

The Gospel of the Kingdom

Matthew 24:3-14

By [Dr. Ed Hartman](#)

I'd like to invite you to turn with me to Matthew chapter 24. This is a portion of what is known as the Olivet Discourse. It's repeated in three of the gospels — Matthew, Mark, and Luke. And Mark's gospel tells us that this is a private conversation not merely between Jesus and His disciples, but specifically four of those disciples — Peter, James, John, and Andrew. We pick up the conversation in verse 3 of Matthew chapter 24:

“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?” 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. 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. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains.

Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of Me. 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. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold. But he 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.”

This is God's Word. Would you please join me in prayer?

Father, by Your Holy Spirit won't You please speak to us by Your Word? Won't You please enable us not merely to understand, believe, the truth, but more than that, as Paul writes, to love the truth and so be saved. Father, won't You please change our hearts and lives by that which we love most dearly and treasure most greatly? We pray in Jesus' name, amen.

As we have the opportunity to anticipate and introduce the Missions Conference, I'd like us to center our thinking on the very basics of what we're about. What is the mission to which we've been called? What is this Gospel upon which this mission is based? And to do that, I'd like to center our thoughts on the last verse of the passage we've read, verse

14. Jesus said, “And this Gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed in all the world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” I'd like to use a very simple outline — three words, each beginning with the word, “g.” There is the Gospel; there is the Going; there is the Goal.

THE GOSPEL

Beginning first then with the Gospel. Jesus specifically says not just the Gospel in general but “this Gospel.” The question is, what is, specifically, this Gospel that He's speaking of? It's an important question because all the way back as the early church period Paul writes in Galatians chapter 1, “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting this one to another gospel which is no gospel at all.” - Gospel meaning “good news.” What is this good news? Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who framed the answer to that question very clearly when he asked what only a physician turned pastor could ask, at least he stated it this way. He said, “The worth or rather the value of a medicine is determined by the disease from which it cures us.” You get what he's saying, right? The worth of a medicine is determined by the value, rather determined by the disease from which it cures us. Think about it this way. If you're holding in your hand a pill and you're told that this is a very valuable pill, it costs a lot of money, and someone says it cures a headache you may argue whether or not it's all that valuable. Sure, it's good to be cured of a headache but if you're told that same pill will cure your cancer suddenly the worth of that medicine is far greater than if it merely cured a headache. Correct? Follow this out. His point in using that illustration is to say that you'll never understand the worth of the Gospel until you clearly understand the disease with which you're stricken.

The disease goes right to the very core of who we are. It's a three-fold disease. Henry Krabbendam, professor at Covenant College, articulates it very simply and I really do mean it when I say I want to stay on a very simple level this morning. Dr. Krabbendam says a disease is three-fold. It works like this. We are stricken first of all with a rebellious heart, secondly a guilty record, third a broken life. Every part of what we suffer with, suffer from, is boiled down to those three parts of our disease. It goes all the way back to the book of Genesis when, in chapter 6, Moses writes, “God looked and He saw that all the intentions of the heart of man were only evil all the time.” Continually. Two chapters later after the flood, chapter 8, he says, “He looked and saw that all the thoughts and all the inclinations of the heart of man were evil from childhood.” Meaning that this diagnosis is true of us all the way back from the very beginning. We didn't develop this problem; we were born with it — a rebellious heart.

Secondly, that gives rise to a guilty record. Paul writes about this so clearly in Romans chapter 3 when he talks about that guilt as being defined not just by our words and our actions but also by our thoughts, our motivations, our desires, our values. And across the whole landscape of who we are, we look and we see, “Guilty, guilty, guilty, guilty.” And that gives rise to the kind of life we live. It's broken; we're stricken with broken lives. Things just don't work the way they're intended. The very best that God offers us, we have a way of messing up, don't we? Paul speaks of it this way. He says, “The good

that I want to do I don't end up doing; no, the evil I don't want to do that's what I keep on doing. Who will rescue me from this body of death?" That's the disease. When you understand how deep and pervasive this disease is in all that we are, you begin to grasp the wonder of the cure because in the Gospel we're offered this tremendous exchange. When you come to Christ in repentance and faith you embrace, first of all, in exchange for that rebellious heart God offers you a new heart. It lies at the very core of the new covenant promise where in Ezekiel 36 He says, "I will give you a new heart and will put a new spirit in you. I will remove your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart in exchange."

It goes even farther. In exchange for this guilty record God gives us a perfect record. What is to me the most important verse in the Bible, my favorite verse, 2 Corinthians 5:21 speaks of this exchange. "God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us so that in Him we would become the righteousness of God." Wow. And then in that same chapter Paul talks about the ongoing character of that exchange — a broken life in exchange for a new life. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has gone; the new has come." God actually restores us. He puts us back right, not merely to Adam's perfect condition — Adam was in a perfect condition, as you know, but he lost it. His condition was losable. Ours is not. In this exchange where God restores us and puts us back right He puts us into a permanently restored condition, one which we cannot use.

But it gets even better. It's not that we have this impassive God who transacts this exchange as if it's all mechanical. No, instead He sets His affection upon us, He envelops us in His embrace, He adopts us, He rejoices over us with singing, He takes such great delight in His children that what He said of His Son at Jesus' baptism, because of our union with Christ, He can say about you and me. "You are My son, My daughter, whom I love. In you I am well pleased." I have to be honest, there are days when I am not pleased with me at all. There are days where I look at myself and I stand in shame and I say, "How could God possibly love me at all?" and yet He does. This Gospel declares this message.

But Jesus goes one step further and He defined the specific nature of this Gospel in the next three words. He said, "This Gospel of the kingdom." Now we could spend a lot of time talking about the kingdom — the already and the not yet portions of it, the overlap between the kingdom and the church and which part is for now and which part is for later. We'll leave that to the theologians. For today, again, simply put, we draw one inference from those three words — of the kingdom. This Gospel of the kingdom means that there is a King and it's not you and it's not me. That does two things. One, it frees me. It frees me from having to understand, having to make sense of things. Look, if you're like me, there's so much of your life that just doesn't make sense and I look at it and say, "I cannot imagine how this can possibly turn out well." We'd never put it into words but we live as if it all depends on me and if I could just figure it out, if I could get people to just do what I think they ought to do then it will work out. And suddenly I'm the king.

John Calvin, in his commentary on Isaiah chapter 2, said that in the heart of every man there's the heart of a king. Later in that paragraph he says, "One swollen" — I want to make sure I get this right — "One swollen to fierceness." Meaning every one of us, not just the people of power and position and substance, but every one of us has within him the heart of a king and we defend that right to be king with fierceness. So the Gospel of the kingdom frees me from my need to be in control because there is one true King who does all things well who sees the end from the beginning, who is good and always does good. And that allows me to do the second thing that this leads me to and that is to submit. And that is to humble myself before His Kingship and to relinquish my white-knuckled grip and my demand to be in charge. But the longer I serve as a pastor now in Eastern Europe, the more clearly I see that nothing I do, nothing I try to accomplish, has any value whatsoever unless it's done in brokenness and humility and dependence upon the Lord Jesus and I fail miserably at that lesson. It's one thing to say it; it's another thing to hang my head in shame for the many, many times that I've failed to live in humility and submission and in brokenness. And I'm here to tell you, my God, my King, is determined to break me, and you, and to bring us into submission.

Because look, if you've claimed to have embraced this Gospel, then you've embraced the Gospel of the kingdom. And the way that you know that you really have is by asking yourself, "Who's king here? Is it I who have to understand? Is it I who have to be in control? Is it I who have to make things work or do I humbly bow and say, 'Lord, I don't understand how this is going to unfold, I don't know how this is going to turn out, but I trust You, I believe in Your goodness, I submit to You, my will to Yours, my desires to Yours.?' " There is a Gospel; it's the Gospel of the kingdom.

THE GOING

Secondly there is a Going talked about in this verse. I suspect you've heard the old proverb, I think it's a proverb — "When the going gets tough, the tough get going." Honestly, I'm not entirely sure what that means because if you're like me, when the going gets tough you begin looking for other alternatives. Surely there's got to be an easier way! But Jesus says, don't be surprised, the going is going to get tough. That's the mission. Listen to what He says in verse 10 — starting in verse 9. "Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death. You will be hated by all nations because of Me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other and many false prophets will appear and will deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold. The going will get tough, and yet the promise is this Gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed in the whole world as a testimony to all nations.

Two simple questions — By whom? And what's the purpose? By whom, you do realize of course, that God could have sent angels to be His proclaimers. He did it many times in Scripture. You know when an angel was sent on mission and God said, "Tell this person this, tell these shepherds this, tell this person this," the angel always got it right. There were never mixed motives. They never said more than they were supposed to,

never less. They were never afraid. They generally had a captive audience. God could have proclaimed the message through angels and it would have been far more effectively communicated but God didn't do that. Instead He chose to send people like you and me — weak, unreliable, insecure, self-willed vulnerable people like you and me to proclaim the message. This Gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed by you, to all the world.

And that takes us to the purpose. Why? Why is it being proclaimed? I've spent a lot of time this past week looking at some definitions on the internet. And as I was searching for definitions of the Gospel and kingdom, I was astounded by how many blogs there are on the internet. I guess I didn't really pay much attention to that previously but I was astounded. People are writing about what they're doing, where they're traveling, what brand of coffee they're drinking, what they're shopping for, what sales they're finding, what cute things their children are doing — all kinds of things. But you know what they almost all have in common? They're just presenting information. They're not asking you to do anything. They're just saying, "I cooked quiche for lunch today." (laughter) And you say, "I'm happy for you!" (laughter) Here's the question: Is the proclamation of the Gospel the same for you? It's a question we have to ask in this context because look, we hold to the reformed faith and there's a danger in thinking that "because God has His elect chosen from the foundation of the world, my job is to do whatever I can to put the Gospel out there and leave the results to God. It doesn't matter whether I speak persuasively or convincingly or courageously as Paul prayed or asked his hearers to pray that he would — God will do His thing and I'll do mine." That's a danger, because look, what Jesus says is that this Gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed in all the world as a testimony to all nations, meaning it's as if you were in a courtroom providing testimony toward a verdict. You're calling people to a response.

Chilling words by Jim Elliot, young missionary, who was sent to the Auca Indians, killed by Auca Indians to whom he was seeking to proclaim this Gospel of the kingdom. In his journal he wrote, "Father, make me a crisis man. Bring those I contact to decision. Let me not be a milepost on a single road; instead, make me a fork in the road so that men must turn one way or the other upon facing Christ in me." How's it going? You encounter people on mission every day of your lives. What choices is your proclamation of this Gospel of the kingdom leading them to make or are you a milepost on a single road where people smile at the quiche? There is a Gospel — the Gospel of the kingdom, there is a going, and it is our mission, not just those you send overseas because you understand don't you, it doesn't take salt water to be on mission. You don't have to cross an ocean to be a missionary. You are on mission right here in Jackson, Mississippi. It's just more easily concealed here than when you speak a different language.

THE GOAL

Finally, there is a Goal. It's in the last phrase of what Jesus said in verse 14. This "Gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed in all the world as a testimony to all nations,

and then the end will come.” It's the target, really. It's what the disciples were asking about, where we started — verse 3. “Tell us,” they said, “when will this happen and what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?” And then the end will come. Ominous words, really. I believe that no mission conference is complete without quoting John Piper. Here's my Piper quote. It's one I'm sure you've heard before. John Piper wrote, “Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church; worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It's a temporary necessity, but worship, worship abides forever.”

You see what Jesus is saying? There is a target, there is a deadline, there is a goal, and it is the end and it is coming. And it's not the end of existence, rather it's the end of the opportunity to proclaim and to embrace this offer of the Gospel of the kingdom. The clock's ticking. The Lord Jesus, the one true King is returning. He said to His disciples in John chapter 14, “I am going to prepare a place for you and if I go I will come back.” He is coming back to take up His bride and to bring in the new heavens and the new earth. “Men of Galilee,” the angel said, when he spoke to the disciples who were looking up into heaven at the ascension of Jesus, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus who has been taken from you into heaven will come back in the same way you have seen Him go into heaven.” He will come. It is one of the dominant doctrines, if not *the* dominant doctrine in the New Testament. Over three hundred references to the return of Christ.

The question is, when? That's the question that lay in the minds and on the hearts of the disciples when they launched this discussion. It's been the question discussed and debated for two millennia. No predictions today, but I'll give you a clue. It's a clue referred to three times in this Olivet Discourse. It's in the use of a word we've already referred to — the elect. You see it in verse 22. “If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.” Verse 24, “For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect if that were possible.” And then finally verse 31. “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 is that relevant? Again, very simply I'd like you to think about a potential scenario. We believe that there is a specific number whom God has chosen before the foundation of the earth to be His very own. The doctrine of election points to that. We believe that Jesus died specifically for the elect, right? You're allowed to nod, even say “Amen” if you agree with that.

Here's the question. I'll tell you, I don't have the answer, but God does. Of that number of the elect, how many, thus far, have made this exchange — they've repented of their sin, they've embraced the free offer of forgiveness and righteousness, restoration, and have clung to and are clinging to Christ? What percentage of that number of the elect have been redeemed thus far, have been converted? Is it half of them? Is it three-fourths of them? Is it ninety percent of them, leaving just ten percent of them? Because you see, Jesus won't return until all of the elect have been converted, right? Let me go

way out on a limb. Let's say it's all the elect have been converted so far but one. And let's say that last one numbered among the elect, tomorrow is sitting in Starbucks when you go in to pick up your cup of coffee or sitting in the doctor's office nervously flipping through the magazine as you're sitting next to your child waiting to see the doctor, or in the next office next to you, or sitting in the lawn chair on the sidelines of the baseball field as your kids are playing. And let's say that the Holy Spirit prompts you to talk to that person and you go over and you say, "How's it going?" And they share with you how they're wrestling and the Holy Spirit prompts you, "Proclaim the message! The Gospel of the kingdom — speak the words!" And you do. You set aside your fear and your awkwardness and your, "What are they going to say? How are they going to treat me? How are they going to respond to me in the future?" You set that aside and you say the truth. And the Holy Spirit steps in and awakens faith in the heart of that person, regenerates them. And the person, with tears rolling down their cheeks, they say, "I've been waiting to hear that all of my life! How do I make that my own?" And you say, "Let's pray." And the last one numbered among the elect says, "Yes, Lord, I receive You as my own. Thank You for saving me."

Is it possible that at that moment that the Father would turn to the Son and say, "Send the angels! It is done! Blow the trumpets; Your bride is complete! Go to the four corners of all the earth! Bring them in; the kingdom is complete. The new heavens and the new earth are about to break in. It is done!" And we then become that generation of which we have been singing for years when we sing, "Lord, hast the day when my faith will be made sight, the clouds be rolled back as a scroll. The trump shall resound, the Lord shall descend, even so, especially so, it is well with my soul." You know, for all eternity, I suspect if you were that person, for all eternity people would come up to you and say, "Hey, aren't you the one? Aren't you the one who shared the Gospel with the last one to be brought in? Wasn't it at the 'Amen' of your prayer with that one that the trumpet blew and the skies opened up and the new heavens and the new earth burst forth?" That day will come. It will. It's more real than your memories of yesterday are real, more real. It's coming.

There is a Gospel, it's the Gospel of the kingdom. There is a Going and it is your mission and mine. There's a Goal, the return of the King. Look up, your redemption draws neigh. Let's pray.

He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen, amen, come Lord Jesus. Keeping with Your promise we are looking forward to the new heavens and the new earth, the home of righteousness. Make it so, Lord Jesus. We praise You for giving us even a small part of that grand design. We look forward to the day we see Jesus face to face. We pray in His name, amen.

Now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all who love and trust our Lord Jesus with sincerity and who long for His appearing. Amen, go in peace.

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