

PFRS Commentary

Matthew 24:14

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Matt 24:14 NKJV

14 "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.

In our opinion, Matthew 24:14 is one of the most important verses in the New Testament, yet it is sadly ignored or explained away by many Christians due to faulty dispensational preconceptions. This one verse ties together three of the major themes of the New Testament; the gospel, the Great Commission, and the return of Christ.

The Context

This scripture is found in what is known as Jesus' Olivet Discourse. Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives with His disciples just a few days before the crucifixion. He had just issued a blistering denunciation of the Jewish leadership (in Mt 23) and foretold the destruction of the temple to His disciples. The disciples were understandably confused and wanted to know: (i) "when shall these things be" and (ii) "what is the sign of thy coming and of the end of the world" (Mt 24:3).

Jesus' response was to describe a time of great evil. Many shall be deceived (v. 4,5). There will be wars, famines, disease, and natural disasters (v. 6,7). But those are only the beginning of sorrows. Followers of Jesus will be persecuted and killed (v. 9). They will even betray one another (v. 10). Continuing on in Mt 24, we see that Jesus will not return until the end of a great tribulation, a time of unprecedented evil in the world. But, God has NOT abandoned this age to the evil one. Rather, He has a purpose, a very clear purpose, in this age that includes each of us. If we compare Mt 24:14 to Mt 28:18-20 and Acts 1:8, we can see that Jesus' purpose is that WE (his church) proclaim the gospel to the ends of the earth. In our opinion, we are commanded to participate.

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Matt 28:18-20

18 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
20 "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

Acts 1:7-8

7 And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.

8 "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Let's look more closely now at Matthew 24:14.

The Gospel of the Kingdom

Jesus talked repeatedly about the kingdom (basileia) of God in His earthly ministry. He began His ministry with the declaration "*the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent ye and believe the gospel*" (Mk 1:15). Today the kingdom of God is sadly misunderstood, in part because it includes both present and future aspects. Simply speaking, the kingdom of God may be understood as the reign of God in the world. It refers to His right and authority to rule. While it is beyond the scope of this commentary to fully discuss the kingdom of God, in particular in its present and future aspects, we will briefly consider the following passages. In Mark 10:15 Jesus stated: "*whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.*" One must receive the reign and authority of Jesus Christ in their lives (i.e., one must obey the gospel). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus stated "*seek ye first the kingdom of God*" (Mt. 6:13). Again, we must seek first His rule in our lives. In so doing, we will seek to obey the gospel and His commands. In order to see (enter into) the future physical kingdom of God, one must receive the kingdom of God today by submitting to the rule of Jesus Christ.

Moreover, the reader has no doubt noticed that Jesus' authority was constantly on trial during His earthly ministry. Virtually all of His struggles with the Jewish leadership were about authority. His authority verses their authority. Even in His death, Jesus exercised His authority. Nobody took His life. He laid it down of His own will.

In summary then, the gospel (euaggelion – literally the good news or glad tidings) of Jesus' reign and authority is to be preached in all the world. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Him (Mt. 28:8). He laid down His life by that authority as a payment for our sins. If we obey the gospel and receive His kingdom like a child, He will forgive us our sins and grant us eternal life. He has the authority to do so!

All Nations

Since Jesus has been given authority over all the earth, the gospel of the kingdom is to be preached in all the world as a witness unto all nations. In English, when we use the word "nation" we are typically referring to a political entity. We refer to the United States as a nation. China, Sweden, Indonesia, Chile, and South Africa are nations in this sense. In contrast to our English understanding, the Greek word translated as nation in this passage generally refers to an ethnic entity. That word is *ethnos*, from which we derive our English word "ethnic." In particular it refers to the Gentile (non Jewish) ethnic people groups. Hence, one nation (political entity) may include many nations (ethnic people groups).

In summary, the good news of the reign of Jesus Christ is to be preached in all the world as a witness unto every ethnic people group. In Revelation 5:9 we see the fulfillment of Jesus' command in that He has redeemed a people for himself from among every ethnic people group. *"And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation"* (Rev. 5:9 KJV)

And Then Shall the End Come

In context, the end (*telos*) to which Jesus refers was clearly His return. A straightforward reading of the Olivet discourse leaves no other alternatives. Jesus was referring to His return to earth in power and glory after the great tribulation (v. 29-31). It is at that time that we who have received the kingdom (obeyed the gospel) will receive our inheritance in His future kingdom.

In the Greek the verb translated shall come (*heko*) is in the active future tense, indicative mood, indicating the certainty of the event. The end most certainly will come. Jesus will return!

To our knowledge, there is no other verse in all of scripture that says *"and then shall the end come"*. This constitutes the clearest statement in scripture regarding the timing of the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. When is it that the end will come? We cannot set a date. But, according to Jesus, the end will come when, and only when, the gospel of the kingdom has been preached in the whole world as a witness to all nations. The Greek word translated then (*tote*) is used about 85 times in Matthew's gospel. In most cases refers to an event that immediately or closely follows a prior event. In most of the Matthew passages *tote* could be equivalently translated as "at that time". Thus we can infer that the end (the return of Jesus Christ) will follow closely on the heels of the completion of the Great Commission.

In our day, many are asking "will Jesus return in our lifetime?" This is a great question and worthy of our consideration. According to Jesus, the answer is "it depends". It depends upon whether WE finish the MISSION He gave us, that being the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom to all the world. Once we understand what Jesus was saying here, it gives us the foundation to understand all of human history, and in particular what God has been doing in human history and what His will is for us in that history. God, in His mercy and love, has been redeeming for Himself a people from among all the ethnic peoples of the world. In the most recent 2000 years, He has sent His church (those of us who are believers) into the entire world to proclaim the good news of His kingdom to every nation, to baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and to teach them to obey everything Jesus has commanded. If we complete that task in our lifetimes, then Jesus will indeed return in our lifetimes. If we look forward to our Lord's return, then we will eagerly participate in its completion.