

Title: “My Promises are True”

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Luke 21:29-31

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Service Readings: Mal 4:1-6, 2 Thess. 3:1-13, **Luke 21:5-36**

We rest in the certainty of the saving work of Jesus.

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

The ESV translation of today’s passage is over 700 words; 31 verses. It is a long passage with quite a lot packed into it. Jesus foretells the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem: “there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.” He foretells the persecution of the Christians: “they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name’s sake.” He foretells the destruction of Jerusalem:

²⁰ “But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. ²¹ Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those who are inside the city depart, and let not those who are out in the country enter it, ²² for these are days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written. ²³ Alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! For there will be great distress upon the earth and wrath against this people. ²⁴ They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

And then, in seemingly the same breath, he broadens his prophecies and foretells his second coming:

²⁵ “And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, ²⁶ people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ²⁷ And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

All of this, in a single passage, a single conversation, and it is overwhelming to us even though we have the advantage of hindsight! Could you imagine how it must have been received in the moment? How overwhelming it must have been? And then, as if there was any doubt of their fear, he adds to all of this a parable of the fig tree:

“Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. ³⁰ As soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near. ³¹ So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near.

Would you ever doubt that summer is near if you saw the fig tree bloom? The question almost goes unnoticed, lost in the sea of other, more invigorating passages. He has been talking about the

destruction of the temple, the destruction of the city, and the persecution of his followers. He has been talking about the end of time. Do the disciples even *need* this parable to underscore the certainty of Jesus' predictions? Do we? It almost seems unimportant, almost an aside. But make no mistake, this seemingly second thought is packed with just as much meaning as all of the other verses, maybe even more. For packed within these three simple sentences is something so profound, so challenging, that it is worth the focus for this morning. Let's listen to them one more time and then let's dig:

“Look at the fig tree, and all the trees.”³⁰ As soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near.³¹ So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near.

The first layer of meaning is easy: Jesus teaches that all of his prophecies are as true as a fig tree pointing to the introduction of summer. How impossible it would be, for a fig tree to bloom as winter approaches. And, although we could stay here, let's keep digging.

The next layer addresses how he could know this future with such confidence. What mere man could foretell the future in such detail and with such confidence? That's a rhetorical question, of course! No man could be this certain of the future. But Jesus is not just a man but God himself, and we could spend our remaining time here as well, but let's keep digging one more time.

It is here, at this layer that I want to focus. It is here at this layer that provides such a rich context to the rest of the gospel passage that we read and where I think I can support my claim that these verses are as crucial, as critical, and as noteworthy as the passages that record his predictions. For in this layer we find the crushing weight of our own sins, the helplessness of the situation we find ourselves in, and the destination that awaits us. But also at this layer we find the release of that crushing weight, the hopefulness of our situation, and the true destination that awaits us in Christ. This is the layer where the pressure of the Law meets the alleviation of the Gospel and where the good news of Jesus wins.

For at this layer what Jesus is teaching is, in a word, certainty. Certainty of creation's future, but also certainty of man's judgement. The God of the universe is giving us a peek at the cards that he holds. He is letting us in on how it will all play out. And unlike any other card game, this one will most certainly follow that which God has foretold. There is no question that it will go any other way.

But he is also teaching that there is another certainty to consider – that of man's judgement. He warns his hearers that they will most certainly stand before God in judgement on this final day. This is where we begin to feel the weight of this certainty. Could I, right now, stand before God, or am I weighed down with the anxieties of life? What about you? Are you *ready* to be judged? You see, if we stop here, if we don't consider Jesus' role in our answer, then we will be crushed because there is no one who, alone, *can* stand before God in judgement. We must feel the weight of this reality, even for but the briefest of moments before we continue on with yet another consideration of certainty that is contained within. And that is, of course, Jesus.

For we know with certainty that in God's infinite mercy and grace, he sent Jesus into the world to be the perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world and to atone for them. And there is no question for us that he accomplished this, for we have an empty grave as proof. Our sins are forgiven, the crushing weight has been lifted, and through faith in this work, we can stand before God on that day of judgement and be confident that he will see us through Christ's work and we will be welcomed into his presence for all eternity.

But there is yet one final certainty that is hiding within the analogy of the fig tree, and that is the certainty of how we can apply this to our lives, today. While we joyfully wait for this final day, we still live in this world. And it is a world of pain, a world of suffering, and a world of sin. So what does Jesus teach us in this passage about *all that*? He tells us that we can also rely on the certainty of our salvation that he won for us. We can place all of our trust, all of our faith in what he has done. He promises that when we stand before God Almighty, he will view us as perfect because he will see us through Jesus. This is what we are promised.

But he does more than just promise, he *proves* to us that we can have confidence in it. In other areas of scripture he says:

As I walk on this earthy, I will bring forgiveness of sins to man, but you will know when I also heal his physical ailments, that my promises are true.

I will be put to death. But when I rise you will know that my promises are true.

I have come to save your life. And when I come back and bring the fullness of my kingdom... then you will know that my promises are true.

You will see that what I have told you will come to pass. But take comfort for when these things happen you can look back and know that my promises are true.

I have promised to never leave you nor forsake you. I have promised to guide you and protect you. I have promised to send the Holy Spirit to you. "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world!" And you can daily carry your cross because you know that my promises are true.

You see, in every situation we can rest in the promise that it has meaning. We can rest in the promise that it has an end. And we can rest in the promise that Jesus will return and take us home.

"Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. ³⁰ As soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near. ³¹ So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near.

And when Jesus returns, all will be made right. This promise is most certainly true.

Let us pray.

Everlasting father, we face so many challenges in this world. And sometimes they seem insurmountable. But we know that you are with us, that you are guiding and directing all creation,

and that you will one day welcome us back home where we will live with you forever. Continue to strengthen us in faith as we await that day. In your name we pray. Amen.