

Session 1

Can we know? Should we know? How do we know?

– Knowing the Generation but not the Day or Hour –

A. Introduction

1. Jesus commanded one generation of believers to know that His return was near. It was the generation that would be alive to see “all these things” which refer to the signs that He prophesied in Matt. 24 (Matt. 24:33–36).
2. The Man we love has given us much insight into what He considers to be the important things to know about the generation in which He returns. As believers who love Jesus, we want to know what is on His heart, and thus what He meant by “all these things” that will lead to His glorious return to the earth.
3. If we are living in the last generation, then we need to know it. There are three questions that many ask:
 - a. Can we know if we are living in the last generation?
 - b. Should we know if we are living in the last generation?
 - c. How do we know if we are living in the last generation?
4. The good news is that there is much biblical information on this because Jesus wants us to be prepared for His End-Time purposes. Jesus would not tell us of the circumstances surrounding His coming if we are not supposed to know about it.
5. By observing the biblical signs of the times, it is possible to know the generation of Jesus’ return even if we do not know the day or hour. However, our faith has to be based on what the Bible says and not on personal revelations or visions about the timing of His return.
6. The signs of the times can be divided into three categories. We pay attention to sign events and sign trends, according to what Scripture says, to progressively strengthen our faith that we are getting near to Jesus’ return.
 - a. Sign events: these are predicted in Scripture and alert us to the timing of Jesus’ return.

- b. Sign trends: both positive and negative sign trends will signal the nearness of His coming.
 - c. Prophetic experiences: subjective personal experiences can alert us to the End Times. However, the veracity of these experiences will always have to be submitted to what Scripture says.
7. The apostles and the Old Testament (OT) prophets also prophesied of sign events and trends. When we combine their prophecies with Jesus' prophecies, we get a much more complete picture. Jesus' most in-depth teaching on the End Times is called the Olivet Discourse. The most complete record of this prophecy is in Matthew 24 – 25. The gospels of Mark and Luke gave shorter accounts of it (Mk. 13; Lk. 21).

B. Learn the Parable of the Fig Tree: Know the Generation of His Return (Matt. 24:32–42)

1. Jesus was answering the apostle's question concerning what signs would indicate His return. (Matt. 24:3)
2. Jesus gave us three commands in Matt. 24:32–42:
 - a. He commanded us to learn the parable of the fig tree (v.32);
 - b. He commanded us to know that His coming was near (v.33) when we see all these signs;
 - c. He commands us to watch (v.42) because we will not know the exact hour of His coming, but we can know the generation.
3. The lesson of the parable of the fig tree is easy to understand. The fig tree loses its leaves in wintertime and does not sprout till late in the spring. Thus, when the leaves of a fig tree begin to sprout, we know that summer is near.
4. In the same way, when the prophetic sign events and trends take place together making global headlines, then we know that a change in season is coming and the end of this age is near.
 - a. These must occur in a way that makes headline news worldwide.
 - b. This is to constitute a prophetic sign that has a message from God in it that could be discerned by the Body of Christ.

5. As the fig leaves signaling the summer can be seen by anyone who is paying attention, in the same way, the events signaling the Second Coming will be obvious to anyone looking for them.
6. How long is a biblical generation?
 - a. A “generation” in Scripture ranges from 40 to 100 years (Gen. 15:13–16; Num. 32:13; Ps. 90:10; Matt. 1:17; Acts 7:6). Moses spoke of Israel’s captivity in Egypt as lasting 400 years or 4 generations (Gen. 15:13). Thus, a generation could refer to 100 years.
 - b. There were 14 generations from Abraham to David (Matt. 1:17) each averaging about 70 years.
7. “All these things” in (v.33 and v.34) include the prophetic signs spoken of in Matt. 24:4–28. There is only one generation in which God’s people will see all the trends and events of Matt. 24 occurring at the same time at an alarming measure globally. Jesus commanded His people in *that* generation to know that His coming was near.
8. For the first time in history, most of these trends are happening in an alarming measure at the same time on a global basis, and some necessary developments have taken place.
 - a. One key development is that Israel will have to become a nation again before the abomination of desolation can occur.
9. It seemed incredible to the apostles that all these sign events and trends would occur in a global way in one generation (v.34). This was the unspoken issue that Jesus addressed by comparing the passing of the heavens and earth (1 Cor. 7:31) to the truthfulness of His words or prophecies (v.35).
10. The emphasis of Jesus’ words in v.35 is not on His general teachings, but on the reliability of His prophetic words concerning the future given in Matt. 24. As impossible as it seems that all these events would occur together in one generation, the prophetic words of Jesus guarantee it.
11. We are called to know or recognize the generation in which the Lord returns. It is then that Jesus exhorts us to look up and lift up our heads if we know it is drawing near (Luke 21:25–29).

C. Like the Days of Noah: Unawareness of Living in a Prophetic Generation

1. In Matt. 24:32–39, Jesus emphasized that the people alive in the generation in which He returns are to know with confidence that it is the generation of

His return. He gives a significant qualifier to this command, namely that we not take it a step further and seek to know the day and the hour.

2. Jesus emphasized that we would not know the hour of His return (Matt. 24:39, 42, 44, 50; 25:13). The Father has strategically hidden that from His people. It is ironic that this qualifier to the command to know the generation is used as an argument against knowing the generation.
3. The main message in this passage is that people who could have understood the prophetic significance of the generation they lived in, did not. The surprise with which Noah's flood came on majority of the earth illustrates the ignorance that Jesus wants His people to avoid. Jesus pointed out how the majority were unaware, even in light of Noah's preaching (2 Pet. 2:4–5).
4. The surprise of Noah's flood illustrated the widespread problem of the lack of prophetic understanding and faith in an historic generation. The people in Noah's day were caught totally by surprise as they went about their ordinary lives.
5. Noah and his family prepared for the duration of an entire generation (120 years) without knowing the specific day or hour (Heb. 11:7).
6. One of Jesus' main points is that many living in the generation that He returns will not know it (Matt. 24:37–39). Thus, many will make wrong decisions because of fear, offense towards God or ignorance of what the Scripture says.
7. Believers *can* know the generation just as Noah did. However, to those of us without understanding, it will come suddenly as a "thief in the night", while those who have cultivated understanding will not be caught off guard (1 Thess. 5:1–6).
8. Many use Matt. 24:36 to justify their unfamiliarity and their lack of study of biblical prophecy. They use this passage in the opposite way that Jesus intended in its context.
9. It is essential to have understanding of the hour we are living in so that we embrace what is right and refuse what is wrong, and we also live according to God's wisdom and commandments.
10. Our faith is to be stirred by searching the Bible to gain understanding of what the Word says about the prophetic signs that declare the generation in which the Lord returns.

11. God could easily settle the issue of timing by telling His prophets in the Church today, but He has chosen to leave the specific day and hour unknown so that we must cultivate a heart of faith with hunger to know what is on His heart about that generation.

D. Overcoming Obstacles: The Fear of man

1. The fear of man causes many to draw back from speaking about and teaching on the End Times.
 - a. Peter warned the saints that all who stand for God's truth in the End Times will be resisted by scoffers or mockers from both inside and outside the Church (2 Pet. 3:3–4).
 - b. We need to first be aware that we will face opposition so that we can take steps to overcome any fear of man that we have in us.
2. Many will scoff and mock the necessity to understand, proclaim and prepare for the Lord's return.
 - a. Scoffers will argue that people have always said that Jesus was coming.
 - b. Peter's priority was to warn the saints to not become cynical in the midst of the scoffing. Instead, we are to be "anointed observers" of the signs of the times.
 - c. We must not let a mocking spirit steal these truths from our heart. We do not want to impart a mocking spirit to those around us or to the next generation.
3. We need to boldly challenge all the ideas that we hear and refuse any that we cannot see in Scripture for ourselves
 - a. As God's people, we need to be like the Bereans who searched the Scriptures to see if the things that Paul said were true (Acts 17:10–11).

E. We are exhorted to watch and pray

1. Scripture exhorts us to watch and pray in context of preparing for the End Times. (We see this in ten different places: Matt. 24:42; 25:13; Mk. 13:9, 33, 34, 35, 37; Lk. 21:36; 1 Thess. 5:6; Rev. 16:15.)
 - a. We want to cultivate faith and understanding that agrees with what the Word and the Spirit say about Jesus' return.

- b. We prepare by watching what the Spirit is saying in Scripture, in circumstances, and in our lives, and cultivate faith and understanding as we pray and commune with God.
2. Scripture: Search out what the Bible says about the signs of His coming. There are over 150 chapters in the Bible that focus on the End Times.
3. Circumstances: With a heart of faith and prayer, watch the sign events and trends that are predicted in Scripture progressively unfold. Set your heart to be an “anointed observer” of these.
4. Personal life: Be alert to the Spirit’s stirring and challenges in your personal life and ministry. We are to keep alert to our communion with God so as to always be in a disposition to agree with the Spirit.