

In the Things to Come-Jerusalem vs. Babylon

by Zac Poonen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of the local church and the Body of Christ in the last days, and warns against individualism and the devil's opposition to the new wineskin of the local church.

Duration: 47:14

Scripture: Malachi 4:5, Matthew 24:32, Luke 21:20, Ephesians 4:15-16, Revelation 21:10

Topics: "Second Coming", "End Times"

Description

This sermon delves into the significance of Jesus Christ's return to earth and the completion of redemption. It explores the signs mentioned in Matthew 24 and Luke 21, pointing to the fig tree as a symbol of Israel and the importance of bearing spiritual fruit. The sermon emphasizes the need for believers to be part of the Body of Christ, working together in local churches to prepare for the second coming of Christ amidst the contrasting images of Jerusalem and Babylon in the last days.

Transcript

We want to think a little bit about the coming of Jesus Christ to earth. The completion of the work of redemption that he began. Jesus said that no one knows the exact day or the hour of his return.

He said that more than once. But he also said in Matthew 24, about certain things that he mentioned, verse 33, when you see these things, you can recognize that he is near, right at the door. That means we still don't know when he's going to open the door, but we can know when he has come to the door.

When is that? And that is where he mentioned in verse 32 about the parable from the fig tree. When its branch is already tender, it puts forth its leaves. You know that summer is near.

In the Bible, the Jewish nation is referred to as a fig tree. And Christ and the church are referred to as the vine. The vine is the new covenant church, and the fig tree is the nation of Israel.

He's not talking here about the vine, he's talking about the fig tree. When Jesus, just before he came into Jerusalem on a donkey, some days before that, he saw a fig tree. And he looked at that fig tree, came near it, there was no fruit in it.

And he cursed it. And it withered up. Not immediately, it withered up the next day.

And many people have asked, why did Jesus do that? He knew it was not the season for figs. It was not anger. Jesus never had anger for such things.

But it was a parable. It was to teach his disciples, first of all, faith. If you have faith, you can curse a fig tree, it will dry up.

But it was also a picture of the nation of Israel. Just like Jesus came to that fig tree looking for fruit, he came to the nation of Israel looking for fruit. When Jesus came to earth, he came to the nation of Israel to look for fruit.

Just like at the fig tree. But what did he see in Israel? Leaves. Without fruit.

Leaves are a picture of a lot of religious activity. Without the manifestation of the fruit of the Holy Spirit. But without the fruit of the Holy Spirit becoming visible.

A lot of Christians are like that. There's no fruit in their life, but a lot of leaves. So, when Jesus cursed it, it is a picture of how God would curse the nation of Israel.

Because they rejected the Son of God and crucified Him. And then, it didn't die out immediately. And the nation of Israel also, even after they crucified Christ.

For 40 years, nothing happened. And then the Roman nation came and said, We can destroy the temple and the Jewish people were scattered all over the world. So the fig tree had died out completely.

Withered. But then Jesus said, A time will come when the fig tree will again come and start putting out its branch. There will still be no fruit.

There will be nothing spiritual in the nation of Israel. But, it's going to be religious again. And the nation will come out.

And Jesus said, When you see that, you know that He is near. So the nation of Israel came back to their land in 1948. That's about 60 years ago.

And about 19 years later, they got a hold of the land of the city of Jerusalem as well. That's about 42 years ago. So we know that something is happening now, which never happened in 2000 years.

All the other signs like famines, earthquakes, wars, that have taken place in 2000 years many times. But this fig tree putting forth its leaves happens only now. Then I want to show you another scripture.

In Luke's Gospel, chapter 21. Where, after Jesus speaks about, verse 20, about the Jerusalem being surrounded by armies. Then you know her desolation is at hand, verse 20.

And that was in 40 years after the crucifixion of Christ. And Jerusalem was surrounded by the Roman armies. And Jesus warned them, verse 21, those who are in Judea should run to the mountains then.

And then, after Jerusalem is destroyed, verse 24, the Jewish people will be led captive into all the nations of the world. They will be scattered among all peoples, even among all nations of the world. And that happened in the years 70 and 80.

And we know that the whole Jewish people is scattered over all the nations of the world. Now, generally speaking, when any people of any country go into another country, after three or four generations or a

hundred years, they become like the people of that country. I mean, if Dutch people or Norwegian people go to America after a hundred years, they become Americans.

They don't have much more loyalty to their own homeland from which their fathers came four generations early. But not the Jewish people. Not only a hundred years, even after 1900 years, wherever they went, they say, our nation is Israel.

Generation after generation after generation, they would say, next year in Jerusalem. And so they were scattered in all the nations of the world. And Jesus said in verse 24, Jerusalem will be ruled by the Gentiles until a particular time.

That time is when the times of the Gentiles are over. The times of the Gentiles began on the day of Pentecost. When God rejected the Jewish nation and started with all the other people in the world.

And now there's no Jew or Gentile, all need to be saved by Christ. Jerusalem was ruled by the Romans, even when Jesus was there. And he said it will continue to be ruled for centuries.

Until a time near the end when the Gentiles will no longer rule Jerusalem. And that happened in 1967. Here it is written in the Bible, 1900 years before that.

So that is one of the signs that we are very close to the end. And in verse 25 it speaks about these tsunami waves coming and hitting in the last days. And men's hearts will faint for fear.

And when these things happen, verse 28, we must straighten up, lift up our heads, because our redemption is drawing near. And he said in verse 32, This generation will not pass until all things are fulfilled. For which I say now, this generation will not pass until all things are fulfilled.

And that means that the generation that will see these things happen, will not pass until the end has come. We do not know exactly how long a generation lasts in the eyes of Jesus. Is it 70 years? I don't know.

But even if it is 70 years, we are pretty close to the end. From the time that Jerusalem came back in 1967. It doesn't mean it will be a whole generation, it could be any time.

But one of the things that is going to happen in the last days is, It says in Zechariah chapter 14 and verse 2, Again it is speaking about what will happen just before the second coming of Christ. Because in verse 4 it says about Jesus coming back and standing on the Mount of Olives. And before that, all the nations will be gathered against Jerusalem to battle.

So there is a lot of mention of Jerusalem in relation to the last days. Now there was not much talk about Jerusalem before the 20th century. Nobody bothered about Jerusalem.

But over the last few years, There is so much controversy and fighting and terrorism and talk about war and all around Jerusalem. And there is another place mentioned in relation to the last days. There are only two places.

One is Jerusalem. The second is mentioned in Revelation chapter 9. Again it is in relation to war. It speaks in verse 13 about the sixth angel sounding.

There are seven angels blowing trumpets. And the last trumpet is the coming of Christ. This is the sixth one, just before the last one.

And when the sixth angel blows the trumpet, There are four demons who are bound near the great river Euphrates who will be released. And there will be war. And the armies will be so huge, verse 16, they are numbered 200 million.

Now Euphrates is a river that flows right through the middle of Iraq. So, the Euphrates is a river that flows right through the middle of Iraq. And the word of God says that in the last days there is going to be war around Iraq.

And it is mentioned a second time in chapter 16 and verse 12. And the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the river and the Euphrates and its water was dried up. The way might be prepared for the kings of the east.

So, all these verses indicate that in the last days there are two places that are going to be the center of warfare. Jerusalem and Iraq. Now, Iraq was not the center of warfare even about ten years ago.

That's happened only in the last four or five years. So, we see how things that were written in the scriptures 2000 years ago are being fulfilled before our eyes. How did John, sitting in the isle of Patmos, know about all these things that are going to happen in the 21st century? God revealed it to him.

And we are privileged to be in this time. There are two generations that are very privileged. One is the generation that received Christ to earth the first time.

And the other is the generation that is going to receive Christ a second time. We missed the first time. But thank God we are born and we can be here for the second visit.

And if this is true, and I believe it is, what sort of people should you be in these days? What are you going to live for? I decided nearly 50 years ago what I was going to live for. I left my job in the navy about one year before Jerusalem was recaptured by the Israelis. In 1966, God took me out of my service to preach his gospel.

In 1967, Israel occupied Jerusalem. And I studied that situation very carefully at that time. And I felt I was tremendously honored to be able to serve God and preach his word in this time.

And I felt that this is the greatest work I can do for God. To prepare people for the second coming of Christ. Do you remember what John the Baptist did? He came with a message preparing people for the first coming of Christ.

But they didn't accept him. We read in Malachi chapter 4, verse 5, I am going to send you Elijah, the prophet, before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. Now, the great and terrible day of the Lord was not the first coming of Christ.

The great and terrible day of the Lord is the second coming of Christ. Because he didn't come as a judge in the first visit, he came as a savior. But before his second coming, he said, I'm going to send Elijah.

In Matthew chapter 11, Jesus said concerning John the Baptist, You know, before John the Baptist was born, the angel Gabriel came to Zacharias, his father, and said, your son is going to go in the spirit of Elijah, before the Lord. So that was the plan. John the Baptist would come with the fiery spirit of Elijah, like Elijah turned people to God.

John the Baptist would come in that spirit. But Jesus said here, Matthew 11, verse 14, If you accept him, then he is Elijah, which was prophesied to come. In English it says something different than in Dutch.

If you accept him, then he is Elijah, which was prophesied to come. If you accept him. But we know that the Jewish people did not accept John the Baptist.

They rejected him and killed him. And therefore he was not the Elijah who was supposed to come. Elijah Malachi prophesied.

Therefore, that prophecy in Malachi has still got to be fulfilled. God will send Elijah, or the spirit of Elijah, before the second coming of Christ. But there is a difference between the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament.

The Old Testament prophets were individuals. Jeremiah, Isaiah, Elijah, all individuals. But in this New Testament, in the New Covenant age, God is not working through individuals.

It's very important to understand that. God is not working through outstanding men, like Elijah and Jeremiah. He is working through one new man, called the Body of Christ.

That's why it's so important to understand the Body of Christ in the last days. The day of great individual ministries was up to John the Baptist. After the day of Pentecost, it's not the day for great individual ministries.

There are apostles, there are prophets, there are evangelists, teachers. But they're all part of a body. Christ is the head.

So, the ministry in the last days and throughout these years, in the New Covenant age, is through the Body of Christ. So, who is going to be the Elijah of the last days? The Body of Christ. The last days church is going to go in the spirit of Elijah.

Who is that? It's you. And me. We have to be a local expression of the Body of Christ in different parts of the world.

It's very easy to say, I'm part of the worldwide Body of Christ. Well, the worldwide Body of Christ, most of them have already gone to heaven in the last 2000 years. And they're scattered all over the world.

How can we see the worldwide Body of Christ? We have to be a local expression of that worldwide Body of Christ. And the devil will fight that tooth and nail to prevent such a local expression of the Body of Christ. And the devil fights to the extreme to prevent that there will be a local expression of the Body of Christ.

Listen to this. The devil makes people individualistic and that they don't attract anything from the corporate, the collective Body of Christ. Everybody is on his own.

They don't want to pay the price to deny themselves to become a part of a body. You know, the parts of this body are limited in one way. This little finger, supposing it wants to take a private walk somewhere, it can't go, it's part of the body, it's stuck here.

It's limited. And when this hand moves, this finger has to move. And the finger can't say, hey, I'd like to stay here, I'm not going to go and move the hand.

My finger can't say, hey, I'd like to stay here, I'm not going to go and move the hand. No, you have to move if you're a part of the hand. There is limitation when you become a part of the body.

You have to move with the other members of the body whom God has placed you with. This finger does not have to move when this hand is moving. Because this finger is part of the right hand, not part of the left hand.

So it doesn't have to move with the left foot or the right foot or the left hand. But when the right hand moves, it has to move with it. Because it's part of that body.

So we can say this right hand is like a little expression of a local part of the body of Christ. Does it mean this finger is a slave only of this hand? This little finger can move on its own, by itself, directly by a command from the head. This finger has got two relationships.

One, it is directly connected to the head. The head says bend, it'll bend. The head says straighten up, it'll straighten up.

That's how you must be. That's how you must be. That you have a direct connection with Christ, whatever he tells you, you can do.

But at the same time, when the head tells the upper arm, lift yourself up, the finger can't say, hey, I never got any signal from the head, I'm not going to move with you. No, you're a part of this arm, you've got to move, whether you like it or not. This is what many people don't like.

I want to be only in connection with the head. I don't want to have any local authority over me. Imagine if your body was like that.

You see it in the medical college anatomy laboratories. Finger here. One toe there.

One eye here. One leg here. One cut out part of a stomach over there.

And the brain somewhere else. Is that a body? Many churches are like that. All individualists.

No connection, no working together. And the devil is happy with all these churches that are like anatomy laboratories. Because he knows that they can never have any power over him.

When I left my job in 1966, for nine years, I traveled all over India, and a number of other countries also, preaching in deeper life conventions. In many places. There were huge crowds that would listen.

But they were not expressions of the body of Christ. They would come together for two days and clap their hands and sing and listen. And they would disappear and never see each other for one year and come back again for the next year's conference.

And nothing could be built. They were just visitors. They liked to hear good messages.

They didn't disturb the devil. And then I studied the New Testament. I read in the Acts of the Apostles.

Paul didn't go around speaking at deeper life conventions. He went and planted local churches everywhere. And he wrote letters to the local churches.

He appointed elders. And he was an elder to the elders. And in every place there was a local expression of the body of Christ.

And you go to the last book of the Bible, there again you find these local expressions of the body of Christ. They are called seven lampstands. And the head of the church was in the middle.

It was not a denomination. Denomination is in the Jewish system where there was one lampstand with seven branches. The Jews called it their menorah, the lampstand.

One lampstand with seven branches. Because the Jews were like a denomination. With twelve tribes like twelve branches.

With the central headquarters in Jerusalem and a high priest. But in Revelation chapter one it is not one lampstand with seven branches. They were all local churches.

Each having a direct connection with the head. That is the new covenant church. With local elders.

With apostles who appointed the elders. Who were like spiritual fathers. And that is going to be the last days Elijah in different places.

I see that very clearly. So after nine years of going around like this, in 1975 I quit all that ministry. God filled me with the Holy Spirit.

And from that time I decided to build local churches. Just like the acts of the apostles. I wanted a New Testament pattern.

And I saw that the devil opposed that tremendously. He didn't oppose me going around preaching in deeper life conventions. But the moment I started building local churches, all my popularity disappeared.

And attacks came from all sides. Then I knew I'm on the right track. When the devil attacks you, you can be pretty sure you're on the right track.

If the devil leaves you alone, that's an insult. He says he doesn't care for you. Does the devil leave you alone? Then he probably feels you're no threat to his kingdom.

I want to be a threat to the devil's kingdom all the time. That should be your goal too. If you read the New Testament and the acts of the apostles, you never see a denomination in the acts of the apostles.

That is the work of man. The New Testament church is not like the Old Testament congregation. Jesus said this new wine must be poured into a new wineskin.

He said if you take the new wine and pour it into the old wineskin, the wineskin will tear and the new wine will be wasted. A lot of people like to have the new wine, which is the life of Christ. You go to different places and talk about the life of Jesus, overcoming life, the love of Christ, the purity of Christ.

Oh, people love to hear that. But then you go to the next step and you say this wine needs a new wineskin. Then the problems begin.

People don't want the new wineskin. Because it disturbs existing church traditions. To try and come back to the pattern in the acts of the apostles, if you ever try to do it, you'll find it's one of the biggest battles of all.

Because to have the new wine is your own individual business. You yourself can live as an individual Christian and seek the life of Christ. But the new wineskin of the local church you can't do alone.

You need to do it with others. With others of like mind who want to come together and function as a body and function just like the human body and function as a human being. Where we have to yield to one another and build fellowship with one another and that's what the devil opposes.

In Ephesians chapter 4 it speaks about two things that help us to grow. Grow up. In Ephesians 4 verse 15 it speaks about growing up to the head which is Christ.

And in Ephesians 4 verse 16 it speaks about the growth of the body by building itself up in love. There's an individual growing up to the head. Which we all need.

But there is also along with that a growing up along with the body together with other members of the body. And for that growth it says the whole body has to be fitted and held together verse 16. Every joint has to supply something and each individual part must work properly then the body grows.

Now it says about joints here. Like an elbow. So now I want to tell you something.

The biggest thing here in the Christian church is these joints. Do you know how many joints there are in the hand? There's one in the shoulder. There's a second one in the elbow.

A third one in the wrist. And there's a fourth one near the thumb. And a fifth one in the thumb.

And in this finger six, seven, eight. Nine, ten, eleven. Twelve, thirteen, fourteen.

Fifteen, sixteen, seventeen. Seventeen joints in just this one hand. It's not enough to have a strong upper arm and a strong lower arm.

Supposing I had a strong upper arm and a strong lower arm and the joint doesn't work. What could I do? Many things I can't do. Supposing these joints in my fingers don't work.

I can't hold anything. It'll be just straight. Supposing you have a strong brother and upper arm and a strong brother like the lower arm but they can't fellowship with each other.

They can't work together. It'll be like this. They can't do anything.

That's the trouble in the body of Christ today. Strong brothers. Zealous brothers.

They can only work alone. They can never work with others. Isn't it wonderful if you have seventeen people all working together? And the wonderful thing is there's no noise.

If there's noise means arthritis, some problem. There's a lot of arthritis in the body of Christ. Anytime people start working together there's noise and sound and crackling sounds and all kinds of things.

That's the problem today. I have worked with building churches now for 34 years. And I have the personal responsibility for about 40, 50 churches.

And I have seen the problems there are. But I know Jesus said, I will build my church and the gates of hell will never prevail against me. He's not building individuals.

He's building the church. If you can't work along with others and be a part of a local church all your deeper life and holiness is a deception. Now let me conclude by turning to Revelation.

In chapter 21 you see finally what this body of Christ looks like. Chapter 21, verse 10. I was in the spirit in a great high mountain and I saw the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God.

The church of Jesus Christ is not coming from earth to heaven it's coming from heaven. Because the church is a heavenly body. The Bible says we were raised up with Christ and seated with Christ in the heavenly places.

The true church of Jesus Christ is mind is set on the things above. If your mind is set on the things of earth you cannot be part of this body. It comes from heaven with the glory of God.

In contrast to that you see in chapter 17 of another church called Babylon and that doesn't come from heaven. That is on the earth. And it mixes around with the political leaders on the earth.

And in chapter 18 you read about it mixing up with all the businesses of the earth. As we approach the end of time we will see this huge structure called Babylon being built. Christians who are involved with political leaders.

Christians who are involved with business and making money. And then there will be the true church Jerusalem also being built. Who are heavenly minded.

Who are seeking the kingdom of God first. And the things that are above. All of us if you are Christians are being caught up in one of these two movements.

Babylon will be destroyed. Jerusalem will remain with the glory of God forever. Jerusalem will stand in the spirit of Elijah and prepare people for the coming of Christ.

I decided I want to be a part of that Jerusalem. A pure virgin for Christ. Virgin means not polluted by the things of the world.

Babylon is a harlot. Polluted by the things of the world. Let's pray.

I want you to think about what you heard today. Lord we pray that you will apply the truths we have heard in these days to our lives. And help us to live for the things that are eternal.

And bring back to our mind all that we heard in these days. We pray in Jesus name. Amen.

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