we await the Lord's coming. He uses the words "take heed, behold," and "watch." In the opening verse of our text He says "Behold the fig tree..." In other words, take a careful look! Just a glance isn't enough; you'll miss important details. Missing those details can make the difference between life and death.

There's some debate about Jesus' reference to the fig tree. Some see it as a simple reference to a fig tree, a common sight in Bible lands. Others see it as a reference to Israel as a nation. It's true; there are many Scriptures that compare the nation of Israel to a vine or fig tree. Just a few are Jeremiah chapter 24, Hosea 9:10, Joel 1:7. I have heard Bible teachers say that the "fig tree" budded in May 1948 when Israel once again became a nation. Maybe that's a valid conclusion - but it's not readily apparent in this text.

But Luke adds something that Matthew and Mark do not; he adds the words "...and all the trees..." Jesus seems to be taking a simple, observable fact of nature and using it to support what He's about to say. Those listening to Jesus would have been very familiar with the characteristics of the fig tree and the other trees.

When the fig tree and all the other trees begin to push out blossoms and then leaves, you know that summer is not far behind. In the same way, Jesus said, when you see the events I've told you about coming to pass, then you should realize that the coming of the Son of Man is very near. Even young children can follow Jesus' reasoning.

Remember how Jesus rebuked the Pharisees and scribes for their failure to read the signs of their time? He said "you can discern the weather by the color of the sky or the direction of the wind, but you're oblivious to the times you're living in. You don't recognize me as the fulfillment of the prophecies you've studied for years." You should be paying attention!

"Just like the fig tree blooming signals the nearness of summer, when the events I've told you about (in this chapter) are happening (present tense), then you know the kingdom of God is very near. And you need to take appropriate action." In the earlier verses, in Jesus' specific predictions about the destruction of Jerusalem, He gave them warnings particular to that time

period. In the same way, He warns us about the Day of Judgment that's coming and how we should prepare ourselves for it.

Oh, but people scoff. "There have been wars and rumor of wars ever since Cain killed Abel. There have been earthquakes and famine and disease for as long as the world has existed. How can you say these things point to the coming of Christ?" Well, I didn't say it, Jesus did! If you don't accept what He said that's between you and Him; although, I would add, that's going to be detrimental to your future. Your rejection of truth doesn't change the truth!

Others may say "well, we only think there are more of these calamities because we have much better communication than previous generations." I don't debate the last part of that statement. But I also know that our day was/is not unseen by Jesus. He sees all time as NOW!

Then Jesus makes a statement that scholars have wrestled with for a long time. "Assuredly I say to you, this generation shall (absolutely) not pass away until all that is predicted is fulfilled."

Let's start with the obvious. Jesus couldn't have been referring to those in the audience because they are all dead. Some say this chapter speaks only of the destruction of Jerusalem; but clearly, there are things predicted here by Jesus that didn't happen in that event.

So what did He mean? Notice that right after Jesus makes this statement He follows it up with verse 33. "*Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away.*" What Jesus said will come to pass!

Some have suggested that Jesus is referring to the human race; that it will continue until all the things predicted will come to pass. That's certainly true, but it's not the usual way the word generation is used. Others suggest the unbelieving Jews were present at that time and today the Jews as a people group still do not believe in Jesus as Messiah. There are individuals who have embraced Him as Messiah, but not the nation. So that seems like a possibility; but again not the usual way the word generation is used.

The understanding I believe makes the most sense is this; the generation that begins to see the signs mentioned in verses 25 and 26 will be the same ones to see the end of human history as we know it. I believe the emphasis is on the certainty of the end, rather than focusing on a specific date for the end. People were expecting some kind of end of human history; we

know that from the disciples' question at the beginning of this chapter. So Jesus stated a particular kind of end and the signs that will accompany it.

Jesus urges us to be observant of the times we live in; the writers of the Epistles echo that counsel again and again. Let's keep our eyes open because our redemption is drawing near!

The Next COMMAND is,

### **Be Temperate**

Jesus begins this section with a negative warning! "Pay attention to your living..." In light of what Jesus told them they must not become careless and inattentive. And why should they watch; "...lest at any time your spirits be weighed down..." The KJV uses the word overcharged. The same word is used in Luke 9:32 describing a scene on the Mount of Transfiguration. It says Peter's eyes were "heavy with sleep." They were weighted down so much that he just couldn't stay awake.

And what would cause this drowsiness, this propensity to slumber? It was surfeiting, drunkenness, and the cares of this life. You may immediately say "I don't have trouble with drunkenness; I'm a total abstainer." I'm glad to hear that, but intoxication can come from other things besides alcoholic beverages. People become intoxicated with power, position, prestige, riches, and a whole host of things. Their intoxication clouds their judgment; they can't see life clearly. They make choices that bring immediate reward but guarantee pain and suffering later.

Surfeiting speaks of the nausea a person feels after a night of drunkenness. We typically refer to it as a hangover. Their senses are dulled; they're lethargic, and often physically sick. They're obviously not in the best shape to respond to the unexpected, or even the routine. Because their senses are impaired they can be easily surprised. We could summarize Jesus' warning in two words – be sober; that command is repeated often in the New Testament.

We must be temperate in regard to the cares of life too. Jesus gave this warning numerous times in the Gospels. In the parable of the soils the thorny soil choked out the growing plants and they bore no fruit. Jesus said the thorns were riches and the cares of this life. Those are two sides of the same coin.

It's not the riches themselves that are the problem; it's our response to them and what role they play in our lives. Paul warns us in First Timothy 6:9 "*But those who **desire to be rich***

*fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.*” See, the problem isn’t so much with riches as it is the desire to be rich. That desire makes us vulnerable to making wrong decisions so we can fulfill our desires!

The cares of life are the anxieties of life. We live in a world fraught with peril. Accidents, disease, terrorism, famine, all these things have the potential to destroy us physically; so we fear them. But as followers of Christ we don’t need to live in fear. God has the hairs of our head numbered and He sees each sparrow that falls to the ground. As Jesus said, you and I are of more value than many sparrows.

Following Jesus’ words means we’ll choose to live simply. I remember hearing of a brother who had spent most of his adult life serving in a variety of ministries. Someone expressed concern to him that he didn’t have any real estate to serve as equity for his retirement years. This brother acknowledged that he didn’t have a lot of financial resources. But then he said something to this effect; “I believe when the Lord calls me home I’ll find it easier to leave than you will.” He had taken Jesus’ words to heart and lived them out.

The warning Jesus gives to the intemperate is that the day of the Lord will catch them when they least expect it; just like an animal gets caught in a snare. But then, it’s too late.

I close this section with the words of the apostle Paul in First Corinthians 9:25. “*And everyone who competes for the prize is **temperate** in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown.*” Let’s be controlled by the Spirit and keep our eyes on the goal; the crown of life Jesus has promised to all who love His appearing.

The Final COMMAND is,

### **Be Vigilant**

Here we have a positive command; and it is among the last words of teaching Jesus gave before going to the Cross. Because the day of the Lord will come unexpectedly upon those who dwell on the earth, we must WATCH! Jesus’ command means to be sleepless; constantly alert. It is a present imperative; keep on watching and being alert. And why must we watch? Because it is so easy to be overcome with the daily obligations of life and the pursuits of wealth and pleasure. These things gratify our physical senses but dull our spiritual ones.

A sentry on his post must be vigilant. If he fails in his duty he will pay for it with his life; and many others may lose their lives too. If you and I fail to be vigilant, others around us may suffer from our lack of vigilance.

And then Jesus gives another present imperative; “keep on earnestly praying.” Paul echoes this command in First Thessalonians 5:13; “*Pray without ceasing.*” Why? So you may be strong enough to prevail and escape all these terrible judgments that are coming, AND to stand without fear before the Son of Man. This kind of prayer isn’t “now I lay me down to sleep...” This is prayer like Elijah’s; earnest and fervent. And according to James 5:16 it is effective prayer; prayer that makes a difference.

As I read verse 36 I was reminded of the words of the apostle Paul in Second Corinthians 11. In a brief catalog of some of the things he suffered for the cause of Christ he listed these in verses 27 and 28: “... *in weariness and toil, in **sleeplessness** often, in hunger and thirst, in **fastings** often, in cold and nakedness; besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my **deep concern** for all the churches.*” We know Paul’s deep concern for the church was the subject of many prayers. What an example Paul is for us! He was vigilant.

My friend, will you be counted worthy to stand before the Son of Man? Only the blood of Jesus can make us worthy. But our text clearly reveals the importance of obeying these commands. Be observant; pay attention to where we are on God’s time clock. Be temperate; exercise moderation in all things so your spiritual senses are not dulled or diminished; so that day doesn’t overtake you as a snare. Be vigilant; always on your guard and always praying in every situation of life. And you will be counted worthy to stand before the Son of Man.

I close this teaching with counsel from the apostle Peter.

*“Be sober; be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.*”

