

A Testimony To All Nations
Matthew 24:1-51
Key Verse: 24:14

by Sarah Barry

"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."

"Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. 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."

We thank God that during the last of May and the first days of June, we could celebrate in Korea 50 years of God's work in and through UBF. Dr. John Jun gave a powerful and meaningful message on 1 Peter 2:9, "You are a Royal Priesthood." I am grateful that I could be present at this historic meeting to thank and praise and worship God and listen to his word. The worship service was followed by a three-day missionary conference. We remember the past so that we might better find God's direction for the future. I was asked to give a main address for the opening of the missionary conference. I chose to speak on Matthew 24, "A Testimony To All Nations." Here in Chicago, we are studying Matthew's gospel. We have not reached chapter 24, but Pastor Ron asked me to share with you the message I shared at the missionary conference. As we learned in the introduction of Matthew, there are 5 great teaching sections in Matthew. The Sermon on the Mount, which we are studying here in Chicago now is the first one. Chapters 24 and 25 constitute the fifth and final of these. These chapters are sometimes called the "Olivet discourse" because Jesus was sitting with his disciples on the Mount of Olives, as he taught.

Why did I choose this chapter for the Missionary Conference? I wanted to think about what God is doing, so that as we move into the next 50 years we might not do our own thing, but participate in what God is doing. To see the big picture we must look at the end, for we are living in the end times. We must remember that Jesus is coming again to establish his kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. This is our great hope. He taught us to pray, "your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. He promised to come with a trumpet blast in power and great glory on clouds of the sky. One false prophet made the headlines this past month by predicting that Jesus would come and the world would end May 21, 2011. But it is June 12, and we and this old world are still here. And God is keeping his secret about when the world will end.

However, through earthquakes, famines, floods and volcano eruptions, wars and rumors of war, God reminds us that he is in control of nature and history. He reminds us that Jesus is coming again. No one knows when Jesus is coming. But his coming is sure. Let's read verses 30-31. "Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. 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."

What is God doing in these end times? How must we live in response to what he is doing? Let's read Mt 24:14.

"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." This is God's promise. God keeps his promises. There is no failure in world mission. The gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world. Then the end will come.

Jesus' sorrow --Jerusalem destroyed

In Matthew 21, Jesus entered Jerusalem as a humble king, riding a donkey. He went first to the temple. He cleansed it. He drove out all those who were doing worldly business there. He rebuked the Pharisees for their hypocrisy. He wept over Jerusalem because it had rejected God's love and blessing. He wept because of the suffering that would come to Jerusalem.(23:37-39) Let's read Mt 24:1-3.["Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. 'Do you see all these things?' he asked. Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; everyone will be thrown down." 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 and his disciples climbed the Mount of Olives. They sat down, overlooking the beautiful temple which King Herod had built. Jesus' disciples were moved as they looked at the beautiful buildings. The disciples revealed a value system focused on wealth and power, on material things. Jesus was still weeping in his heart because of God's people who rejected God's love (23:37). His heart was full of sorrow

when he responded, "I tell you the truth. This temple will be demolished. Not one stone will be left standing on another. Every stone will be thrown down."

The destruction of the temple and of Jerusalem happened just as Jesus prophesied: In 70 A.D. a Roman army under General Titus entered Jerusalem. He was bent on destroying the Jews and their religion. Someone set fire to the temple and it burned to the ground. He killed all the Jews he could find. The streets of the city ran with blood. A few people sought refuge in the Masada fortress, but they were discovered and before they could be massacred, they committed mass suicide. The Jewish people were killed or driven out of Palestine. Those who escaped scattered throughout the world. Jews would not return to reclaim Jerusalem for 2000 years, until after WWII in 1948, when the State of Israel was established. When they began to return, they could not rebuild the temple, because a Mosque was sitting on the temple mount. This was God's sovereign wisdom. There is still no temple; no animal sacrifices. There is no need for the temple, for Jesus is the temple; he is the perfect sacrifice. The destruction of Jerusalem and the attempted annihilation of the Jews is an event comparable to the holocaust of modern times.

To the disciples, the destruction of the temple was tantamount to the end of the world. Indeed, the destruction of Jerusalem foreshadowed the end of the age and Jesus' second coming. Jesus had in his heart two things: the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the age.

The end of the age and Jesus' second coming.

The disciples asked Jesus two questions about the end of the age: When will you come again? And, what will be the sign of your coming?

Jesus begins his answer to the question about signs with a warning: "Do not be deceived." People who only look for signs are frequently deceived. Watch out that no one deceives you--false Messiah's will come. In a world that does not care about truth, lies prevail. False Messiahs take advantage of this. God's people must watch out and not be deceived. God's word is truth. We must be equipped with the sword of the Spirit, the word of God. Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away." (35)

In the time leading up to the end there will be great suffering. (6-12) There will be natural disasters and man-made disasters. Jesus says, "Don't be alarmed, the end has not come. It is the beginning of birth pains." We should not give in to fear. God is in control. (8). What does he mean by "birth pains"? A woman giving birth to a baby suffers excruciating pain. But it is not pain and suffering that leads to death; it is pain that results in a new life coming into the world. The birth pains herald a new and glorious age, the coming of the Risen Christ, King Jesus, and his kingdom.

What then is the sign of his coming? Read verses 30-31. "Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. 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." The sun will be darkened. The moon will not give its light. God will shake the heavens and the stars will fall from the sky. Jesus' coming is a cosmic event. His elect are those who have accepted the gospel of his kingdom. The mourners are those who have not. The elect will come with the Risen Christ to join him in establishing his glorious kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

The disciples did not fully understand, but they believed. We also do not understand everything, but we believe that Jesus is coming again. It was promised to the first witnesses that Jesus who was taken into heaven would come back in the same way they saw him leave. (Ac 1:11). The Risen Christ will come, bringing God's kingdom to earth. It is the event Paul wrote about in Romans 8:19-25-- "For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. ...the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God." The Risen Jesus, the firstfruit of resurrection will come with his elect. His coming marks the end of this present age. His coming ushers in a new heaven and a new earth. Jerusalem had been cruelly destroyed. But the Apostle John had a vision of a new and glorious Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. (Rev 21:1,2) She is filled with love and hope and overflowing joy. The kingdom of the Risen Christ will be full of inexpressible love and joy.

The next question is, "When?" --What is the time of his coming? Jesus' answer is, "No one knows when; Be ready; keep watch." "But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." (36) If we knew the time of Jesus' coming, we could think, "I've got time. I'll get ready later." People were like this in the days of Noah (24:37-39). Only Noah was ready. The rest of the people went about business as usual, eating, drinking, partying, getting married. They paid much attention to their flesh lives and no attention to their spiritual lives. Noah also lived an ordinary life, but he was different. He was ready. He made time to walk with God, and listen to him. He believed that God meant what he said. So, when God told him to build a boat, he built it. He believed and obeyed God's word. He and his family were saved, but everyone else drowned. In the same way, we

should be ready. Like Noah, we should walk with God in prayer, listen to his word and be ready. Jesus will come like a thief in the night. He will come at a time when we do not expect him. Therefore, we should keep watch. (42-44)

3. What is God doing in these times and what will he keep on doing?

What is God doing? First, He is working to help his elect stand firm. Look at verses 12-13. "Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved." Second, He is working now through his elect to bring his love and mercy and forgiveness to the world. Third, He will gather his elect from everywhere. "When the Son of Man comes with power and glory he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call and they will gather his elect from the 4 winds, from one end of the heavens to the other." Who, then are the elect? Who is he gathering?

God's elect are those who have accepted Jesus as Savior and Lord. They are the sheep of chapter 25, who inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the creation. (25:31-40) The elect love God because God first loved them. They inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the creation. But, on the other hand, wickedness will increase (9-11). God's people will be persecuted, hated, put to death. Some will fail. They will turn from the faith and betray each other. Most men's love will grow cold. But these, the worst of times, are also the best of times. It is the time of opportunity. It is the time for love to challenge hate, the time for Jesus' people, the elect, to make God's saving grace and his love known to the suffering people of the world. The wickedness of injustice breeds hatred.

Tass Saada was a Palestinian refugee. He was raised in a world of radical Islam and violent Palestinian nationalism. He hated Jews. He immigrated to America, but in his heart, he hated America. He thought that the world should be Muslim, and Jihad (Holy War) was the way. A friend tried to evangelize him and he got mad. Then his friend offered him a Bible. He shouted, "Don't get near me--that's God's book." So his friend said, 'You believe this is God's book? Then listen to what God's Book says about Jesus.' And he read John 1:14--"the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. It hit Tass that the Bible teaches plainly that Jesus is God and he trembled. He heard a voice, "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life." He didn't know that these words were from the Bible. Jesus was speaking to him personally. Jihad is not the way; Jesus is the Way. He repented. He prayed, "Jesus, come into my life." He was transformed by the power of the Word of God and the Holy Spirit from man of hatred and violence to a man of peace and compassion. He had to deal with his hatred of Jews. He called his friend. "Was Jesus a Jew?" "Yes, Jesus was a Jew." So Tass Saada decided to love Jews. He became a powerful preacher of the gospel of the kingdom. He founded an organization called "Hope for Ishmael" dedicated to reconciling Arabs and Jews through the cross of Jesus. Tass Saada is one of God's elect.

Louis Zamperini was an Olympic runner. He set new records aiming for the 4 minute mile. As a youth, Louie was incorrigible and untamable. Then he found that he could run. His Olympic career was cut short by the advent of WW11. He was drafted and became a bombardier on a B24. His plane crashed in the Pacific Ocean. He survived hunger, thirst, sharks and enemy bullets, drifting for 47 days some 2000 miles across the Pacific Ocean. A typhoon blew his raft to a tiny island that was occupied by the enemy Japanese. Thus began 3 years as a prisoner of war. He was not broken by the crash, the ocean, or by the circling sharks or by the typhoon. But the cruelty and inhumanity of his captors almost broke him. The treatment he received in captivity was cruel beyond imagination. One sadistic guard who he nicknamed "Bird" targeted him. This guard made it his goal to break Louie. He beat him, humiliated him, enslaved him and dehumanized him. The war escalated and an American invasion of Japan was imminent. His captors decided to kill all prisoners. Three days before they carried out their plan, the bomb fell on Hiroshima and again on Nagasaki and the war was over. Louie came home. Bitterness and hatred consumed him. He became an alcoholic. He couldn't hold a job. "Bird" had ruined his life. Nightmares tormented him. He had one goal--to return to Japan and kill "Bird." He did indeed return to Japan. It was to carry the Olympic torch. But something had happened in his heart. He met Jesus at a Billy Graham crusade. He tasted God's love and the hatred left. The love of Jesus who suffered on the cross conquered the man who was not broken by the worst that men could do. He visited the camp where he had been tortured and humiliated and he forgave them all, even "Bird." He was set free. He started a "Victory" boys camp to minister to broken young boys with the love and compassion of Jesus. Louis Zamperini was one of God's elect.

There are many kinds of wickedness that make love grow cold. To nurse bitterness or to hold on to a grudge makes love grow cold. Selfishness and indifference are not as evident as overt cruelty and poverty and broken homes. When I examined my own heart I realized that my love was cold. I found in myself a rebel spirit and a sharp tongue

and I repented and continue to repent. I repented of my sarcastic tongue, but it comes back from time to time. And I must repent of my selfishness every day. This is the time to challenge indifference and hatred with God's love. God's elect are not exempt from suffering and pain. God refines and purifies the hearts of his people through suffering. Through broken dreams, sickness, seeming failure, children's problems, God purifies our hearts. By his grace, we can become a testimony to the nations.

God is working through his elect to bring his gospel to all nations. God's mission to the world will not fail. God is spreading his gospel to all nations through his elect. Look at verse 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." God's Son, Jesus, was born at God's set time, according to God's plan, into a Roman world. Roman laws, Roman soldiers, Roman roads and a common language unified the world in a way that it had never been unified before. Paul and the apostles could travel anywhere without visas. The gospel was spread to the whole Roman world.

We have "Roman roads" in our time, too. We live in the world of the internet, satellite T.V. and radio; in the world of facebook and Twitter and Youtube. Through these modern roads of communication, our world has become one community. In Egypt, two young people made facebook entries that sparked a revolution. Because of the internet, news spread. Revolution sparked revolution. The Muslim Radicals want to destabilize the world so that they can step into a power vacuum and enforce Sharia law. We don't know which way the revolutions in Libya, Syria, Yemen, Russia are going. But this is a time of unprecedented opportunity for the gospel of the kingdom, the good news of God's love to be preached in the whole world. Radio station HCJB continues to beam the message of the Prince of Peace into Libya and North Africa. People are listening. Jesus promised that "the gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations and then the end will come." (14) Jesus keeps his promise. His coming is our glorious hope.

4. How can we participate in what God is doing in these end times?

We can love God. God is love. He commands us to love him. (Dt 6:5) We can love him because he first loved us. When we accepted God's grace of forgiveness, we welcomed Jesus into our hearts. Look at verses 40-41. We cannot tell about a person's inner life from his outward appearance. But God looks at the heart. When the Son of Man comes, two men will be working together in a field. They are doing the same thing. But their hearts are different. One has Jesus as king of his heart; The other one has no relationship with God. One will be taken; the other left. Two women will be working together, grinding grain with a hand mill. One has a heart that is ruled by Jesus and the other's heart is full of greed and lust and bitterness. One will be taken; the other left. By his grace we can stand firm to the end. Let us trust Jesus and give him our hearts.

We can love one another. Even though people's love grows cold, God's love does not grow cold. He is working in and through us to bring the gospel of the kingdom to the ends of the earth. He is working to share his love in a world where love has grown cold. In Chapter 25 we find that God's elect show God's love to the world as they care for the vulnerable people of society--they feed the hungry, visit the prisoners, minister to the sick, clothe the naked, love the unlovable. They do this without realizing that they are serving God and spreading the gospel of his kingdom. The heart cleansed by Jesus' blood and ruled by the Holy Spirit is a heart that is ready to meet King Jesus. Let us forgive one another. Let us love one another and build up one another. Let us love the people of the world for which Jesus died.

We can be faithful and wise servants. What can we do as we wait for Jesus' return? We can keep on living the life God called us to live. In verses 45-51, Jesus talks about the faithful and wise servant whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to feed them...He says, "It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns." As we wait for the coming of our King Jesus, the indwelling Jesus helps us to be faithful and wise servants. He helps each of us to overcome our selfishness and to be mindful of all of God's family. He enables my life and your life to be a testimony to the nations.

We can participate in making disciples of all nations. He promises that this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations. This is what God is doing. In the last verses of Matthew's gospel, he sends us forth to share in what he is doing. "Go and make disciples of all nations." We are in Christ and he is in us. May God use our lives as a testimony to the nations. "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."