

“How Much Longer?”

“The Parable of the Fig Tree”

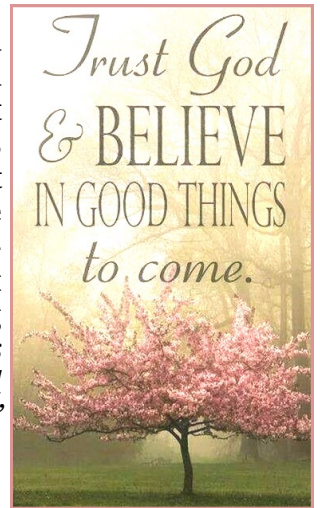


How many times do we want to ask “How much longer?” over many things, not just traveling? The saying is often attributed to kids riding in the back seat of a car, but I think it can also apply to us many times. Basically that is what the disciples were asking that prompted Christ to tell them the parable of the fig tree. The parable of the fig tree is found in Matthew 24:32-36; Mark 13:28-32; and Luke 21:29-33. In the verses preceding it, the disciples are anxious. They have been faithfully listening to Jesus preach and they wanted some action. They wanted to know when something was going to happen. They did not understand what Christ was telling them in His parables or stories, but they would not have been able to understand it in any form any more than we would have or than we can today.

“Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near.” Isaiah 55:6

Many people were confused when Isaiah told them about the coming of a Messiah, and now the people who were listening to Christ were still confused. Jesus was spending his days preaching and His nights on the Mount

of Olives. He was constantly being followed by people who were questioning. At the beginning of the chapter containing this parable, Christ is standing there while people are bringing their offerings. Christ noticed a poor widow who had come and put in what would be equivalent today to two pennies. He watched the rich offering much more. Then He said to the disciples *“The plain truth is that this widow has given by far the largest offering today. All these others made offerings that they’ll never miss; she gave extravagantly what she couldn’t afford—she gave her all!”* Luke 21:1-4.



The disciples couldn’t understand that. Then the people were talking about the beautiful temple and how remarkable the stonework was and the beauty of the gifts that had been offered. Jesus said *“All this you’re admiring so much—the time is coming when every stone in that building will end up in a heap of rubble.”* Luke 21:5-6 They wanted to know when and how. They could only see the material things. That is what we can see today. We have to have faith to see past the material things to the heavenly things, but that is not easy.

Christ was not only talking about the structural temple, He was also referring to their body. Our temples or bodies are only temporary structures. This all led into the story about a fig tree.

He told them that when they saw the leaves begin to show, they knew that summer was right around the corner. That wasn’t anything they didn’t already know. Then He went on to tell them that when they saw things happen, they would know that God’s kingdom was about to be on earth. This is exactly what they wanted, but now were they going to know and when was it going to happen?

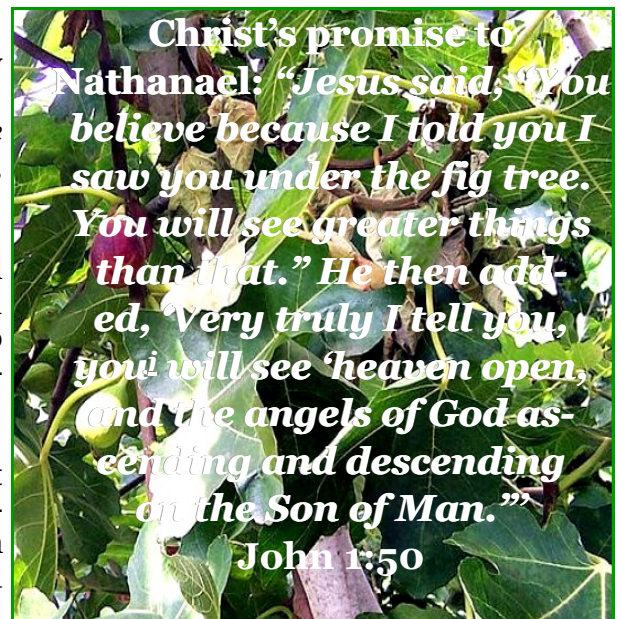
Christ didn’t give them an answer. He just told them to pray without ceasing and always be ready. He told them it would come as a thief in the night and so they had to be constantly aware of what was happening. Then He told them *“Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”* Matthew 24: 34-36. Do we have enough faith to accept this?

I think they might have wanted to ask “Aren’t You the Son? Don’t You know? Can’t You tell us how long? I think this was all confusing to them then as it is to us today. They were listening to the Son of Man, yet He couldn’t tell them the answers in a way they could understand. We are in the same situation today. Christ is with us every day and He has told us that we have to be ready. None of us know when we will be

called. But we want to know answers. We would do well to reflect on the words to the song, "Day by Day" from the musical by Stephen Schwartz and John-Michael Tebelak GODSPELL. "Day by day, oh, dear Lord, three things I pray To see Thee more clearly Love Thee more dearly Follow Thee more nearly, day by day."

We want to hear more than just that the new leaves on a tree tell us summer is around the corner or than when the leaves begin to turn color, that fall is approaching. We want to know so much. We want to know what about tomorrow. We aren't satisfied to go just day by day.

Nathanael, the disciple, also had his doubts. Before he had met Christ he was told he was from Nazareth. Nathanael asked Philip "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" Philip asked him to go with him and he would show him. When they approached Christ, Nathanael questioned how Christ knew him. Christ told him "Before Philip called you, I saw you under the fig tree." Nathanael answered, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel."



The Parable of the Fig Tree

"Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away. But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only." Matthew 24:32-36

Prayer: Heavenly Father, You are mighty and You tell us so much and yet we always want to know more. In all Your wisdom, You know that we cannot handle more. Help us to be ready when You call, and always ready to witness for You to those we see every day by the way we live and the things we say. Amen

I believe in God.

*I saw him today in the eyes of a child,
in an older couple walking arm in arm,
in the smile of a cancer survivor,
in a field of flowers, and in the stars
filling a night sky.
I hear God calling to me as I close my eyes
to pray.
I feel his hand upon me when
I am most in need
For this and so much more,*

I will always believe.

1. How do the signs in nature apply to God's wisdom for us today?
2. Do we need to prepare for the various seasons in our lives as well as the seasons of nature?
3. Why do you think Christ didn't give more direct answers to the disciples?
4. Do you think you want direct answers today? What would it profit you?
5. If you knew when you were going to leave this earth, should it prompt you to do things differently?
6. Do we have the same promise that was given to Nathanael?

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