



Matthew 24:9–14

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. 10 At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, 11 and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. 12 Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, 13 but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. 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.

Reflection

The disciples are rattled. And over the course of this conversation it's only going to get worse. Especially in today's passage. In fact, the whole day has been deeply unsettling. The week started well enough with Jesus entering Jerusalem like an all-conquering king, the crowds praising his name and laying down the cloaks off their backs so that even the hooves of the donkey he was riding wouldn't touch the ground, the ancient equivalent of a red carpet. But things have become ugly, fast. Jesus has just spent the entire day tearing strips off the leaders of the Jewish peo-

ple in Jerusalem. And none of them were spared. Not the elders or chief priests or the Herodians or Sadducees and especially not the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. Jesus publicly debated them all until they were completely silenced before his wisdom; then he turned them inside out in full view of the vast crowds gathered in the temple courts, publicly humiliating them, insulting them, and exposing the hypocrisy and wickedness in their hearts. The disciples could read the murder in their eyes. It wasn't just the temple guards shifting uneasily, the crowds too could see how deadly serious this had become.

And yet, just when the disciples were probably thinking that things couldn't get any worse, as they were leaving the tem-

ple, and admiring its huge stone buildings, Jesus had told them that not one of these stones would be left on top of the other.

They'd brooded over this until they reached the Mount of Olives where they asked Jesus about it directly. And just when they thought the day couldn't get any worse it did. They asked Jesus two questions. When will the temple be torn down, and, what will the sign be of his second coming and the end of the age? They probably thought that the two events would happen together because it was so unthinkable to them that the temple would be torn down before the end of the age. But they were wrong. These would be two separate events. In the first half of Matthew 24 Jesus goes on to tell them about the lead up to the first one; what will happen over

the next 37 years until the temple is torn down in 70AD. And in the remainder of Matthew 24 he'll tell them about his second coming, expanding further on it in parables in Matthew 25.

It isn't good news. In fact, it's frightening what's about to happen. But when these events do unfold, says Jesus, don't think it's the Second Coming, that's something else entirely, far more frightening. In yesterday's passage Jesus told them about what lies ahead after he's gone. He spoke about wars and rumours of wars, and false prophets claiming to be the Messiah who'd rise up and lead rebellions against the Romans. He was prophesying about events that happened shortly after in history and finally led to the Romans decimating the temple in 70AD. There'll be earth quakes

and famines, kingdoms rising against kingdoms, doomsday language because it's going to feel like doomsday but don't be mistaken, it won't be the Second Coming; that will be unmistakable, much worse and will come after the destruction of the temple.

And as unsettling as all this sounds Jesus adds to it in today's passage by saying bluntly to his disciples in verse 9,

9 "Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death,

As if this wasn't enough, he continues,

and you will be hated by all nations because of me. 10 At that time many will turn away from the faith and will

betray and hate each other, 11 and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. 12 Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, 13 but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. 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.

You're going to be hated, and persecuted, handed over to the Romans and put to death. In fact, all who follow me will be hated by the nations because of me. Many of them will fall away, or be led away by false prophets, and false teachers, and false religions, led away through deception. Wickedness will increase, love will grow cold, but the one who stands firm

to the end will be saved. And, the light at the end of the tunnel, verse 14, despite all this,

this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

Despite all this the gospel will explode like wildfire. It's going to go out everywhere, to the far reaches of the Roman Empire, despite the persecution and bloodshed, and false teaching the gospel will be unstoppable, it'll reach the ends of the known world, the far reaches of the Roman Empire, preached as testimony to all nations, then the end will come and Jerusalem will fall.

Now it's hard to know how to take this torrent of prophecy from Jesus. If you read the book of Acts, this is exactly what happens and if you read histories written by secular historians you can read about the fall of Jerusalem. But this language is also the language of prophecy which in the bible is known as apocalyptic language. It's a style of language that's hard to pin down and it has echoes not just of the fall of Jerusalem but also of the fall of the world which Jesus is going to talk about in the second half of this chapter. In short, it's terrifying. And would have been especially so for the disciples hearing from the mouth of Jesus who always speaks the truth that they would soon be put to death.

But through all this the gospel would go out. And that's what I'd like you to medi-

ate over today. Just that one verse, verse 14.

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.

A middle eastern carpenter hung on a tree, dead at thirty-three. Eleven followers, fisherman, tax collectors, no-bodies, most of them hiding like cowards while their master is tortured and then killed. A tiny hated sect of Judaism is born, even the Jews themselves wanted to eradicate them. And so they did, they cut off the head of James, they stoned Stephen, they chased them from town to town, stoning and flogging and killing them. And then the Romans who'd had enough of the whole Jewish

faith, stormed Jerusalem, ripping the very temple apart stone by stone. The emperor Nero turned on Christians, blamed the fire of Rome on them, dressed them in animal skins and had them torn apart by wild animals in the Colosseum. He lit up his gardens at night by using Christians as torches, burning them alive. Despite all this gospel went out. Sign up and be tortured to death. And people did, in their thousands, in their tens of thousands, slaves, masters, Jews, Gentiles, even Roman Emperors; brothers and sisters, all one in Christ Jesus. And in 380 AD the whole Roman Empire was declared Christian. And this gospel of the kingdom has travelled 14,000 kilometres and 2,000 years across oceans, cultures, languages and history to hit you centre mass and change your life forever as well, just as it has changed

the entire world. Meditate over the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ this morning. What can't it do? Who can't it save?

It will be preached in the whole world. It is being preached in the whole world. As a testimony about Jesus Christ. Shortly the end will come, its closer than it has ever been. Thank God this morning for the power of the gospel. And pray for opportunities and the courage of the early church to share this gospel in light of the end that is coming.