

Lesson 49

Be Alert

Introduction:

Jesus is concerned about the future. He wants His disciples to be prepared to meet its challenges. So He begins the Olivet Discourse cautioning His disciples not to be misled, then gives them the map of the future with road markers along the way and finishes by telling them to stay alert. It can be compared to the modern allegory of a camping trip.

John is going to favorite campsite for the weekend and intends to meet his friend Ted there on Friday night. John says, “Ted, I’m so glad you want to spend time with me up at my favorite campsite but since we are going at different times let me give you the directions. First, its kind of tricky getting to my campsite so pay close attention to what I’m about to tell you. It won’t do you any good to ask someone else where my campsite is because they don’t know. If you listen to them you’ll be misled.

Take the old dirt road just north of town ... its kind of bumpy at the beginning then you’ll come to a fork in the road ... be sure you take the right fork. This road will take you into the forest. When you get to the forest the route gets trickier, as there are a lot of different unmarked forest roads a person can take. As you enter the forest take the third road on your left. Turn right at the cabin on the lake. Then go about two miles and you will come to a large boulder on the left side of the road ... take the next road to the right.

It’s a rough ride from here on and you may think you are on the wrong road. But just keep going and after a little while the road will run into a broad meadow where a lot of people will be camping. If you ask them where I’m at, they’ll just point you in the wrong direction and you will become lost.

Drive through the meadow to the far side. There you will see a large fallen tree across the road. Go around it on the right side and continue on. It will be getting dark by then. Continue driving until you come to a clearing, which overlooks a cliff. At that point you can get a broad view of the heavens with all their stars. And also from there you can see the light of my campfire. You’ll be tired on the journey but stay alert, because if you are not: you may run off the road or miss a marker and you’ll never get to the campsite.

Jesus is adamant about staying alert. During the Olivet Discourse He issues twenty instructions that His disciples are to obey. The last ten deal with the issue of **alertness**.

Reading The Scripture:

Matthew 24:32-25:13; Mark 13:28-37; Luke 21:29-36

The Parable of the Fig Tree

Matthew 24:32-44, Mark 13:28-33, and Luke 21:29-32

(Gospels forged together into one seamless story, in collaboration with New American Standard Bible,
authored by Michael Gibson, Founder of Spirit & Truth, dba Key 2 Changes: “Follow Me: A Message from God”, a Journey with Jesus)

“Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender, and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near; even so you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door. Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away

until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words shall not pass away. But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.”

A Thief in the Night **Matthew 24:37-44**

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“For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. For as in those days which were before the flood they were eating and drinking, they were marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so shall the coming of the Son of Man be. Then there shall be two men in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken, and one will be left. Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. For this reason you be ready too; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will.”

Be Alert **Mark 13:33-37**

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“Take heed, keep on the alert; for you do not know when the appointed time is. It is like a man, away on a journey, who upon leaving his house and putting his slaves in charge, assigning to each one his task, also commanded the doorkeeper to stay on the alert. Therefore, be on the alert-- for you do not know when the master of the house is coming, whether in the evening, at midnight, at cockcrow, or in the morning-- lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all, ‘Be on the alert!’”

Be A Faithful Servant **Matthew 24:45-51**

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“Who then is the faithful and sensible slave whom his master put in charge of his household to give them their food at the proper time? Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes. Truly I say to you, that he will put him in charge of all his possessions. But if that evil slave says in his heart, 'My master is not coming for a long time,' and shall begin to beat his fellow slaves and eat and drink with drunkards; the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour which he does not know, and shall cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites; weeping shall be there and the gnashing of teeth.”

Stand Before the Son of Man **Luke 21:34-36**

(Gospels forged together into one seamless story, in collaboration with New American Standard Bible,
authored by Michael Gibson, Founder of Spirit & Truth, dba Key 2 Changes: “Follow Me: A Message from God”, a Journey with Jesus)

“Be on guard, that your hearts may not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and that day come on you suddenly like a trap; for it will come upon all those who dwell on the face of all the earth. But keep on the alert at all times, praying in order that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

Parable of the Ten Virgins **Matthew 25:1-13**

(Gospels forged together into one seamless story, in collaboration with New American Standard Bible,
authored by Michael Gibson, Founder of Spirit & Truth, dba Key 2 Changes: "Follow Me: A Message from God", a Journey with Jesus)

“Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps, and went out to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were foolish, and five were prudent. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the prudent took oil in flasks along with their lamps. Now while the bridegroom was delaying, they all got drowsy and began to sleep. But at midnight there was a shout, 'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' Then all those virgins rose, and **trimmed** their lamps. And the foolish said to the prudent, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the prudent answered, saying, 'No, there will not be enough for us and you too; go instead to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.' And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut. And later the other virgins also came, saying, 'Lord, lord, open up for us.' But he answered and said, 'Truly I say to you, I do not know you.' Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour.”

Trimmed. Prepared for use.

Group Discussion:

Currently within the United States there is a prevailing view of eschatology (study of end time events). It is popularly called the “Pre-trib Rapture”¹ and arises from a system of theology known as Dispensationalism. The Dispensational system of theology began to be developed by John Nelson Darby of England in 1827. He inserted a pre-tribulation rapture view of eschatology after hearing a prophecy given by Margaret Macdonald in the spring of 1830. Darby’s dispensational views gained ground in the United States when C.I. Scofield included it in his reference Bible of 1917. After that, it began to be taught at Dallas Theological Seminary and one of its students; Hal Lindsey made it popular with his book, The Late Great Planet Earth (1970).

Four major components of the Pre-tribulation Rapture position are:

1. That Christians will be raptured (caught up to meet the Lord in the air) **before** a seven-year tribulation period.
2. That the rapture occurs **before** the second coming of Jesus Christ.
3. That the rapture is “**secret**”. (It will not be visible to anyone. Those who remain are either Jews or unbelievers and they will discover that all the Christians have disappeared in the twinkling of an eye.)
4. That the rapture is **imminent**. (It can occur at any time. No signs have to precede its occurrence.)

Based on the Pre-tribulation Rapture position as stated above please answer the following questions:

1. If Jesus’ return was imminent (could occur at any time)
 - a. Why didn’t He say so?
 - b. Why did He bother to tell His disciples about specific future events?
 - c. Why did He caution them not to be misled?
 - d. Why did He issue specific commands to the disciples when they observed the events happening?

¹ This eschatological view is actually futuristic – pre-millennial – with a pre-tribulation rapture. It is opposed to the Church’s historic position, which is futuristic - pre-millennial – with a post-tribulation rapture. Alexander Reese outlines the Church’s historic position in a quote on the last page of this lesson.

- e. Since according to this scheme no signs are required to precede the Rapture, why did the Apostle Paul say that our gathering together to Jesus would not occur until after the apostasy and the man of lawlessness was revealed?
2. Jesus commanded His disciples to be alert.
 - a. Why?
 - b. What difference does it make if a believer is alert or not, since the rapture is a secret?
 - c. What are they to be alert for?
3. If the rapture of Christians occurs before Christ's coming why didn't Jesus or any of the apostles or prophets tell anyone or write it down?

The Commands:

1. Now learn the parable of the fig tree.
2. Recognize that He is near, right at the door.
3. Therefore be on the alert.
4. But be sure of this.
5. For this reason you be ready too.
6. Take heed, keep on the alert.
7. Therefore be on the alert.
8. Be on the alert.
9. Be on guard.
10. But keep on the alert at all times, praying.

The Lesson:

Immediately telling His disciples how He will return to earth, Jesus instructs them to learn the parable² of the after fig tree. Talk about using a parable for effect! Just hours before, the disciples had walked by a fig tree that Jesus had cursed the day before and noticed it had completely withered from the roots up in one day.

The reason Jesus cursed the fig tree was that it gave a **false sign**. The time of year was April. Normally, fig trees don't put forth their leaves until July or August and the fruit becomes ripe in October. However, with the coming of its leaves the fig tree also puts forth its fruit at the same time. So Jesus walked over to the tree to see if there was any fruit on it.³ Since there was no fruit⁴ on the tree Jesus knew it was an aberration⁵ and cursed it.

It was common knowledge in the Jewish culture that a fig tree put forth its leaves in the summer time. So it served as a practical sign to all the people that summer was near, at hand or right at the door. In the same way Jesus wants His disciples to have common knowledge concerning the time of His coming. The signs in the heavens: the sun and moon not giving their light and the stars

² A parable is used as an illustration comparing the concepts about a known subject with an unfamiliar one.

³ The fruit would have been green and hidden among the leaves so closer inspection was required.

⁴ For the tree is known by its fruit. (Matthew 12:33) John the Baptist used a similar analogy when he confronted the Pharisees and Sadducees who came to him for baptism. He told them, "Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance. The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." (Matthew 3:8 and 10)

⁵ The tree was an aberration because it did not follow the pattern that God created for the fig tree. In other words the tree was in rebellion against God and its own nature. It failed on two counts: **1**) it put forth leaves at the wrong time and **2**) it didn't produce fruit with the leaves, which provided Jesus with a two-fold witness against the tree. Therefore, it was worthy of being cursed. The cursing of the fig tree also serves as a sign and warning to hypocrites who themselves are an aberration (i.e. those who say they are Christians but do not produce the fruit of the Holy Spirit). The hypocrite's curse is that they will be assigned to a place where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 24:51)

falling from heaven are to serve as a sign, like the fig tree⁶, of His soon return. It is near, at hand or right at the door. There should be no doubt about the validity of these heavenly signs being a precursor to Christ's return, as all three of the synoptic gospels record the signs in the heavens immediately followed by the parable of the fig tree.

The issue of alertness revolves around the parable of the fig tree. Jesus knows that a person cannot be vigilant 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and He is not telling His disciples to do it either. However, He is telling them **when** to become alert. Like the fig tree, when you see the signs in the heavens **begin** to come to pass be alert, your redemption is drawing near. In fact, Jesus said that from the time that the heavenly signs begin occurring until His coming would occur within one generation.

The concept of when to become alert is reinforced by Matthew (24:37-41) when he compares the coming of the Son of Man to the days of Noah. Most Christians aren't aware that Noah was given a prophetic sign on **when** to become alert or ready to enter the Ark. Lets take a closer look at his story.

It begins with Noah's great-grandfather Enoch, the seventh generation from Adam. Enoch was a prophet according to Jude 14 and he walked with God. In his 365th year he went to God without dying.⁷ Enoch being a prophet, named his son, Methuselah. The root meaning of the name Methuselah is "his death shall bring"⁸ or some variant of that theme⁹. According to the Jewish sages Methuselah died seven days before Noah received the word of God to enter the Ark. Then he remained in the Ark seven more days before the flood began (Genesis 7:4).

Though Noah had finished building the Ark he did not have to become "alert" or "ready" until Methuselah died, which was his prophetic sign that the flood was approaching. Then came the Word of God for Noah to enter the Ark through which he and his household would be saved from the impending wrath of God to come. In like manner, Christians are to become "alert" or "ready" upon observing the heavenly signs, recognizing that God's judgment is approaching. Then the Word of God (Jesus Christ) will come to save His household from the impending wrath of God to come.

Commencing with the parable of the fig tree Jesus begins to exhort His disciples to remain alert. As He does so Jesus also weaves three other concepts together with alertness throughout his commentary:

⁶ *I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood; and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. (Revelation 6:12-13)*

⁷ We currently call that event "raptured" or "caught up to God". Enoch and Elijah are the only two people in the Scripture that did not die but were taken by God to heaven while still alive.

⁸ Sources:

Missler Chuck, *Cosmic Codes: Hidden Messages from the Edge of Eternity*, Koinonia House, 1999.

Jones, Alfred, *Dictionary of Old Testament Proper Names*, Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, MI, 1990.

Kaplan, Rabbi Aryeh, *The Living Torah*, Maznaim Publishing Corporation, Jerusalem, 1981.

Pink, Arthur W., *Gleanings in Genesis*, Moody Bible Institute, Chicago, IL, 1922.

Rosenbaum, M., and Silbermann, A., *Pentateuch with Onkelos's Translation (into Aramaic) and Rashi's Commentary*, Silbermann Family Publishers, Jerusalem, 1973.

Stedman, Ray C., *The Beginnings*, Word Books, Waco, TX, 1978.

⁹ For example, Matthew Henry says, "The signification of his name, which some think was prophetic, his father Enoch being a prophet. *Methuselah* signifies, *he dies*, or *there is a dart*, or, *a sending forth*, namely, of the deluge, which came the very year that Methuselah died".

- 1) Those who are not His disciples won't know what about to transpire.
- 2) No one will know the day and hour.
- 3) Darkness or night.

Since those who are not Jesus' disciples won't be looking for His appearing, the significance of the signs in the heaven won't have the same meaning for them.

No one will know the day or hour of Jesus' return because there are always two days and twenty-four hours existing on planet earth at any given moment. According to Hebrew tradition the judgment of men begins on the Feast of the Lord called Yom Teruah, the Day of Blowing¹⁰ (the horn). A unique property of this feast is that it is celebrated over two days¹¹ because it was based on the visible sighting of the light of the new moon of the seventh month.

According to Jesus it will be dark¹² when He comes and this is borne out through many Old Testament Scriptures concerning the Day of the Lord.

*"Behold, the **day of the LORD** is coming, cruel, with fury and burning anger, to make the land a desolation; and He will exterminate its sinners from it. **For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not flash forth their light; the sun will be dark when it rises and the moon will not shed its light.**" (Isaiah 13:9-10)*

*"For the day is near, even the **day of the LORD** is near; it will be a **day of clouds**, a time of doom for the nations." (Ezekiel 30:3)*

*"Blow a trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm on My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the **day of the LORD** is coming; surely it is near, **a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness.**" (Joel 2:1-2)*

*"For the **day of the LORD** is near in the valley of decision. **The sun and moon grow dark and the stars lose their brightness.** The LORD roars from Zion and utters His voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth tremble. **But the LORD is a refuge for His people and a stronghold to the sons of Israel.**" (Joel 3:14-16)*

*"Will not the **day of the LORD** be darkness instead of light, even gloom with no brightness in it?" (Amos 5:20)*

*Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you. For you yourselves know full well that the **day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night.** While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape. **But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief; for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober. For those who sleep do their sleeping at night,***

¹⁰ This feast day is also called: Rosh Ha Shannah (New Year's Day), Yom Hazikaron (Day of Remembrance and Yom Haddin (Day of Judgment.)

¹¹ The Jewish people call it "Yoma Arikata" or one long day.

¹² From the Scriptures we understand that Jesus will return when it is dark. It doesn't matter what time of day it is because the sun, moon and stars will not be giving off their light. Why this is happening is a matter of conjecture. It should be noted that Yom Teruah the feast of trumpets falls on the first day of a new moon when the night skies are darker in the first place.

*and those who get drunk get drunk at night. But since we are of the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation. **For God has not destined us for wrath**, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him. (1 Thessalonians 5:1-10)*

The Point Of The Lesson:

Become alert when you see the signs in the heavens.