

When Will the Kingdom Come?

Matthew 24:1-14

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Before we dive into God's Word, I want to spend a few minutes on the subject of motherhood. Why? I've had a mom my whole life. I am incredibly blessed by the faithful love of my mom. Now I have a firsthand look every day at my wife, the mother of my two daughters. I see the extraordinary effort it takes to be a mom day in and day out. My children are incredibly blessed to have her as their mommy. And she blesses me too.

Is it any wonder that in God's top ten commands for us to follow, number 5 is honoring your mother? Yep, dad is in there too, but this is Mother's Day. Honor your mother. The word there for honor means, *"to give weight to."* Moms generally don't want weight, but they do appreciate respect, honor, and love. That's really what it means. Hold your mom in highest regard. Her words and life must always be important to you.

Adults no longer have the obedience requirement, but we must continue to honor our moms. How? I want to show you one moment in Jesus' worst hour when he displayed *"honor your mother."*

"So the soldiers did these things, but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home." (John 19:24-27 ESV)

Jesus is hanging on the cross. He is in his most desperate moments. He is suffering physically and spiritually. Yet, what a picture. There is his mom, Mary. She's there for her son in his darkest hour. Faithful mom. A terrible time for her too. Yet, she won't forsake him. He sees her. He thinks of her care and needs. He had siblings including his half-brother James who would be a key leader in the church. Yet he entrusts her care to the Apostle John and John takes her into his home and care.

My point? Jesus, in the midst of crucifixion, honors his mom. He cares for her even in that terrible hour. She loved him. He loved her.

Let's follow his example not just on Mother's Day but every day. Love your mom in her ups and downs. Love her in your good days and bad. Moms, what you do is so important in the eyes of God that he includes your role in his top 10 and Jesus models it in his greatest trial. Thank you for all you do.

When Will the Kingdom Come?

Our series from Matthew and the kingdom wraps up next weekend. These two messages are both on the future of the kingdom (and the world and human history) as explained by Jesus. Who would like to know the future? The disciples did. Let's look at Matthew 24:1-2.

"Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. But he answered them, 'You see all these, do you

not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.” (Matthew 24:1-2)

The disciples are impressed with the grandeur of the temple facilities. Jesus is not. Why? He sees things from the perspective of the future and explains that this grand temple will one day be completely destroyed. That would be like saying Washington DC would be obliterated. The temple was more than a building. It was the center of their Jewish identity. *Gone*, Jesus says. The disciples are speechless.

“As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, ‘Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?’ And Jesus answered them, ‘See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.

“Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake. And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” (Matthew 24:3-14)

This passage has parallels in Mark 13 and Luke 21. It is known as the Olivet discourse. Jesus is on the Mount of Olives. This is probably the most famous photo spot in Israel and perhaps the world.



This is Jerusalem as seen from the Mount of Olives. It is a picturesque spot to explain the end of the world.

- *“On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before Jerusalem on the east.” (Zechariah 14:4)*

- *"When will these things be? What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" (Matthew 24:3)*

From this very spot the disciples will ask a similar question before Jesus' ascension. *"So when they had come together, they asked him, 'Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?'" (Acts 1:6)* The disciples' question is a common one. Moms, when you are on a road trip, what question dominates the trip (Besides, "Can I eat something?")? *Are we almost there? Two miles later, Are we almost there? 10 minutes later, Mom, are we almost there?* My standard answer is, *We are closer than last time you asked. Are we there yet?*

The disciples are asking the same thing from the perspective of history and their understanding of the future of the kingdom. One question is before the resurrection, one after. In both cases, the disciples are expecting something imminent. They are hoping for a kind of messianic revolution led by Jesus. They assume they would be his top officials. James and John wanted to sit at his right and left. Some believe Judas betrayed Jesus to force his hand into a political revolution. So don't think of Jesus' disciples as simpletons or hangers-on types. They were reflective and ambitious.

Jesus, are we almost there yet? Are we almost to the time you will usher in your reign? Jesus' answer is complex and very difficult to interpret. This is in part because Jesus' answer swings between immediate events and future events. Neither of which the disciples could have realized. The destruction of the temple was a mere 40 years away when the Romans came and sacked Jerusalem and literally dismantled the temple. So that fulfills verse 2. But then he describes a more much future time of distress and upheaval. Nations against nations. Wars and earthquakes. Persecution of Christians on a grand scale. False teachers and doctrinal heresies everywhere. To some extent, all these have occurred for centuries. More Christians were martyred in the last century than in all the other centuries combined. The wars of the last century were the most destructive and cost the most lives of any the world has ever known. Some people interpret this entire chapter as past history (I don't).

This is the challenge because our perspective is like the children in the back seat, *are we there yet?* We want to know where in the story of human history our day is. What is to come?

The King Sees History in Terms of Kingdom

We began our series on the kingdom by saying that this is way more important than any of us realize. Quick review. What is the kingdom of God? It is a reign. A reign in a realm. The current realm is the human heart and the community of faith, the church. The kingdom of God is the redemptive reign of God through Christ. All authority is given to Jesus yet for now he exercises it primarily in the lives of Christians and the testimony of the church as he transforms people from the kingdom of sin, darkness, and death into a kingdom of life, light, truth, purity, and glory.

"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." (1 Peter 2:9)

Jesus said, this kingdom is like a mustard seed. Apparently small, insignificant. But a really big thing comes from it. Don't judge a tree by its seed and don't judge a kingdom by its apparently insignificant 12-disciple start.

I think some here today may think that all this is religious mumbo-jumbo and spiritual huffing and puffing. The really important things are not here (church, Scripture, heart) but are found in the news or social media. Politics and public policy or some other cause or hobby are the real things to care about. *This religious stuff is nice at weddings and funerals but that's enough for me.*

Moms, can you relate to what happens when you give a toddler a gift? They get excited, but often about the wrong thing. What happens at Christmas? The child gets the present. They see the pretty colors in the wrapping paper. They get excited to rip it. Quickly, they set the present aside to focus on the wrapping paper. It's shiny. It makes fun sounds. It might even taste interesting. The actual gift could be the family heirloom diamond worth a lot of money but the child obsesses about what is not important and misses completely what is important. The local cemeteries are filled with people who thought the same thing.

Could that be you? What you think is really important in the grand story of your life and eternity is actually insignificant. And here we are talking about what the Son of God said is the most important thing but you mistakenly set it aside. What's really important? Jesus and his kingdom. Jesus and God's mission to redeem a fallen humanity from the clutches of Satan and death and hell forever. Jesus and your eternal destiny. Jesus and the consummation of all things.

Jesus Will Return When the Mission is Accomplished

How important? The real answer to "Are we there yet?" is in verse 14. *"And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."* (Matthew 24:14) The gospel of the kingdom.

Here's what I want us to see. Jesus' answer to when the kingdom will come in fullness isn't primarily about the earthquakes and wars and heresies. What is the sign? What is the tipping point? *"This gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world... and then the end will come."* Proclaimed to all nations? Where have we heard that before?

The past two weekends we studied Jesus' final words in Matthew,

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."
(Matthew 28:19-20)

Jesus defines the time after his resurrection as a mission to make disciples. Go and make disciples. Clear and understandable. From now on, your big deal is to make disciples. Notice the scope of the mission. Make disciples **of all nations**. Take this gospel of the kingdom to the ends of the earth which Jesus doesn't define geographically, he defines sociologically. All *ethne*. All ethnicities. All people groups. He isn't sending us to Antarctica to evangelize. There are no *ethne* there. Just penguins. His concern isn't the geography of the world but the people of the world. Or as we teach our children, *"Jesus loves the little children/All the children of the world/Red and yellow/Black and white/They are precious in His sight/Jesus loves the little children of the world."*¹ The *ethne* is a broad description of the people groups of the world. All nations. Not just Israel. But all people groups. All tribes. All languages. This is the answer to the disciples' question, *are we there yet? When will the end come?*

¹ C. Herbert Woolston, "Jesus Loves the Little Children," 1969.

Jesus says the end will not come until the gospel has been preached to the all the peoples of the world. *Then* the end will come. The end is Jesus' return, his earthly reign, and final judgment.

The end is coming and Jesus is returning. The Bible says we are living in the last days. They are the last days because ever since the resurrection, the presence of the future kingdom is here now. We are living in the time between the arrival of the kingdom through Jesus' incarnation and its final consummation with his return. The kingdom is here now. It's not here like it's going to be here. Someday it will be here fully, visibly, physically, victoriously.

Living in the Time in Between

Today is Mother's Day. I remember when we found out we were pregnant for the first time. We found out accidentally at a doctor's appointment. We were in shock. We were excited. We were terrified. The first person we told was the waitress at Olive Garden because we were sitting jabbering on in a semi-psychotic state. For months we waited. There were signs that the baby was here. Jennifer's belly got bigger. At night we would giggle at the protrusions that would appear from her belly. A foot. A head. The baby was here. No mistaking it.

Yet the baby wasn't fully here. She wasn't born yet. While the signs of our daughter's presence were unmistakable, they were nothing compared to what happened when she was fully here. You moms know the joy of seeing fully what was only seen obscurely. Pregnancy is a precious gift. A baby in your arms is the happiest day of your life.

In terms of history and what is coming, the story of the church is like a kingdom pregnancy. It started small with a few disciples in Galilee. For 2,000 years the presence of the kingdom through the church is unmistakable. Human history has been defined largely by it. There is most definitely an alternative kingdom at work in this world. It's here but it's not all here, because the gospel hasn't been preached to all peoples.

*"Why did he not come in AD 500? Because the Church had not evangelized the world. Why did he not return in AD 1000? Because the Church had not finished its task of world-wide evangelization. Is He coming soon? He is- if we, God's people, are obedient to the command of the Lord to take the Gospel into all the world."*² (George Eldon Ladd)

*"The point rather is that as long as the Lord has not returned, there must be more people groups to reach, and we should keep on reaching them."*³ (John Piper)

Have you considered that Jesus not coming back should motivate us to mission? If he's not here, we're not done. This doesn't mean all *ethne* will be evangelized. Clearly that doesn't happen. Our job is the proclaiming; God's job is the saving. We are to be faithful to the mission.

Are we there yet? No. Are we close? Only God knows. Too often Christians think about Christ's return and they are all about their charts and graphs. Or they try and see signs of Jesus' imminent return. So they watch world events or some astronomical occurrence.

² George Eldon Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, p. 135.

³ John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, p. 205.

Recently it was all about the blood moons. *Oh look! Jesus is coming back! The kingdom is about to arrive.*

What we have missed is that Jesus' absence means we have work to do. It should motivate us, like a pregnant mom who knows the child is coming. It motivates her to get the crib ready. Prepare the changing table. Stock up on supplies. *The waiting motivates the working.* Bethel Church, let's do that. Let's use the waiting to motivate the working. *Are we there yet?* No. But here is what I can tell you. We are closer than we have ever been before. "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!" (Revelation 22:20)

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