

THIS GOSPEL WILL BE PREACHED TO ALL NATIONS

Matthew 24:1-22

Key Verse: 24:14

“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”

Many books begin, “Once upon a time,” or “In the beginning,” and they finish, “The End.” As there is a beginning, so there is an end. There is a beginning to the semester, and there is an end to the semester. In the Bible, we find the ultimate beginning and end. God began all things (Gn 1:1). And God will end this present age. It will not end through rogue terrorists with black market nukes. It will not end through the environmental blunders of big business. It will end when God decides it will end. The gospel will be preached to all nations. Then the end will come. In light of this truth, Jesus tells us how to live. We must watch out for false Christs. We must stand firm in our faith and preach the gospel. We must flee the corruption of the world and live a holy, prayerful life.

First, watch out that no one deceives you (1-8).

As Jesus left the temple and was walking away, his heart was broken with grief over the failure of God’s chosen people. On the other hand, Jesus’ disciples were very excited, looking at the temple buildings. These buildings were made of large white marble stones, covered with plates of pure gold. They shone like dazzling jewels in the sunlight. This temple had been built by King Herod at great cost, taking decades. It symbolized the cultural and religious life of the Jews. It gave the disciples a sense of national pride and security.

Look at verse 2. ““Do you see all these things?” he asked. ‘I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.’” To Jesus, the dazzling buildings were nothing. Jesus wanted his disciples to see through the culture of their times and to understand the mind of God. God would bring judgment on the nation. It would be so devastating that not one stone would be left on another. Indeed, this happened in 70 A.D. when the Roman General Titus invaded Jerusalem and completely destroyed the temple buildings. The Internet, space travel, nuclear technology, and genetic engineering impress our minds and seem to offer security and hope. Yet it is false. Neither these things nor religious symbols can save us at the time of God’s judgment. This present earth will someday be destroyed by fire (2 Pe 3:10). At that time the only thing that matters is our relationship with God.

The disciples must have been in a quiet shock as they crossed the Kidron Valley and climbed the Mount of Olives. Then they asked Jesus privately, “Tell us, when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” (3) To the Jews, the end of the age meant “the day of the Lord”—the day God would intervene in history.

Look at verses 4-5. “Jesus answered, ‘Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, “I am the Christ,” and will deceive many.’” Jesus first warned against false Christs. False Christs can be people who falsely promise security, or ideologies and systems that falsely promise a utopia. Communism promised the best possible life, with the motto, “From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs.” Many died trying to actualize it. But it proved bankrupt in every way. Some people look to America as a kind of savior country because of democracy, freedom, money, military power, and so on. But America is full of unsolvable problems and miserable people. Some postmodern young people turn to peers for security. Can a fellow teenager be a savior? Some young American women fall in love with sweet-talking foreign men and marry them. Later they find out that their husbands really wanted American citizenship. Some young men will do anything for money, thinking it will give them security and happiness through a hedonistic life. They become easy prey for the devil, like the monkey who grabs a banana in a jar and won’t let go until the hunter comes and captures him. We must watch out for false Christs. Only Jesus is our Christ. Jesus knows the end from the beginning (Isa 46:10). Jesus guides us with truth for salvation. We must trust Jesus alone.

Jesus teaches us to overcome fear by faith in God’s sovereignty. Look at verse 6. “You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come.” We hear of wars and rumors of war in Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, and North Korea. Sometimes, greedy weapons dealers seem to run the world. Sometimes cruel terrorists seem to be in charge. If we think so, we become vulnerable to fear and

have many nightmares. But Jesus says, "...see to it that you are not alarmed." We must overcome fear by faith in God. God is in control of these things. There is a divine purpose in them. And "the end" will come in God's time. There are also famines and earthquakes (7), even in beautiful Hawaii. All kinds of calamities also serve God's purpose and are under God's control.

Jesus teaches us that sufferings are birth pains. Look at verse 8. "All these are the beginning of birth pains." Birth pains are not mere dreadful events, but meaningful sufferings that result in new life. On December 26, 2004, a tsunami struck southeast Asia. Hardest hit was Banda Aceh, Indonesia. Muslims had been trying to make this a Muslim state for five years, cutting it off from the outside world. According to some reports, they burned Christian churches and martyred pastors right after their Christmas service. Then the tsunami struck—thousands died; villages disappeared. Many Christian relief agencies came to help. After a year, local people began to say, "Muslim leaders told us we were being punished, and did nothing. But Christians have shown us God's love." Many opened their hearts to the gospel. In God, catastrophic events are opportunities to reveal God's love. They are also reminders that our real hope is in heaven (Isa 66:22; 2 Pe 3:13; Rev 21:1). As birth pains precede a new life, wars and troubles precede the new heavens and the new earth, which are wonderful beyond imagination. There are no tears, sorrows or pains, and there is no death. It is God's dwelling place (Rev 21:3-4). Isaiah 65:17 says, "Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind." All sorrows and miseries will be completely forgotten and will never come to mind again. There will be true joy and peace and love in the presence of Christ forever. Our momentary troubles are birth pains through which God brings a glorious new age.

Second, stand firm and preach the gospel (9-14).

Most leaders tell their followers only positives. But Jesus spoke the truth about persecution to come. Look at verse 9. "Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me." The persecution of Christians was begun by Jewish authorities, and continued through the Roman government. In 64 A.D., Emperor Nero falsely accused Christians for setting fire to Rome, and as a result many were martyred publicly. Later, there was a systematic persecution of Christians under Emperor Diocletian. Christians were hated and killed just because they were Christians. This has continued to our time as well—in China, and many other places. There is also persecution in the USA, through media, education, science and the law.

Look at verses 10-11. "At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people." Persecution tests the love and commitment of Jesus' people. Many suddenly turn away from the faith when it becomes costly. Some remove their "WWJD" bracelets with a feeling of shame. Those who betray the faith become bitter, even to the point of hating others. Then they destroy themselves and others. During times of persecution, many false prophets appear. They teach a compromising message that avoids the cross and persecution. Their church buildings are packed, but they are leading people to destruction.

Look at verse 12. "Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold..." It is not easy to love others in a wicked environment. Wicked people make use of Christian love for their own benefit and hurt those who love them. Some of us have loved young people who turned out to be selfish pragmatists, and even enemies of the gospel. One shepherd sacrificed his family life to help a desperate young man. This young man received all the love and attention gladly and restored his spirit and ambition. However, when a young woman appealed to his romantic inclination, he ran off with her making many false charges against his shepherd and others. This wounds our hearts. We can understand why love grows cold. But it does not have to.

Look at verse 13. "...but he who stands firm to the end will be saved." To "stand firm to the end," means to stand firm in God's love until his kingdom comes. It is to remain in the love of God no matter what happens. Actually, the one who suffers most because of the wicked world is our Creator God. God grieves over it. Yet God's love never fails. God so loved the world that he sent his one and only Son Jesus to us. Jesus was treated like a criminal even though he was completely innocent and good. Jesus was mocked, spit on, flogged and nailed to a cross. It was for our sins. On the cross, Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Lk 23:34a) God loves each one of us at the cost of his only Son's blood. Though people betray and wound us, God's love heals our sorrows and pains. God's love satisfies our souls and gives us true joy and peace. God's love enables us to love

God and to love others fervently. When we stand firm in God's love we can be happy and victorious even in the midst of wickedness. Jesus promises that he who stands firm to the end will be saved.

Look at verse 14. "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." The word "And" connects those who stand firm in God's love to God's world salvation plan. God uses the saved to save others. "The gospel of the kingdom" refers to God's reign in people's lives. God's love drives out the power of sin and death and brings joy and peace to our hearts. Those who live in God's love become a testimony to the world that God is living and that God loves people of all nations. This does not mean that everyone will be saved. Each person must decide to accept God's love. But God will make his love known in a meaningful way to all nations. Then the end will come.

In a world gone crazy, we must see what God is doing. God is carrying out his world salvation work without fail to the ends of the earth. We must participate. So we pray to send 100,000 missionaries to 233 nations by 2041. We pray for our missionaries in Muslim countries, and for North Korea, and for all nations. We pray for a fruitful fall semester in Chicago that will produce future missionaries. God's heart burns for all nations. They must hear the gospel. Then the end will come.

Sadly, many young people live without vision. They have concluded that life is futile. They would rather live in virtual reality than the real world. But there is a real vision and a real hope. God wants to proclaim the gospel to the whole world. God wants to use us for this great purpose. Missionaries are needed, short-term and permanent. Bible translators are needed. One-to-one Bible teachers are needed. We find real meaning in God. We have a great vision in God. Let's accept this great vision and offer ourselves for God's glorious purpose.

Third, flee from corruption and pray (15-22).

Jesus finally gives the definitive sign of the end of the age and tells his disciples what to do when they see it. Look at verses 15-16. "So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand—then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains." Spiritual corruption is a sign of the end of the age. We must flee from it. The ordination of homosexual priests may be a modern example. When we see these things happening, we must flee American culture. We cannot flee to Canada, because the situation may be worse there. In truth, to flee has a spiritual meaning. We must flee to a quiet place to pray and listen to God's word. God's word of promise gives us true freedom from the corruption of the world (2 Pe 1:4). In order to flee, we may have to leave behind our plasma TVs, music cds, or designer jackets (17-18). In addition, we must pray (20). God hears and answers our prayers. God intervenes for us in the midst of terrible difficulty to deliver us from evil. God even has mercy on unbelieving people for the sake of his elect, and shortens the time of terrible distress (22).

In this passage Jesus teaches us that there is an end to this present age. Jesus promises that when we stand firm to the end, we will be saved. Jesus wants to use us to preach the gospel to the whole world and to save people of all nations. This gives us direction, vision and hope. But let's remember to watch out for false Christs. Let's stand firm in God's love no matter what happens and preach the good news to all nations. Then we will have final victory with our Lord Jesus Christ.