

# 36 PARABLES

## AMBER BIBLE STUDY

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**Film:** *Tractor Safety Tips*

**Parable:** *The Fig Tree*

**Scripture:** *Matthew 24:30-33*

### Interpreting *Tractor Safety Tips*

Most of us fail to read the manual when we acquire a new toy. We want to start playing immediately. In this film, the owner of the new tractor is no exception. Because of his drowsiness, he decides to skip the instructions and misses the tractor safety warnings. The result of his irresponsible impatience is disastrous. Double vision causes him to smack his head on a tree branch. He passes out only to awaken to his new toy bursting into flames as it collides (unmanned) with a propane tank. If only he had heeded the manual's warnings.

So it is with us. In an effort to race forward to the "end" (where Jesus sets up his glorious Kingdom), we overlook his manual warnings that calamities must come first. This news, on the surface, is discouraging...but when you look deeper, it needn't be. These things tell us that summer is at hand. Luke's Gospel puts it this way: "So when all these things begin to happen, stand straight and look up, for your salvation is near!" (21:28)

### Discussion Questions

1. Why are we so prone to skip the instructions?
2. Have you ever experienced disaster because you failed to read or follow the instructions?
3. In what ways do we get caught off guard by current events?

### Background

In Matthew 24 Jesus gives a laundry list of warning signs (things that must happen before the end). Failure to obey these warnings, according to Jesus, is akin to missing out on the obvious signs of summer. In Israel, the fig tree was well known as the most accurate barometer of summer's arrival—it withholds its blossom until the final freeze of spring has passed. Any farmer worth his salt knew that you couldn't reliably proceed with the business of summer until the fig tree signaled the season's arrival.

In the same way Jesus warned his followers that calamities such as false messiahs (vv. 4-5), wars and rumors of wars (v. 6), famines and earthquakes (v. 7), and persecution (vv. 9-10) might cause anxiety in unobservant disciples. Jesus wanted those who fear the destruction of winter to see such calamities as fig tree-like signs that summer (i.e., the end of time and the establishment of God's Kingdom) is imminent.

### Discussion Questions

1. Why does Jesus use the fig tree as his object lesson in this parable?
2. Why do people become discouraged by life's calamities?
3. What happens to believers who fail to discern the "signs"?

As you reflect on the parable and the video, consider that Jesus told these parables so that we could learn truth in the midst of our everyday lives. Because he reveals himself through common experiences, and we should be able to find Jesus in the most unlikely places. Christ can "show up" while we're sitting in front of our computers at work, cooking dinner, or driving in traffic. It's great to learn during the big moments of our lives, but Christ clearly notes that learning about his love, his grace, and his mercy can be experienced in the most ordinary circumstances of our lives as well.