**THE GOSPEL WILL BE PREACHED TO ALL NATIONS**

May 26, 2019

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.”

Today Generation Z worry a lot about climate change. One crazy person says that the world will end in 12 years if we don’t address climate change. The world will end. But it will not end through the climate change. It will not end through nuclear war with North Korea. It will not end by Ebola virus. The world 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 Messiahs. 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.

Look at verse 1. “Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings.” Jesus’ disciples were mostly Galilean fishermen. Whenever they traveled to Jerusalem, they were fascinated by the temple buildings. The Jerusalem temple had been built at the summit of Mount Zion. It was built of white marble stones, plated with gold, and it shone in the sun. No wonder the young disciples from Galilee were overwhelmed to see it. They were susceptible to the glittering things of the world. Their hearts were filled with the desire to grab and hold onto all that the world had to offer. How did Jesus answer them? 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; everyone will be thrown down.’” This was a prediction of the imminent doom of the temple in Jerusalem. In 70 A.D. Jerusalem fell to the besieging army of Titus, a Roman general. He desecrated the temple and demolished it completely until not one stone was left on another, in order to take out the plated gold in between the stones. Jesus’ prophecy concerning the temple building was also an allegory about the destiny of human civilization. The Jerusalem temple was the culmination of human wisdom and technology. It appeared that it would last forever. Like the Jerusalem temple, human civilization dazzles our minds. The internet, space travel, and genetic engineering such as human cloning seem to offer hope and security. People are excited about those things. But these things cannot save us at the time of God’s judgment. Everything will be destroyed by fire. At that time the only thing that matters is our belief in Jesus Christ. Jesus’ prophecy concerning the temple building sounds depressing. But it is not. Jesus wanted to help his disciples have eyes to see beyond the temporal things of the world. Jesus wanted his disciples to have eyes to see the eternal kingdom of God.

What was the response of his disciples? They were greatly surprised at Jesus’ words. Look at verse 3. “As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. ‘Tell us,’ they said, ‘when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?’” The disciples asked two questions: (1) when will this happen? (2) what will be the sign of Jesus’ coming again and the end of the age?

In verses 4-7, Jesus tells his disciples the general overview of the end of the age and its signs. There will be many false prophets and false Messiahs (5). There will be many rumors of wars (6). Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places and famines (7). In 2011 there was an earthquake in Japan with a magnitude 9.1. It caused 15,000 deaths and also Fukushima nuclear power plant meltdown. These disasters make us afraid. We feel helpless and lose our hearts. But Jesus said in 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. There are two kinds of pains: meaningless pain and pain as the prerequisite to gain something better. Birth pains belong to the latter. Jesus said in John 16:21,22, “A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.” Most women are willing to go through birth pains in order to give birth to new life. When their cute babies are born, they immediately forget the anguish. This is Jesus’ view of the sufferings and agonies of the world. Jesus views them not as meaningless pain but as birth pains: suffering to bring forth a better world.

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–170,000 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.

This birth pain applies to students as well. Some students enjoy studying in college. But most of them think that studying is pure torture or a necessary evil. But studying in college helps us to grow intellectually and spiritually. It is to learn hard-working spirit, discipline and faith. It is to lay the foundation for the future. No pain, no gain; no study, no degree; no degree, no professional job. This birth pain applies to shepherds. A shepherd’s mission is to go through birth pains to bring forth spiritual children and raise them up as spiritual leaders. Instead of trying to avoid sufferings, we must be willing to suffer for God to raise spiritual children.

Another birth pain we must endure as Christians is persecution from ungodly people. But God will use their persecution on Christians to advance the gospel of his kingdom to the whole world. 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 early Christians in Jerusalem enjoyed a wonderful fellowship with one another. Every day they met together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:46,47) Then the Jews began to persecute them. Stephen became the first martyr. Soon Roman Emperors began to persecute Christians, for they refused to worship the emperors as gods. Emperor Diocletian (302-304) persecuted Christians most severely burned the Bibles. As Jesus predicted in verses 10-12, many turned away from the faith. They betrayed each other.Because of the increase of wickedness, the [love](http://69.42.87.196/cgi-bin/v40/ezlclk.fcgi?id=7099) of most grew cold. They became too busy to take care of themselves that they had no room to take care of others.

What should we do at the time of persecution? We must stand firm to the end. Look at verse 13. “but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.” At the time of persecution, Satan plants fear in our hearts: fear of losing everything and fear of death. Those who give in to Satan’s fear lose the battle even before the fighting begins. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 16:13, “Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong.” Persecution will test our faith whether it is genuine or not. Those who stand firm in Jesus to the end are true victors. Furthermore we should not think of persecution as something strange. Peter said in 1 Peter 4:12,13, “Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.” We should accept persecution as the honorable badge of living as genuine Christians in this ungodly generation.

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.” In fact, the Jewish persecution on the early Christians in Jerusalem could not extinguish the fire of their glowing love for Jesus and his gospel in their hearts. The persecution rather fanned the fire into a burning flame. The more the Jews tried to extinguish the fire, the wider the fire spread. Acts 8:4 says, “Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.” Soon the gospel spread from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria and later to Rome. It is interesting to note that verse 14 has a passive form. It says that the gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, but does not say “by whom” it will be done. It was, is and will be done by all nameless Christians--those who stand firm to the end at the time of persecution, who love Jesus more than their own lives and whose prayer topic is “your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”(Mt 6:10)

Last year Billy Graham died. In his 99 years of life, he preached the gospel of the kingdom to more than 215 million people in 185 nations, including North Korea in 1992. 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 words: “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.” 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.

In verses 15-22, Jesus tells his disciples how the destruction of the Jerusalem temple would occur in detail. Look at verse 15. “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.” The abomination that causes desolation refers to Daniel’s prophecy in Daniel 9:27. Antiochus IV, the king of Syria, who was disgusted by Judaism, determined to stamp out Judaism and introduce the Greek religion in Judea. He entered the temple, and set up an idol of an altar for Zeus, and placed the head of a pig on the altar. Jesus predicts that another abomination of desolation, like Antiochus IV of Daniel, is coming. Indeed, that abomination did come in Roman form in AD 70. The Roman armies were always an abomination because they carried with them idolatrous images of the emperor, whom they worshiped. And those armies brought desolation because their commander leveled the city and entered the Most Holy Place, defiling it. The line “let the reader understand” means that those who read Matthew—which would have been written before AD 70—must be ready to flee when they see Roman armies besieging Jerusalem. Indeed, the parallel account in Luke 21 makes this point explicit: “when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies . . . flee to the mountains” (Luke 21:20). In fact, many Christians did flee, sparing their lives, when they saw Rome’s armies coming. Eusebius, the first great historian of the church, says that when the Romans fell upon Jerusalem, “the church at Jerusalem . . . left the city, and moved to a town called Pella.” On the other hand, many Jews were deceived by false prophets who said that God would protect them, and remained in the city. They were all killed either by starvation or by swords. So Jesus, ever the Good Shepherd, told the first Christians how to survive those most distressing years of the church’s infancy.

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 us to preach the gospel to the whole world. This gives us direction, vision and hope. May God help us to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to all nations.