

“THIS GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM WILL BE PREACHED”

Matthew 24:1-51

Key Verses 13-14

“...but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. 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.”

Today we begin a 2-chapter 2-part study of the last of 5 Major Discourses of Jesus to his disciples in Matthew’s gospel. Let’s remember the others briefly:

- (1) The Sermon on the Mount (Ch.5-7)
- (2) Missionary Principles (Ch.10)
- (3) Parables of the Kingdom (Ch.13)
- (4) Teachings About Christian Community (Ch.18)
- (5) The Olivet Discourse (Ch.24-25)

Today we study part one of the Olivet Discourse, so-called because Jesus spoke it overlooking Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives. The main theme is Jesus’ return and the attitude his followers must have until he returns. Our hope is largely what determines our attitude, our lifestyle, and our practical investments of time, money, and effort. Human history sometimes seems to be headed for disaster and self-destruction. But Jesus tells us there is glory in the future for all who stand firm and who are ready. May we live with this conviction as his elect.

I. What Should We Do During Birth Pains? (1-29)

Let’s recall this is the last week of Jesus’ life on earth, and he knew it. He entered into Jerusalem on a donkey. He drove out the buyers and sellers from the temple courts. His authority was questioned. Matthew, Mark and Luke all say Jesus answered and then told the Parable of the Tenants, which prophesied their rejection and murder of Jesus. Matthew also added two other parables: the Parable of the Two Sons and the Parable of the Wedding Banquet. Then Jesus was barraged with critical questions, which Jesus answered and then asked, **“Whose son is the Messiah?”** Matthew then recorded a long, heart-breaking rebuke from Jesus toward the Pharisees and teachers of the law. Now, as they left the temple, Jesus’ disciples called his attention to its buildings.

“Do you see all these things?” Jesus asked. **“Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.”** These were shocking words to the disciples. So as Jesus sat on the Mount of Olives, overlooking Jerusalem, his disciples asked him privately. **“Tell us, when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”** Jesus answered them in reverse order: speaking first of signs to come and then

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about when. Jesus spoke of things that would happen before he returned, which can be categorized in four areas:

- (1) False prophets and false teachers (4-5; 11; 23-24).
- (2) Global calamities and disasters (6-8).
- (3) Persecutions and betrayals (9-12).
- (4) Defiant acts that mock God’s holiness (15).

Let’s consider these briefly.

First, False prophets and false teachers. Jesus mentions these kinds of people three times in his prophetic words. Jesus said in verses 4-5, **“Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Messiah,’ and will deceive many.”** False Messiahs claim a way of peace and salvation other than Jesus Christ. We call such people “antichrists,” which can mean “against Christ” but can also mean “in the place of Christ,” that is, a substitute for Christ. This has been the devil’s tactic since the Garden of Eden: he presents an alternative way of fulfillment and happiness, which is contrary to God’s revealed way through the prophets in his holy word, the Bible. The devil’s intention is to deceive and lead people astray, away from God and the way of salvation. The devil promises salvation, but actually leads people to destruction. Jesus said the way to destruction is wide and broad and many people are on it, but the road to life is narrow and small and only a few find it (Mt 7:13-14).

Again, look at verse 24. **“For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.”** False prophets can even perform miracles, but their message does not agree with the Bible: the words of Jesus and the apostles of Christ. This is the same reason Apostle Paul warned that we should not listen even to angels that preach another gospel, for Satan can masquerade as an angel of light (Gal 1:8; 2Co 11:13-15). There are false prophets and false teachers all over the world. We must cling to the Bible and the Jesus of the Bible, not a new and improved Jesus, who says what people would rather hear instead of the gospel message which is, **“Repent and believe the good news of Jesus Christ!”**

Second, Global calamities and disasters (6-8). Jesus spoke of wars, famines and earthquakes. A few months ago, we had a series of powerful hurricanes that kept hitting Puerto Rico, Haiti, Florida and that area. It is easy to think, “What is going on?” when we hear such reports. That was my first reaction. But my second thought was much better: “Jesus might be coming soon!” Disasters in the world should not alarm or frighten us. Rather, these things should help us to refine our own hope to put our faith and trust in Jesus.

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Third, Persecutions and betrayals. More disheartening and painful than natural disasters are human atrocities that Jesus mentions: persecution, murder, hatred, betrayal, and apostasy, which is abandoning the faith. Some only pretended to believe and follow Jesus. When they realize that following Jesus will cause them loss and suffering, they abandon the faith. With the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold. We must not stop loving Jesus and Jesus’ people. We must not stop loving people and praying for them.

Fourth, Defiant acts that mock God’s holiness (15). Jesus mentioned “**an abomination that causes desolation.**” These same words occurred several times in the prophetic book of Daniel (9:27;11:31;12:11). They referred to a desecration of the temple. This happened once in 167 B.C. when the Seleucid king, Antiochus IV Epiphanes conquered Jerusalem and desecrated the temple. Obviously, Jesus wasn’t speaking of that event, but of a similar event to happen in the future. In the year A.D. 70, the Roman general Titus defeated a revolt in Jerusalem and destroyed the temple. Jesus foretold this destruction. It is said that many Christians fled Jerusalem at that time. They were saved from destruction when they remembered and obeyed Jesus’ words to flee quickly from abomination.

In every generation there are false messiahs, disasters, persecutions and defiant acts against God. Jesus called these things “**the beginning of birth pains.**” Birth pains are difficult and they come again and again in waves. But they also indicate that something wonderful is coming.

Then what should we do amidst such things? Jesus tells us what to do and he also gives a promise. First, what should we do? Look at verse 13. “**...but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.**” Actually, this is both an encouraging exhortation and a promise. Jesus’ exhortation to us is: “**stand firm to the end.**” What does this mean? It means to stand firm in faith and hope in Jesus Christ. It means to not give in, to not give up and to not stop following Jesus. Said positively, it means to keep on following, keep on believing and keep on loving Jesus.

Paul said similar words in 1 Cor.15:58, “**Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.**” If we are not prepared to suffer and sacrifice for Christ, we cannot stand firm. This is why Jesus told his disciples ahead of time. Of course, they were weak, and they would all fall away very soon—but only temporarily. By God’s grace and help, they would turn back, and with the help and power of the Holy Spirit, they would do what Jesus said next in verse 14.

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Jesus gave this great promise of gospel victory in 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.”** Jesus promised that his kingdom gospel would be preached in the whole inhabited world, and then the end would come. This means that he wants his kingdom gospel to be preached to every person on earth. And he promises that it will be done. By whom? Of course, by those who love and follow him.

By the help and power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus’ followers are promised to be witnesses to all peoples on earth. That means that we should be actively involved in going and telling and showing the good news of Jesus Christ to people who have not heard. If we ourselves don’t go, we should help to send others. But actually, we can start right where we are to tell others the good news of Jesus Christ. And we can pray that more and more people will follow Jesus and be involved in the task of sharing this gospel of the kingdom with all people.

This week Billy Graham passed on to God’s kingdom. In his 99 years of life, he preached the gospel of the kingdom to more than 215 million people in 185 nations, including some very closed nations. In 2005, at age 86, he preached for 3 days to over 250,000 people in New York City. But Billy Graham didn’t just preach to strangers. In 1974 in Switzerland, Billy took his son Franklin for a walk on Franklin’s 22nd birthday. Here are Franklin’s own words¹:

“Daddy and I walked along a pathway beside the lake when he turned to me and said, ‘Franklin, your mother and I sense there’s a struggle going on in your life...You’re going to have to make a choice either to accept Christ or reject Him. You can’t continue to play the middle ground.’

[Then] I heard these words: ‘I want you to know we’re proud of you, Franklin. We love you no matter what you do in life and no matter where you go. But you’re going to have to make a choice.’ He had pricked my conscience to the point I was actually angry. I couldn’t figure out how he knew about the struggle that had been going on inside me—but he did, and he was right.

My father’s words haunted me for several weeks until I finally gave up running from God and made that choice to accept Jesus Christ as my personal Savior and turn my life over to Him. I’ve never looked back or regretted my decision.”

¹ <https://billygraham.org/story/billy-grahams-new-home-by-franklin-graham/>

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Like Billy Graham, may we faithfully share with others—family members, friends, neighbors, coworkers at work, college students, strangers—this gospel of the kingdom. May we prayerfully preach with both our words and our lives—this gospel of the kingdom, that is, the message of salvation in Jesus Christ.

II. Are You Preparing in Hope Glorious? (30-51)

In verse 27, Jesus gave a reason not to listen to false teachers and be fooled to look for false messiahs. Jesus said, **“For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.”** It means that everyone will see and know worldwide when Jesus comes again.

Jesus’ words in verse 29 are apocalyptic and ominous, echoing other biblical prophets (Isa 13:10; 34:4; Ezk 32:7; Joel 3:15; Amos 8:9):

“Immediately after the distress of those days ‘the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.’”

Consider that! The sun will be darkened! If you were walking down the street today and the sky suddenly became dark, what would you think? Maybe, “What’s going on—is this a total eclipse? A comet? An invasion of UFOs?” Rather, I hope you and I could say, “Come, Lord Jesus!” Actually, that is what comes next.

Look at verses 30-31. **“Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.”**

Why will all the peoples of the earth mourn at this glorious, powerful sight? To mourn is good if it’s an expression of crying over our sins and repenting. It’s a terrible sadness, however, to mourn in regret about how we’ve lived our life on earth. May we not live in regret, but in glorious hope that Jesus is coming to gather us as his elect, from all over the earth.

Up to verse 31, Jesus answered his disciples about the signs of the end and of his coming. Now he turns to their question of “when” will it happen, in verses 32-51. The simple answer is: No one knows, so be ready, all the time. A fig tree budding means summer is near. Likewise, when we remember Jesus’ words we can prepare for his coming. Does this mean that we should stop planning anything? I don’t think so. Someone wisely said, “Live each day in the hope that Jesus will

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return today, but plan today as though he'll return in 100 years.” (maybe 5 or 10 years is better) The point is the things in this world all pass away. But Jesus' words are eternal, because they are the words of God. Jesus will surely come again in power and glory one day. One day he's coming, o glorious day!

When? No one knows the day or the hour. So we should not try to calculate it. Jesus gave the example of Noah. Only Noah and his family prepared for the flood. Even they did not know when it was coming. So they worked hard, doing what God told them to do, in humble hope and obedient faith. The people of Noah's time thought he was crazy. They were not prepared at all. The flood came and took away all the unprepared people. Only Noah was left, and those with him in the ark that God had told him to build.

Jesus said, **“That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.”** Two close coworkers or even two family members can be separated, based on their faith or unbelief. We'll see more about this in the next chapter. Actually, we see more about this in verses 45-51, contrasting a faithful and a wicked servant.

Jesus said, **“Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions”** (45-47). This person had the right attitude and prepared well for his master's return.

How about the bad example? Jesus said, **“But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, ‘My master is staying away a long time,’ and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”**

I skipped over verses 42-44 to end with them. So here they are:

“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”

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This leads to a question for us: Am I living to please my master, or myself? Am I living in a right way of accountability to the Lord? Or am I squandering what he has given or entrusted to me? It's a good time to examine our hearts and repent of wickedness and unfaithfulness.

What is your hope? People hope in many things: graduation; a friend, a romantic interest, marriage, children, grandchildren; a good job, a better job, a promotion, another better job, retirement; good health. These are not necessarily bad things. But these cannot be our ultimate hope. It's natural and normal to live for what will make our lives easier and more comfortable. Many people live for these things without much thought or investment in eternity.

We are here to live more than an animal-like existence, just focused on ourselves, our family names or our herd or clan. We are here to know and love the Lord Jesus Christ and to preach the gospel of his kingdom until he comes again in power and glory. May God help us by his Holy Spirit to proclaim the gospel of his kingdom and be ready for his coming reign as King.