

We've been working our way through the Gospel of Matthew, and when we got to Matthew 24, we sort of entered a little sub-series – “What to expect when you're expecting.” What do we expect to happen, while we're waiting for the return of Jesus Christ?

And so far, we've encountered some pretty tough stuff that's on the agenda:

1. Firstly, we expect Jesus to be a long time coming, so don't be discouraged that it's already been 2000 years. It could be any moment of any day.
2. Secondly, we expect there to be ‘big trouble’ – the great tribulation before Jesus returns, and at that time, Christians are going to suffer great persecution.
3. Thirdly, we expect there to be false christs and false prophets, trying to lead people astray.
4. Fourthly, we expect the **un**holy to desecrate the holy. We expect to see the worship of the One True God, to become increasingly difficult, and for other gods to take His place, and to be placed alongside of Him.
5. And then there was last week's topic: “Before Jesus returns, we expect lawlessness to increase. And we looked at the different domains in which this is already happening:
 - Lawlessness in the world – both personal lawlessness, which comes from a disregard for authority, and a state-sanctioned

lawlessness, where the laws that nations make, are completely lawless in themselves.

- The second domain we encountered, was lawlessness in the church – where a church will embrace lawlessness rather than living by God’s righteousness.
- And the third domain, is that personal domain for us Christians – where Christians begin to live lawless lives

6. And sixthly (also last week), we very sadly discovered, that before Jesus returns, the love of many will grow cold. As lawlessness heats up, love cools down.

So, over the last 5 weeks, we’ve seen some pretty tough stuff, that we expect to happen, while we’re waiting for Jesus to return....

But at the end of last week, I actually promised you, that today would be an entirely different matter. Today, we’re going to see something that’s going to be pretty jolly good – something that’s going to happen before Jesus returns.

And so the 7th thing we expect, before Jesus returns, is
“this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations.

Hey??? Does that sound pretty good? ¹⁴ ... **this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.**

And you know what??? The best part is, it's already happening.

The gospel **is** being proclaimed throughout the whole world. No, not everybody has personally heard it yet, but there is **not** a country in the world today, where the gospel is **not** being preached. Even in places like China, Saudi Arabia, North Korea - places where persecution is so severe that the church has to hide (because if they get caught preaching the Gospel, they're in big strife.. – even in places like that, Christians have never been stopped from proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom.

If you've got something that's as good as the good news, then that's something that you cannot keep to yourself.

So today, I'm going to be posing 3 questions:

- What is “this gospel of the Kingdom”?
- What does it mean to proclaim this gospel?
- And how is it a testimony to all nations?

And I'm going to begin, by taking you back, to first century Rome.

Imagine that Caesar's armies have been in a battle in some far-flung land...

And approaching Rome, comes a runner – a messenger – in Greek (euangelos or evangelist)- a messenger of good news. And as he comes running into town, he's shouting εὐαγγέλιον εὐαγγέλιον or in English "Gospel. Gospel". "Good news. Good news." Caesar's armies have won the victory... "Gospel. Gospel"

That's how the word “εὐαγγέλιον – Gospel”, was used.

And when the writers of the New Testament had to translate what Jesus had said, they could find no better word than “εὐαγγέλιον – Gospel”... A message of good news – great news – a great victory has been won – it's something to celebrate – something joyful...

“this **good news** – this **gospel** of the Kingdom” is what will be proclaimed throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations.

But what **is** the gospel? To our shame, many Christians differ in our opinion of what the gospel is...

Some will look to the Apostle Paul, and say, “Paul explains the gospel”. We have all sinned and fall short of the glory of God. The punishment for sin is death. We're all condemned to hell – no one is righteous – not

even one, and so the good news – the Gospel, is that Jesus took that punishment for us. Jesus died in our place. And all those who repent of their sin, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and make Him Lord of their life, will be saved...

I can't argue with that – that's true...

Others though, will look to social reform and good deeds that Christians do in the name of Christ. Jesus Himself said:

Luke 4:18–19 (ESV)

18 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news (gospel – euengellian) to
the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the
captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

And for some people, "gospel" is translated as social action.... So what is it??? What is the gospel?

Well, I'll tell you what it is. The euengellian – the gospel – the good news... - is God...

The gospel is God. It's everything about Him. It's the whole story of God in word and action. It's God revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ preached the good news, but He also **was** the good news.

The Gospel **cannot** be divorced from the person, action, and saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The opening words of the Gospel of Mark 1:1 The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

That's the beginning of it – the gospel continues. The activity of God in your life and in my life, is the continuing story of the Gospel.

The gospel – the good news of Jesus Christ, takes us beyond what may be a current miserable existence.

Did you notice that Jesus said ? ¹⁴ ... **this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.**

What do you think He means by “this??? What's he just been talking about??? He's been talking about trouble and persecution... Look, I'll read it:

“See that no one leads you astray. ⁵ For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray. ⁶ And you will hear of wars and rumours of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is **not** yet. ⁷ For nation **will** rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there **will** be famines and earthquakes in various places. ⁸ All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.

⁹ “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. ¹⁰ And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. ¹¹ And many false prophets **will** arise and lead many astray. ¹² And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. ¹³ **But..... the one who endures to the end will be saved.** 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.

I'm going to have to take you right back, to the very first message I gave on this passage:

Where we talked about the great trauma and pain and suffering, that is going to unfold in the world.., and how these are like birth pains... Yep, there's a lot of bad stuff that is already happening, and is continuing to happen, until Jesus returns... *And just like when a mother goes through birth pains, the good news is the baby is born* – When we suffer trials and tribulations, the good news is **the one who endures to the end will be saved.** ¹⁴ **And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world**

There might be times in your life, when you find yourself wondering “Where’s God?” Well, I’ll tell you where He is. God is right there with you – He’s right there, living the Gospel with you, as you live the Gospel with Him...

And as we draw near the end, many will abandon their faith in God... And the world **will** mock and say “Where’s your God now?”... Don’t be surprised – they did it to Jesus. As Jesus hung on the cross, they said: **27:⁴³ He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him.**

But what they didn’t realise was, even as Jesus died on the cross, this was the euangellian – the good news – the gospel – even in that very dark place.

The gospel, is bigger than circumstances. And even when tribulation comes – the message remains the same, and it **will** be proclaimed, throughout the whole world.

What is the Gospel? God is the gospel. Jesus Christ is the Gospel. Holy Spirit with us, is the gospel. The activity of God, is the gospel. Even in a dark place, through trial and tribulation, this gospel, is lived, and proclaimed...

So, 2nd question: What does it mean to **proclaim** this gospel?

There once was a time when proclamation didn't need to be explained, but because many of us want to avoid it, or abnegate our responsibility, we seem to have become a generation who have given “proclamation” a whole new meaning.

The Greek word **κηρύσσω** (*kēryssō*), means: announce, make known, proclaim (aloud).

It means, “Use your words...” – use your words to make known the good news of Jesus...

For many of us in the church, we seem to think that proclamation – we now call it “preaching” – is the

responsibility of one or two people in the church...
What a nonsense.

That'd be like saying "State of Origin night, it's the job of the cheer leaders, to cheer for Queensland..." Did anyone here cheer for Queensland, by the way??? Did anyone happen to wear maroon on Wednesday or Thursday?

You were proclaiming the good news of your favourite footy team.

Why, when it comes to the even better news – the very best of news, all of a sudden our mouth snaps shut?

I'll tell you why – it's fear.

Proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ in the world, is as much to be feared as decking yourself out in maroon, to go and cheer for your favourite team in front of a big screen TV in the bar of a Western Sydney pub....

Generally, the good news of Jesus Christ, is as welcome in the world, as you would be in that pub. And so we're afraid to tell people the good news of God.

Attributed to St Francis of Assisi is a saying (which there's no evidence he said by the way), "Preach the gospel, and if necessary, use words."

It's a pretty snappy saying, which basically means, "Live what you preach".

I want to rescue that phrase from how it is most used today. I have heard so many people quote it, and in the same paragraph, to use it as an excuse to behave as if their silence is their gift to God. I believe that the greatest denial of Christ today, is the silence of believers.

The funny thing is, St Francis apparently was well known for preaching about 5 sermons a day. And he'd stand up on a soap box in a market place to start telling people about Jesus, every opportunity he got....

What gives us the right, to keep it all to ourselves? The world is perishing, while we remain silent... And some of us will say "People will know I'm a Christian, by the way I live my life"... OK, you might live a good life, and people might be able to see that... But how does that give them hope????

I'll tell you how they get hope: It's when somebody who has lived a bad life in the past, tells them how Jesus saved them from that, to something far better.

If all they see is ‘good people in churches’, that’ll just confirm what they’ve always believed – “I’m not good enough to go to church”. What people need, is somebody to tell them the gospel. God lifts us up out of sin, to move us to righteousness.

Did you know you’re allowed to be proud of Jesus? No, it’s not right to be proud of yourself, but it is right to be proud of Jesus and what He’s done. It is right to proclaim it.

I’d better keep moving.
How is it a testimony to all nations?

μαρτύριον (*martyrion*), (from which we get our word martyr). It means: “testimony, evidence, proof”...

When the Gospel is proclaimed – in spite of all its opposition – that is the evidence the world needs, to give it credibility.

The context of this proclamation, that goes out into the whole world, is very often in the midst of suffering....

I wanted to find a quote for you, in a book, but it’s packed in a box somewhere, and I’m not going to find it. So I’m going to have to give it to you as best as I can remember. I’m a very slow reader, and people give me

heaps of books to read, that I never get read. Most of them could say in 3 paragraphs what they take 300 pages to say... And so if you've given me a book I've never read, I'm sorry – I'm too slow to get through them all.

But this book called “The Heavenly Man”, it captivated me. It tells the story of Brother Yun, who runs a prohibited house church in China.

And in it he says,

"Don't pray for the persecution to stop! We shouldn't pray for a lighter load to carry, but a stronger back to endure! Then the world will see that God is with us, empowering us to live in a way that reflects his love and power."

That is how the gospel is a testimony to the nations.

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

Never before, has the gospel been proclaimed in so much of the world. Even our little church here – each of these messages goes on the internet. Christian radio. Christian television. Short Wave Band. Christian

Satellite television – beaming into every corner of the world.

Christian missionaries, giving up their life's dreams, in order to serve God in other lands. We had the Gideon's here a couple of weeks ago, and they told us about all of the languages the bible is being translated into.

Never before, has the gospel been proclaimed in so much of the world.

But let's not have the attitude that that's **their** job, and I can stay quiet...

I'm constantly amazed at how God makes our series line up with what's current for us as a congregation....

Those who are visiting us this Sunday, might think that I chose this bible passage to line up with their visit... I didn't – it's just the way it came about...

But what an entirely appropriate topic for today – that before Jesus returns, the gospel will be proclaimed throughout the whole world....

This Sunday, of all Sundays, we've got some of the crew, who are about to travel more than 13000 kilometres – all the way to Uganda – to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. You might think you're a

medical team, but you're much more than that. You'll be sharing healing, but more importantly, you will also be sharing Christ.

No matter how inadequate we may feel we are, words spoken from a position of faith, have power.

(not spoken from a position of education; theological training; not spoken with eloquence – but from a position of faith, have power.)

Romans 1:¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed **from faith for faith**, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

All you need, is faith – faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And when you share your faith, the righteousness of God is being revealed from your faith, for (potentially) the development of faith in those who hear.

Let's pray.

ⁱ The heavenly man