

**Mark 13: 30; “This Generation”, Sermon # 106 in the series – “Astonished at His Teaching”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on February 9<sup>th</sup>, 2013, in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

This whole chapter of the gospel of Mark, and the parallel passages in Matthew 24 and Luke 21, are just filled with the truths of what would happen to the Jews as a result of their unbelief in regard to the truth that Jesus was, and is, their Messiah. In verse 28 the Lord Jesus parabolically refers to the nation of the Jews as a fig tree. In Luke 21: 29 it says: “Then Jesus spoke to them a parable: Look at the fig tree, and all the trees.” “When they are already budding, you see and know for yourselves that summer is now near.” “So you also, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near.” “Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all things take place.” This afternoon I would like to show you 1<sup>st</sup> of all – That the words, “this generation” have reference to the Jews in relation to the parable of the fig tree. 2<sup>nd</sup> – I would like to show you that the words “this generation” relate to the great advances of the kingdom of God.

**1<sup>st</sup> of all – The words “this generation” have reference to the Jews in relation to the parable of the fig tree.**

Look once again at the connection between verses 28 and 30. “Now learn this parable from the fig tree.” “When its branch has already become tender, and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near.” “So you also, when you see these things happening, know that it is near—at the doors!” “Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.” Jesus, by the use of this parable, is drawing our attention to the fact that “this generation” that He is referring to, is the nation of the Jews themselves. You will recall that the Lord Jesus cursed a literal fig tree over in Mark 11: 13 and 14. It says there: “Now the next day, when they had come out from Bethany, He was hungry.” “And seeing from afar a fig tree having leaves, He went to see if perhaps He would find something on it.” “When He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs.” “In response Jesus said to it, ‘Let no one eat fruit from you ever again.’ “And His disciples heard it.” Jesus was traveling from Bethany into Jerusalem, not long before His going to the cross, and He saw this fig tree afar off. He went to it to with the expectation that it would have some fruit from it. But there was none to be found. Its leaves indicated that it should, and so our Lord was displeased that it had no figs. This was just before the time of the Passover. And this fig tree having leaves but no fruit was just like the unbelieving Jews of that day. They had a profession of knowing God, but did not have any spiritual good fruit to show for all of their religiosity.

Now, if you do not know about the fig tree, you should know this; there are two seasons where fruit is born on a fig tree. The fig tree bears an early fruit which I am told is called, “taqsh”, along with the leaves. This fruit is edible. It appears about 6 weeks before the real, more substantial figs appear. I am further told that if these “taqsh” do not appear, the real figs will not appear later on either. You will only find leaves. That is why it seems, as we read this incident, that Jesus came looking for figs when it was not really the season. He actually was looking for the “first fruits in the first season”. That is the time that they appear; in late March and early April, just before the Passover week. These fruits are supposed to come to maturity just before Passover time, but the other more substantial fruit is not formed until sometime in the summer; often in August. Even so, when Christ came to His own, He could perceive no fruit, even among the leaders of the nation. Most of them were not in the house of prayer, praying that they might bear fruit to God, because they did not know God. Many would not even consider that Jesus was their Messiah, nor would they listen to His teaching, to receive it. They were like this false and useless fig tree. They would not satisfy Christ’s spiritual hunger when He came to reveal Himself to them and to teach them about their need of His grace. Instead they were full of their own opinions and traditions in relation to coming of the Messiah, and the meaning of the Scriptures. They were like a fig tree, having just leaves. And so Jesus cursed this fig tree saying, “May no one eat fruit from you ever

again.” In this regard He is speaking of unbelieving Israel in relation to their Old Covenant ecclesiastical state. He was saying that no one would ever eat fruit from that tree ever again. In Matthew 21: 19, it says, “Immediately the fig tree withered.” I trust that you can see here, that Jesus was actually, in a typical and prophetic fashion, teaching His disciples that this whole tree of Jewish false worship under the leadership of the scribes and Pharisees was now under His curse. From this point forward and forever that whole Old Testament system and practice were dead as far as bearing fruit unto God. Our Lord would wither them for their false doctrines and spiritual uselessness. Nothing good would come from any person holding to their false system of works-righteousness. Even though they had been given the oracles of God, they had not understood them, or improved upon that knowledge wisely. No fruit could be gathered from them in that state of unbelief.

But the words of our text, “Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away do not refer exclusively to the unbelieving Jews of Jesus’ time. The better interpretation of “this generation” refers to the Jews themselves as an ethnic people, composed of both unbelieving and believing people in all the generations forward until Christ’s return. The Jews as an ethnic people will not pass away till all the prophetic events mentioned in these parallel passages, are fulfilled. Let’s look at the unbelieving Jews first. Turn with me back to Luke 17, verse 20. “Now when Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, ‘The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say ‘See here!’, or ‘See there!’” “For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.” “Then He said to the disciples, ‘The days will come when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it.’” “And they will say to you, ‘Look here!’ or ‘Look there!’” “Do not go after them or follow them.” “For as the lightning that flashes out of one part under heaven shines to the other part under heaven, so also the Son of Man will be in His day.” “But first He must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.” “And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man.” Here, the word “generation” cannot simply mean all the people of that generation in time. Jesus was rejected specifically by His own ethnic people; the unbelieving Jews. So I think that you can see that it is perfectly legitimate to conclude that “this generation”, in the text that we are studying, does not simply mean the unbelieving Jews of that particular generation in the time of Christ and the apostles; it means that the race of the Jews will not pass away before all these things; the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, and the conversion of the Jews to Christ, and Christ’s 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming takes place. The Jews will have an ethnic identity as long as the world shall last. God has a role for the Jews to play, both in their unbelief and in their conversion to Christ, in relation to the forward progress of Christ’s kingdom. The word for “generation”, here in the original Greek, is genea. It can refer to either a time period lasting 40 or 50 years, or to a particular people, depending upon the context. Here in our verses I believe that “this generation” refers to the Jews as an ethnic people.

If we were to go farther on in this passage to read Luke 17, verses 27-37 we would find that they are pretty close to the same words spoken by Jesus and written down in Matthew 24: 36-44. They are words of warning concerning the suddenness of Christ’s coming in judgment. This warning could be applied either to the coming of Christ to destroy Jerusalem in 70 A.D., or to His return in His Second Coming at the end of the world. In regard to 70 A.D., the Jews as an ethnic people did not pass away in that generation of time, nor were all the things referred to in these passages completely fulfilled in that generation. Those Jews responsible for persuading Pilate to crucify Jesus said, “His blood be upon us and our children.” (Matthew 27: 25) Although the temple and the city of Jerusalem were both completely destroyed, those Jews who lived through this awful judgment were scattered among the nations and became spiritually desolate. Now let’s think about the believing Jews. The fig tree became tender for those who knew Christ, and it became spiritual summer for the apostles, who preached so successfully to the multitudes on the Day of Pentecost after Jesus ascended to heaven. But we need to understand is that God has yet a further purpose for

“this generation”, the ethnic Jews, whose branches were broken off in 70 A.D. Unbelieving Israel has yet a purpose to fulfill in God’s plan of the application of that great redemption which Christ has wrought. (See the note at the end of this sermon for B.H. Carroll’s view on this)

**Now 2ndly - I would like to show you that the words “this generation” relate to the great advances of the kingdom of God.**

“Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.” The “all these things” taking place refers to all the prophetic events related in all the previous verses in this chapter; all the events in judgment and in salvation from the time of Jesus’ ascension to the end of the world. You can see this better if you will turn over with me to Matthew 23, verses 34-39. Jesus is in the process of pronouncing woes upon the scribes and the Pharisees, calling them hypocrites and a brood of vipers. And then he says this: “Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.” “Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.”

Now I want to pause before I read verses 37-39 I want to say this. The way that Jesus said this makes it very evident that He was not simply placing the blame upon that particular generation in time of these scribes and Pharisees that He is addressing. He is talking about the implications of the sin of unbelief coming to the unbelieving Jews in all the time periods before, who would not listen to God’s word and believe it. All this unbelief would culminate in His being crucified by them. There was a national guilt, and we can even say a guilt of this ethnic people, as they were chosen by God to be His Old Covenant people. Yet they rejected their Messiah when He came to them, and even though He displayed such mighty proofs of His identity, they refused to believe Him. So political and ecclesiastical Israel was the fig tree that withered, and whose branches were broken off. Those Jews who placed their faith in Christ were the branch of the fig tree that had become tender and had put forth leaves; coming to their time of fruit-bearing in their summer at the Day of Pentecost.

Now let me read for you verses 37-39 of Matthew 23, because here we find the purpose of God to have mercy on many nations through the conversion of the unbelieving Jews, bringing them into the church as the first-fruits of the conversion of nations. “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her!” “How often I wanted to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!” “See!” “Your house is left to you desolate; for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’” Now here we find the truth of the matter. It is that there is a length of time for Israel’s desolations. Their house, meaning their ability to worship God truly, and have Him dwell with them, would be desolate until the day when they welcome the messengers of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and believe the gospel of Christ that they preach. Only God can do this great and mighty work of saving the Jews. But it is prophesied that this will happen someday.

And this is why Jesus says, after He cursed the fig tree, in Mark 11: 23 – “Have faith in God.” “For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea, and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says.” When Jesus is speaking of a mountain here, He is not speaking of His disciples being able to remove physical mountains. In the context, He is speaking of this mountain of the false Judaism of His day; the unbelieving scribes and Pharisees and rulers of the people, who opposed His kingdom’s coming and its advance. In saying all this, I wonder if perhaps there are many people who have missed the real meaning and the application of all of these verses that we have studied thus far in this chapter on prophecy? The focus of Jesus’ teaching in this entire chapter has been to answer the questions of verse 4. “Tell us, when will these things be?” (When will our land be invaded and our temple destroyed?) This was a great concern to them there in that

time. “And what will be the sign when all these things will be fulfilled?” In Matthew’s gospel it reads, “Tell us, when will these things be?” “And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?” Here in the wording of these questions and the way that Jesus answers them, we see that there was to be a near fulfillment in the time of the destruction of Jerusalem; and farther on, 2 more major fulfillments as the kingdom of God advances. Each of these fulfillments has a direct relationship to the Jews and their fig tree budding and becoming tender. The fig tree budded and had become tender in our Lord’s choosing His apostles and appointing them to build upon the foundation that He Himself would lay, in His death and resurrection. It would become a gospel summer in the days after Christ’s ascension, and all the trees of the Gentile nations would benefit.

In Luke’s gospel, Jesus speaks of not only of the withering of the Jewish fig tree in the destruction of Jerusalem, but also in verse 24, of the Jews being “led away captive into all nations and Jerusalem being trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.” The Jews as the ethnic people of God’s purpose, or what is termed by Jesus here, “this generation”, would continue on, scattered among the nations, still in their unbelief through all the generations of time which would follow; a remnant, only, being saved from 70 A.D. until the day when God will redeem them to Himself through Christ just before the Millennium begins. It is then that the prophecy which the Apostle Paul speaks of in Romans Chapter 11, verse 25-27 will be fulfilled. “For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.” “And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: “The Deliverer (or the Redeemer, as it says in Isaiah 59: 20) will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins.” This is not speaking of Christ’s going to the cross. It is speaking of His coming to the Jews to apply His great Redemption to their hearts; to turn Jacob away from ungodliness, and take away their sins. This is His application of the New Covenant grace, a special covenanting with them to take away their sins as a nation; that is a tremendous number of elect among that ethnic people, being saved.

In verses 25-28 of Luke Chapter 21, we see Jesus speaking of His 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming in power and glory at the end of the world, but yet it also appears to me that He phrases it in such a way as to take in the 2<sup>nd</sup> fulfillment of the fig tree parable as well when He says in verse 28, “When these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near.” “Then He spoke to them a parable: ‘Look at the fig tree, and all the trees.’ “When they are already budding, you see and know for yourselves that summer is now near.” “So when you see these things happening know that the kingdom of God is near.” Is He speaking of the redemption of the body at His 2<sup>nd</sup> coming, or of His saving and redeeming of the Jews in the time period just before the Millennium? Certainly He has spoken His words in such a way that they could apply to both. It is only the pouring out of God’s Spirit upon the unbelieving Jews which will bring them to the place in time where “their branch will become tender”; this great springtime for them, leading to the summer of the Millennium which will follow. What is wonderful is that the Jewish Apostles and disciples of the Early Church were the first fruits of the fig tree whose branch He had made tender. In Romans 11: 24 this generation of the Jews is described by Paul as an olive tree. He says, speaking first of the Gentiles - “For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these (Jews), who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?” The point to remember is that in all 3 of the major advances in Christ’s kingdom (Pentecost, the conversion of the Jews which will introduce the Millennium, and Christ’s Second Coming); all these will come about in relation to the Jews who are here represented as a fig tree. They are “this generation” which will not pass away until all of these things are fulfilled; both the near and the farther fulfillments of the advance of Christ’s kingdom. According to this passage in Luke the indication that the kingdom of God is near is the fig tree (the Jews) and all the trees, (that is many other kingdoms and nations of the world) becoming tender and budding. This happened at Pentecost. It will happen again in a much greater

sense when the Jews are converted to Christ; an event which will awaken the nations to also become tender and bud in their interest in the gospel. And it will happen in the greatest sense at Christ's 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming. When you really understand how great God's plans are for the Jews and for the nations, you should be able to rejoice and pray – "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Isaiah 27: 6 says this: "Those who come He shall cause to take root in Jacob; Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit."

(B.H. Carroll's observations on this in his Interpretation of the English Bible, Vol. 11, page 211, are very helpful. He says: "Dr. Broadus insists that "this generation" shall have its ordinary meaning, the average period of life for the living, thirty or forty years. If his contention be tenable, then the section answers the question, "When shall Jerusalem be destroyed," and what follows must be applied to the final advent." "But certainly the Greek phrase, e genea aute, does sometimes mean "this race" of people, i.e., here "the Jewish race." And it should be so rendered here if the context demands it." "And, in my judgment, all the context does demand it." "If we look back to the indictment (Matthew 23:31-35) it is race guilt." "If we look at the penalty and its destruction (Luke 21:24) it is race penalty." "If we look back to the great hope suggested (Matthew 23: 39) it is race hope, certainly not to be realized by that generation in the ordinary sense of the word, nor, in fact is it even yet realized." "Why then may we not render the phrase, e genea aute, this race of Jews shall not pass away, shall not be blotted out as other conquered peoples have been, but shall be preserved as a monument of wrath, as Moses foretold, until after the fullness of the Gentiles, and thus become earth's greatest monument of mercy in the way of their salvation?" "This puts our Lord in harmony with Moses (Deuteronomy 28:15-68; 30:1-10) and with Ezekiel (Ezekiel 36:21 to 37:14) and with Paul in Romans 11:1-36)." "With this interpretation all difficulty vanishes.")