

NOON BIBLE STUDY: MATTHEW 24 (PART 2)

Matthew 24:1-3, 4-5 - Signs Of The End Of The Age & Related To The Destruction Of The Temple

The end of the age is the conclusion of the era of sin and death upon the world. In the beginning, a good God made a good world and the recipients of this gift chose to rebel and go their own way instead of living in a loving relationship with their creator. Though there were clear and just consequences to this fall of humanity, because God is love, he allows humans to make their own choice in relationship to loving him back. He also enacted a redemptive plan to make right what humans made wrong.

And so, the world we are now living in is the ramification of humanity's choice to do things their own way rather than God's way. As a result, we are daily experiencing what life is like when humans are in charge rather than God. There are certainly glimpses of God's original goodness around us and his continued involvement in the world, but sadly, the cosmic rebellion continues as the forces of evil and the powers of this world cling to any remaining authority they can grasp.

As we move closer to the time when God's kingdom is fully revealed, the clash between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world intensifies. The forces of evil know their time is limited and resist fiercely. These signs are not primarily God pouring out judgment yet, but the visible consequences of a world that continues to reject his rule. Humanity ruling itself produces conflict, deception, violence, and breakdown. Jesus wants his followers to understand this reality so they are not shocked, frightened, or misled when these things increase.

Matthew 24:6-8 - The Beginning Of Birth Pangs

Deception, false Christs, wars and rumors of wars, nation and kingdoms rising against each other, famine and earthquakes - "all birth pangs"

What is a birth pang? - "Birth pangs" are the pains associated with childbirth. Pregnant women often deal with discomfort throughout their pregnancy, but the pangs of labor are intense and specifically associated with the delivery of the baby. The mother is in great pain and anguish right before the baby is born. The fact that Jesus uses this imagery to describe the world before his second coming is appropriate. There will be incredible pain and trouble before he returns, seemingly which will intensify and climax just before his coming. But at his coming, like with the birth of a baby, the pain and trouble fades as it is replaced with the joy and reward of the new life. Unlike chronic suffering, birth pangs are intense, time-bound, and lead to joy.

How do we respond to these things happening? → **See that you are not frightened (v. 6).**

Q - how could one not be frightened in the midst of such hardship?

I think part of it is understanding the placement of these things. 1, that these things must take place and that they are not the end yet. In a way that should help the reader, and more so those experiencing these things, to know to patiently endure and trust God that there will be an end and that he is still in control.

Many women decide to have children because they long for the baby in a greater way than the pain of childbirth could potentially deter them, and then many women have more than one child! I say this because the disciple of Jesus must keep their eyes fixed on the end - the coming Kingdom of God.

Jesus is not saying that war is a new phenomenon or a precise signal that the end has arrived. He is saying that ongoing conflict, instability, and suffering will characterize the world until he returns. These things remind us that the world is not being redeemed by human power or political systems.

Matthew 24:9-14 - Next Stage Of Signs Of The End Of The Age

v. 9 - specific persecution against the followers of Jesus - tribulation, killing and hatred - “because of me.”

Let’s discuss what this means, and what it doesn’t mean. There are some troubles that every human faces. There are obstacles and difficulties that every human faces. Many of these have nothing to do with whether or not you are a Christian and desire to live godly. For example: sickness, weakness, family conflict, death, financial troubles, natural disasters, the general effects of evil things and evil people. We are living in a broken world that is influenced by the devil and his lies. Every person is experiencing the results of sin and rebellion against God. Those things challenge us and are impediments to our relationship with God for sure, but they aren’t necessarily persecution.

So what is Christian persecution? Biblically speaking, it is specific resistance, pressure, and trouble *because we are Christians* which are designed to silence and squelch the movement of the gospel and the glory of God. Christian persecution is designed to separate us from each other and the world, so the gospel can’t be heard. It’s designed to distract us so that we get entangled and cause our witness to be invalid. It is designed to scare us so that our fears of what might happen if we continue to follow and obey Jesus become more influencing than him.

At the time of Jesus’ teaching in Mt. 24, he had a large following of disciples spread throughout the region. While there were some instances of persecution from Jewish leaders in Jerusalem and locally in synagogues, it was nothing in comparison to what would begin and continue after his resurrection.

v. 10 - many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another

There are going to be global and national challenges, but there are also going to be personal and relational challenges. The pressure of these trying days may contribute to the selfishness of the human heart & relationships and friendships will be discarded. History has taught us that in times of crisis, people often ignore other’s needs and enter a self-preservation mode which leads to isolation, rivalry, and hatred rather than clear headed thinking, wisdom, compassion & caring for others.

v. 11 - many false prophets will arise and mislead many

We discussed this last time and are reminded again here that false prophets (people who claim to speak for God) will arise and many will be misled. We cannot ignore Jesus' repeated warning here as we wait and make ourselves ready for his coming.

v. 12 - lawlessness increases, “most people’s love will grow cold

Lawlessness is the condition of being law-less. In other words, it's the time when people will not be following the “law” or a standard of right/wrong, good/evil. The standard of God will be rejected and even the guidance of the consciences God embedded in every person will be ignored. And as a result, people will hate more and love less, people will focus on self more and others less.

Though perhaps less dramatic than a war or an earthquake, we shouldn't neglect that this reality is just as much a sign of the end of the age.

v. 13 - But the one who endures to the end will be saved...

How does one endure to the end? There are many ways we could probably answer that question, but let's consider how we can answer it in light of this chapter so far.

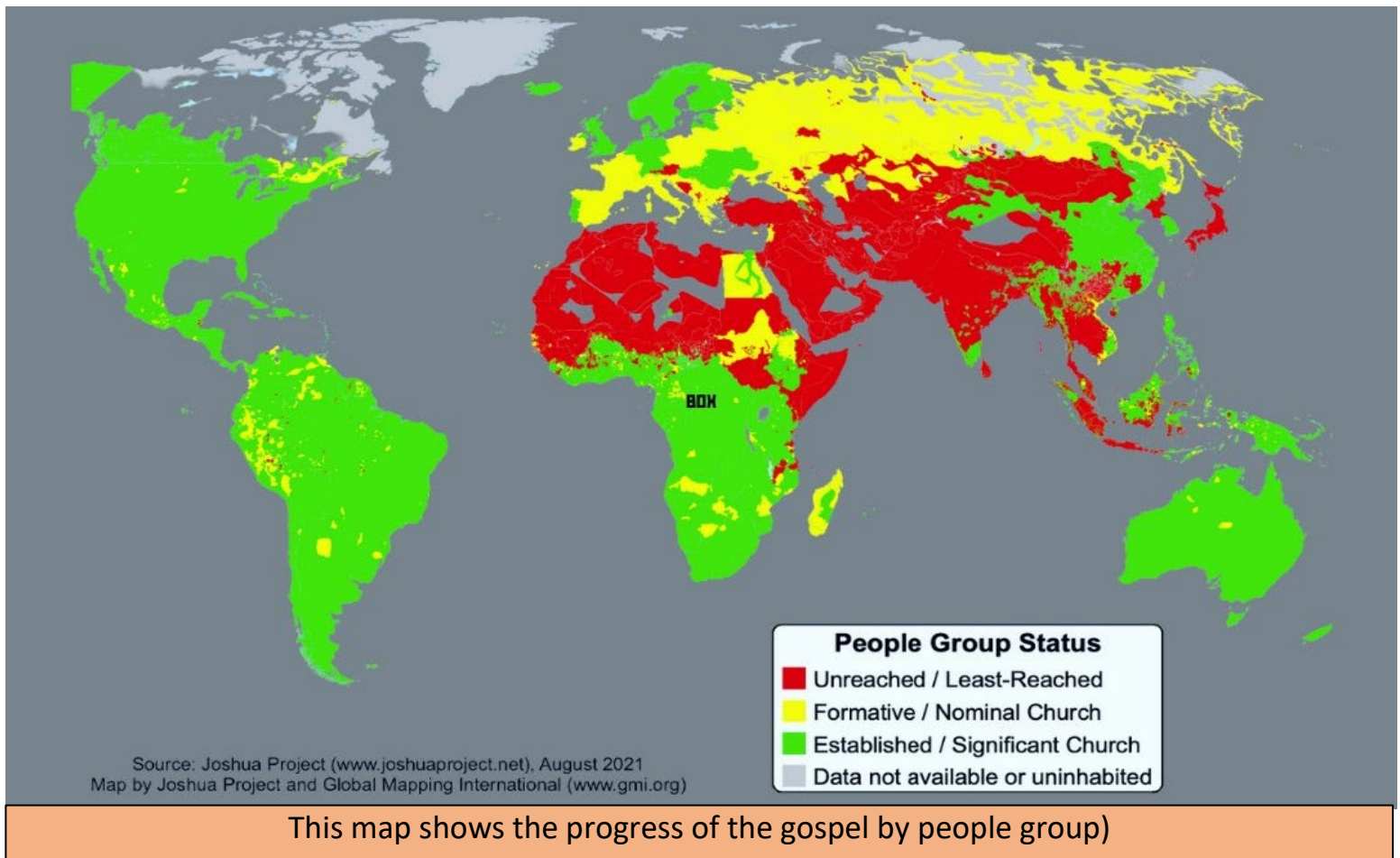
- 1 - Don't be misled by the misleaders, false Christs and false prophets (v. 4-5, 11)
- 2 - Don't be frightened by the things that are happening (v. 6)
- 3 - Stay faithful in the face of persecution and tribulation (v. 9)
- 4 - Don't fold when people around you give up, hate you or betray you (v. 10)
- 5 - Don't let your love grow cold, even when evil is all around. (v. 12)

The world is evil and dark and will grow increasingly more so as the days get closer to the return of King Jesus. But the power and presence of King Jesus will not fade during these hours. He will stand with his people and empower us to endure. We must remain resolute to follow him without exception. Jesus has already shown us what endurance looks like and we see the first followers of Jesus follow their leader as we read their story in Acts!

v. 14 – Kingdom gospel preached worldwide before the end

I think this final verse should give hope and purpose to the reader. We started talking about birth pangs in verse 8 and now we're reminded that “the end will come”. And one of the signs of the nearness of the kingdom is the increased and far-reaching spread of the good news about the kingdom! God wants any and everyone to hear the invitation announcement to his kingdom and know that they can be forgiven and transformed now and granted immortality in the age to come!

And it gives purpose in that it invites us to participate in the coming of the Kingdom by partnering with God to spread this kingdom news throughout the world. Speaking the gospel to our neighbors, becoming and sending missionaries to places who do not yet know Jesus is King, supporting Bible translators and their work to get the Scriptures into every language, and other glorious endeavors like these - all helping to fulfill this prophecy by getting the gospel of the kingdom preached in the world world as a testimony!



Can't you just hear Jesus' voice rise as he speaks this to his questioning and perhaps trembling students on the Mt of Olives? Sure evil, trouble & trials are ahead, but the advancement of the gospel of the kingdom will never be thwarted. And with each hearer and believer of the gospel message, the army of God's kingdom grows and more and more can then hear the great news that there is hope, that Jesus is King, and that the God that made you, loves you, & has a great rescue plan for you!

Let's conclude with the final two verses of Martin Luther's anthem "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God", appropriate and inspiring as we consider the challenges of today and the days to come:

*And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us,
we will not fear, for God has willed his truth to triumph through us.*

*The prince of darkness grim, we tremble not for him;
his rage we can endure, for lo! his doom is sure;
one little word shall fell him.*

*That Word above all earthly powers, no thanks to them abideth;
the Spirit and the gifts are ours, through him who with us sideth.*

*Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also;
the body they may kill: God's truth abideth still;
his kingdom is forever!*

Amen!!