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Sermon Notes

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Christ's Sovereign Declaration: This Gospel Will Be Preached

Matthew 24:14

On a rocky mountainside in Palestine, a young rabbi of a small Jewish sect sat surrounded by his earnest followers and made a sweeping prediction:

Matthew 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.

That prediction would be one of the costliest predictions Jesus ever made. It would cost the lives of countless thousands over two thousand years to make it come true. It would bring pain and disease and injuries and tears and torture and blood and tragic funerals and incalculable sorrow to those who would see to it that it happened. The preaching of the gospel in every nation has been incalculably expensive...

Examples abound from Church History:

October 8, 1732: a sailing vessel pulled away from the wharf in Copenhagen, Denmark. On board were John Leonard Dober, a potter, and David Nitschman, a carpenter, who were leaving the security of their jobs and families in Copenhagen to become the first Moravian missionaries. In a prayer meeting, they had both felt the call to come and minister the gospel to the slaves of the sugar plantations of St. Thomas in the West Indies. They knew that the only way to reach these slaves was to become slaves themselves... so they voluntarily sold themselves into slavery to reach the lost people. One of the men left his wife and children begging on the wharf for him to reconsider and stay. But the call and heart of God for these slaves in the West Indies was even greater than the pull of home. As the ship pulled away from the docks the men lifted a cry, "**May the Lamb that was slain receive the reward of His suffering**" which became the resonating heartbeat of the Moravian Missions movement.

The cost they paid was very high... so was the cost of Adoniram Judson who buried two different wives and six children in five different locations... whose sorrow over the loss of his first wife, Ann, was so profound that he dug his own grave and sat by it for hours staring into it... But despite this immense cost, Judson fulfilled in part Christ's amazing prediction... the gospel of the Kingdom was preached in Burma as a testimony to them

Their spirit—their drive—was to fulfill the Great Commission, even if it cost them their lives. It also motivated the Student Volunteer Movement missionaries to Africa in the

19th century who packed their belongings in their own coffins because the life expectancy of missionaries to the jungles of Africa at that time was 18 months because of tropical fevers. 80% did in fact die within two years of their arrival.

It motivated William Borden, 1909 graduate of Yale University and heir to the Borden family fortune who was converted to Christianity and gave his life to become a missionary to Muslims in China... he died of spinal meningitis during his training in Egypt; his grieving parents were given his Bible; In it they found in one place the words "No Reserve" and a date placing the note shortly after he renounced his fortune in favor of missions. At a later point, he had written "No Retreat", dated shortly after he was diagnosed with meningitis. Shortly before he died, he added the phrase "No Regrets."

This is the kind of commitment it would take to make Jesus' words come true!!

How is it that Jesus, sitting on a rocky mountainside overlooking Jerusalem, could predict that twenty centuries of His followers would be willing to sacrifice everything they had to preach the gospel all over the world?

How could he be so certain that it would ever get that far?

The answer to these questions is the focus of this sermon!!

Context:

- Jesus' statement about the destruction of the Temple
- The disciples' private question
- Matthew 24: Jesus' teaching on the end of the world
- Matthew 24:4-14 The nature of life between the first and second comings of Christ
 - Vs. 4-5 Warning about false Christs and false teaching
 - Vs. 6-8 the "beginning of birth pains": wars, rumors of wars, famines, earthquakes... the convulsions of a sin-sick planet
 - Vs. 9-13 the specific sufferings of the church: apostasy, betrayals, hatred, persecution... the need to "stand firm to the end" in order to be saved
 - Then... verse 14... the great sign of the end of the world... the reason WHY Christ is waiting to return

I. Not a Command But a Prophecy

A. Christ's Saving Purpose

1. Why He came to begin with

Luke 19:10 the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.

2. Why He is waiting to return

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

2 Peter 3:15 Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation,

B. Many Commands for Evangelism

1. We don't lack for commands in the New Testament that we ought to be involved in evangelism and missions
2. There are FOUR VERSIONS of the "Great Commission", one in each of the Gospels

Matthew 28:19-20 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

- a. Note the clear commands: "GO" and "MAKE DISCIPLES of ALL NATIONS" and "BAPTIZE THEM" and "TEACH THEM TO OBEY EVERYTHING"
- b. Note also the implication that this commission is for the church until the end of time: "I am with you always, *to the end of the age*"

Other versions as well:

Mark 16:15-16 He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. ¹⁶ Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.

Romans 16:26-27 by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him-- ²⁷ to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.

The writing and proclamation of the gospel has been COMMANDED by the eternal God!!

C. The Lesson of the Commands: We Have an Obligation

Romans 1:14-16 I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. ¹⁵ That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome. ¹⁶ ¶ I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes

This was the DEBT of Paul's life... he OWED the gospel to lost people...

WE should not feel any less obligation!

That was why, in 1792, William Carey, the father of the modern Protestant missions movement wrote a tract entitled

An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens

Carey was arguing against a PASSIVE view of the Great Commission that, if God wanted the heathens (unreached peoples of the world) converted, He could do it Himself without us

Carey was arguing that we have an OBLIGATION... we OWE it to them to do what we can to reach them with the gospel

And we are to use MEANS... there are practical things we can do, while trusting in the sovereignty of God to make them effective... we are to get on ships, he would say, and sail to India, and set up missions stations, and study the Hindu languages, and preach the gospel plainly to them, and translate the Bible into their native tongues, and set up printing presses, and print those bibles, and teach the people how to read, and establish local churches... etc.

These are MEANS to the end of the conversion of the heathens

We OUGHT to do it

However... I want you to notice the grammar of the text this morning...

D. This is NOT a command... it is a Sovereign Declaration

Matthew 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.

1. There is not a word of command in this declaration
2. Jesus is not telling His apostles something they should DO... he has already done that before and will do it again after He has risen
3. But here, when tracing out with His prophetic power the future of the world, He is not at this moment commanding them to do ANYTHING... He is merely stating what must CERTAINLY come to pass

E. The Lesson of this Declaration: This WILL HAPPEN!!!

1. The main point of this sermon is to give you a sense of absolute CERTAINTY about the completion of the Great Commission
2. It is CERTAIN that this Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached
3. It is CERTAIN that every nation on the face of the earth will hear its words
4. It is CERTAIN that witnesses will travel over the burning sands of the desert, through the snowy and forbidding mountain passes of the highest mountain ranges on earth, through the steamy, dark jungles of Africa and the Amazonian rain forests, over the seemingly endless waves of the southern Pacific ocean to reach the distant islands of cannibals... it is ABSOLUTELY CERTAIN that witnesses will be raised up, motivated, trained, prepared, funded, and sent out... it is absolutely certain that they will arrive and proclaim faithfully the true gospel... the native people will hear it proclaimed as a testimony...
5. Almighty God, speaking by the perfect tongue of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, throws His sovereignty behind this one statement:

The Great Commission WILL BE COMPLETED!!!! Nothing can stop it!!!

II. The Prophecy Explained

A. Message: "This Gospel of the Kingdom"

1. Notice Christ's words "THIS gospel..."
 - a. Implied is that the gospel is being taught and lived out in front of them by Jesus Christ Himself
 - b. The word "Gospel" is the English translation of the Greek word "evangelion"... the Greek prefix "eu" comes over into English as "ev" and it means "GOOD"... the word "angelion" means "message" or "news"
 - c. This "good news" is the very thing Christ had been teaching them about and displaying before them for these three years
 - d. The KINGDOM was the focus of everything Christ came to do... the Kingdom is the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven... the realm where God rules, where His subjects delight to obey Him... where sin is defeated and order restored
 - e. Christ HIMSELF is the centerpiece of that Kingdom... He is the King of the Kingdom of heaven
 - f. It is GOOD NEWS because His kingly reign is so perfect, so good, so wonderful

Matthew 11:28-30 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

John Piper's recent book *God IS the Gospel*

The GOOD NEWS is GOD HIMSELF... His character, His holiness, His power, His beauty, His wisdom, His love... all of that given to you as a result of the forgiveness of sins through the blood of Christ shed on the cross...

By believing in the gospel, you get GOD... and that is infinitely good news

2. Also "THIS gospel of the Kingdom"... it implies that the gospel is being lived out in space and time right before their eyes
 - a. The history of Jesus is the centerpiece of the gospel
 - b. His miraculous birth... His sinless life... His powerful miracles... His deep and perfect teachings.... His astonishing promises... His gentle character and tender mercy
 - c. The disciples were WITNESSES of the life that He lived... and that life was the center of the GOOD NEWS
 - d. Jesus knew very well that the apostles had been chosen to watch, to experience the physical life that Christ lived on earth... their EYEWITNESS accounts of His life would be the basis of the gospel
 - e. They were like little CAMCORDERS... their eyes taking in the sights of Jesus, their ears absorbing the sounds of His voice, their skin sensing the cold of the stormy sea that He stilled... THIS gospel of the Kingdom... the one that was lived out in front of you

B. Method: "Will be preached"

1. The only way to convey THIS gospel is by WORD
2. Christ would entrust the salvation of souls to WORDS... a message PROCLAIMED... PREACHED
3. Messengers would travel over land and sea and would stand and proclaim a message to hearers
4. Faith would come by HEARING this message

Romans 10:13-17 "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." ¹⁴ ¶ How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to

hear without someone preaching? ¹⁵ And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" ... ¹⁷ So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

5. The method will never change... words must be spoken...

a. Nowadays, new “evangelicals” who have a heart for the decaying cities of the world are saying foolish things like

“Preach the gospel... use words if necessary!”

Sometimes attributed to St. Francis of Assisi

It is like saying

“Feed starving children... use food if necessary!”

The implication is that the gospel is “preached” by our actions as we clean up an junk-filled abandoned lot and plant trees and make it a park for urban children to play in

Friends... that is NOT preaching the gospel... it may give you a platform to preach the gospel, but it is NOT preaching the gospel

WORDS ARE NECESSARY... the gospel words about Christ’s life, death, and resurrection are the POWER OF GOD FOR SALVATION of people who believe

6. What Jesus is saying here is that the message will MOST CERTAINLY be preached

C. Scope: “In the whole world”

1. Jesus’ eyes are on the WHOLE WORLD... the Greek here means the “inhabited” world... the place where people have built their homes
2. Furthermore, the Greek intensifies this...the WHOLE of the INHABITED world... it is intensive, it is clear... not a single inhabited place will be missed
3. From the beginning, the God who made this globe has intended that it be inhabited throughout with people who will glorify Him for its beauty
4. Habakkuk 2:14 sums up God’s consistent desire in this

Habakkuk 2:14 For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.

5. So Jesus is asserting that there will not be a single inhabited portion of the globe that does not receive a proclamation of the gospel message

6. There is no strategy needed for the uninhabited portions of the globe... for Greenland, for the Sahara desert, for the Antarctic, for the Pacific Ocean floor, etc.
7. It's PEOPLE we're after... wherever the PEOPLE are

D. Purpose: "As a testimony to all nations"

1. The word "testimony" implies a need to PERSUADE... to PROVE the nature of the Kingdom and the identity of the KING...
 - a. The evidence of the deity of Christ asserted
 - b. The proof of his miracles
 - c. The testimony of eyewitnesses concerning His bodily resurrection from the dead
 - d. The goal of this preaching is PERSUASION... pleading... reasoning
 - e. The evidence of the prophets is brought forth... of fulfilled prophecy to prove the identity of Christ
3. "All nations" = Greek word from which we get the word "ethnic"
 - a. Much work done on this concept since the middle of the twentieth century...
 - b. The idea from Donald McGavran's writings... he was a missionary in India and observed different ethnic and linguistic groupings within the geographical region in which he was working... it wasn't enough to send missionaries to "India" as a political nation, and say the nation was "reached" with the gospel... there are ethnic groups within the nation that are distinct... they have their own language, their own culture, their own history, their own marriage customs... they don't mingle with people from other ethnic groups... this is what "ethne" means in the Greek

Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization:

There are several facets to the way people groups are identified: Linguistic, cultural, social, economic, geographic, religious, and political factors can each be part of what gives formation to the peoples of the earth. From the viewpoint of evangelism, a "people group" is the largest possible group within which the gospel can spread as a discipling, or church planting movement without encountering barriers of understanding or acceptance

- c. Mission strategists go on to define "unreached"

Joshua Project: A people group among which there is no indigenous community of believing Christians with adequate numbers and resources to evangelize this people group.

4. Jesus is saying that this gospel of the Kingdom WILL be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations
5. Revelation 7 goes beyond this to show that there will be ELECT from EVERY nation on earth effectively won to Christ
6. But in Matthew 24:14, Jesus is merely saying that the gospel will be preached to them

E. Result: “And then, the end will come”

1. The implication: this is the work Christ is wanting to get done before the end of the world
2. ONLY WHEN this gospel of the Kingdom is preached as a testimony to all nations will the end come

III. The Power Behind the Prophecy

A. The Absolute Sovereignty of God

1. Only God can make ANY kind of prediction about the future... even including small matters like weather or sporting events
2. BUT only a GREAT GOD can make this kind of a GREAT prediction about the future
3. The sheer number of things that had to happen to make this a reality are mind-boggling
 - a. No one missionary could do all this work
 - b. It was too immense for the Twelve Apostles as well
 - c. Christ is predicting the mobilization of generation after generation of men and women who will be willing to lay down their lives for the advance of the gospel
 - d. Christ knows full well that some parts of the world will require martyrs... people who will DIE to reach that tribe with the gospel
 - e. Christ is stating here: NO MATTER WHAT THE COST, this work will actually be finished
4. Only a Sovereign God can make this happen

B. The Power of the Holy Spirit over Human Hearts

1. Key issue: the power of the Holy Spirit to transform the hearts of His people and make them willing to die for others

Acts 1:8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

2. The power works FIRST on the hearts of the messengers, THEN on the hearts of those who hear
3. The Holy Spirit has the power to transform our selfish hearts, our materialistic hearts, our comfort-loving hearts

C. The Power to Thrust Out Laborers... Even at Great Cost

Matthew 9:36-38 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. ³⁸ Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

1. The prayer of Matthew 9 rests on the sovereignty of God to transform hearts
2. The Greek there is almost violent: THRUST OUT laborers
 - a. Greek is "ekballo" used frequently in describing the casting out of demons
 - b. It has to do with a forceful ejection
 - c. The implication is that the same force that COMPELS a demon to leave a man is that which will compel a missionary to leave the comforts and pleasures of home to go to a distant land and preach the gospel
3. The Holy Spirit has this kind of power

D. A Holy Compulsion

1. The Holy Spirit can make it impossible to resist His call
2. The Holy Spirit can put a fire in our hearts and drive us to do missions
3. Examples: Jeremiah and Paul
 - a. Jeremiah... persecuted and hated because of his preaching of God's word, resolves to stop doing it... BUT

Jeremiah 20:9 if I say, "I will not mention him or speak any more in his name," his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot.

b. So also the Apostle Paul

1 Corinthians 9:16 Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!

4. The compulsion of the Love of Christ

a. The Holy Spirit ministers essentially positively

b. The CONSTRAINT of the love of Christ

2 Corinthians 5:14-15 For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; ¹⁵ and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

“Controls” = “holds us fast” like in a form of bondage... we can’t go anywhere else... we are in some sense CONSTRAINED by the mission God has laid on our hearts

Like Jesus, as He thought about His own mission:

^{RSV} Luke 12:50 I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how I am constrained until it is accomplished!

c. What “constrains us”? the “Love of Christ”...

i) Either “the love that characterized Christ” or “the love directed to Christ”

ii) Either way... it CONSTRAINS us... forces us to preach the gospel

Examples:

Hudson Taylor

1. Served as a missionary in the Shanghai area in 1854, but soon grew depressed around other missionaries, who lived luxurious lifestyles
2. decided to move further inland, and totally immersed himself in Chinese ways
3. In 1857, resigned from his mission agency because they rejected his immersion lifestyle and because their financial support was erratic

4. Returned to England. In 1865, Hudson Taylor began a new era in Protestant missions when he stared at the “accusing map” of China on the wall of his study. He became increasingly burdened for the inland regions of China, and committed his life to bringing the gospel to those inland provinces. He was in Brighton in England when he wrote these words:

“On Sunday, June 25, 1865, unable to bear the sight of a congregation of a thousand or more Christian people rejoicing in their own security while millions were perishing for lack of knowledge, I wandered out on the sands alone, in great spiritual agony, and there the Lord conquered my unbelief, and I surrendered myself to God for this service. I told Him that all the responsibility as to issues and consequences must rest with Him; that as His servant, it was mine to obey and follow Him—His to direct, to care for, and to guide those who might labor with me. Need I say that peace at once flowed into my burdened heart.”

E. Psalm 110 Fulfilled

Psalm 110:1-3 The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." ² The LORD will extend your mighty scepter from Zion; you will rule in the midst of your enemies. ³ Your troops will be willing on your day of battle.

The Holy Spirit has made twenty centuries of missionaries WILLING in the day of Christ's battle

IV. The Prophecy Fulfilled: Already and Not Yet

A. Already: Huge Portions of the World Reached with the Gospel

1. Olivet Discourse: Jesus sat on the rocky mountainside and made this astonishing prediction to a tiny band of followers... the message of this gospel would spread from shore to shore... all over the inhabited earth
2. At the time, anyone hearing it would have thought it preposterous
3. But His power through the Holy Spirit has made it happen

No geographical nation on earth without a New Testament Church

1. couldn't have said that even twenty years ago
2. God has broken through in Mongolia, Albania, and various closed Muslim nations

3. The fall of the Soviet bloc has opened access to countless hidden people groups

Unreached people groups

1. 1950 estimated 24,000 unreached peoples
2. 1980 estimated 17,000 unreached peoples
3. 1992 estimated 11,000
4. 1996 estimates put it around 9,000... almost half what it was in 1980 when I started praying for them
5. Today: JoshuaProject.net puts the number at 6,644
5. MANY local churches have adopted unreached peoples and have prayed for them until there were local churches planted in their midst!!

D. Various amazing statistics: TO GOD'S GLORY

1. 3500 new churches opening worldwide every week
2. 28,000 additional Christians in People's Republic of China every day. In 1950 when China was closed to foreign missionaries, cons. estimates at 1 million Chinese Christians; now conservative estimates at 40-50 million
3. 20,000 new Christians in Africa every day; in 1990, 3% of continent was Christian; now over 40%
4. In Muslim Indonesia, the number of Christians is so high the government has stopped printing the statistic... estimates place it at around 25%!!
6. In Iran, more Muslims have come to faith in Christ since 1980 than in the previous 1000 years combined!!
7. In Russia, after 70 years of oppression, Christians number at least 100 million- five times the number in the Communist parts and 36% of the total population
8. In A.D. 100, 360 non-Christians for every believer; now the estimate is 7 non-Christians for every evangelical believer
9. In A.D. 100, estimated 12 unreached people groups per church congregation; in 1991, with 5 million congregations worldwide, there are at least 500 congregations for every unreached people group!

Christ prophesied accurately when He said, “This gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”

We’re seeing the greatest fulfillment of that prophecy in history right before our eyes!!

NOT YET: The Work Still to Do:

- A. The newly opened nations still have a very small and weak witness
- B. There are still 6644 unreached people groups
- C. There is much degeneration of the church in previously strong areas... look at America... many of our own people hardly know anything about Jesus Christ
- D. There are still almost 4 billion people who have never heard the name of Jesus Christ

The “10-40 Window”... Muslim nations, India, China

V. Applications

- A. Rejoice in the Sovereignty of Christ: to Make this Prediction and to See that it Comes True
 - 1. Understand that the Holy Spirit has power over people’s hearts to COMPEL them to obey
 - 2. Ascribe to the Triune God the glory of the completion of most of this work!
 - 3. Worship Him for how far it’s gotten!
 - 4. Don’t celebrate human will, human spirit, human commitment, human sacrifice... anywhere near as much as you celebrate the sovereign power of the Spirit to MAKE it happen
- B. Be Confident in the Final Outcome
 - 1. We are not fighting a losing battle... but a winning one!!
 - 2. The elect from every nation will hear the gospel and be saved
 - 3. Many non-elect from every people group on earth will hear the gospel as a testimony according to the will of God
 - 4. We are not on a fool’s errand... we are the fulfillment of a promise made by our Sovereign Lord

C. Pray Confidently for MORE LABORERS for this vast harvest

Matthew 9:36-38 *When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. ³⁸ Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."*

1. More unbelievers are alive today than any other time in history
2. The response of Christians to their plight is still immensely beneath what it should be
3. Ask God to raise up more and more laborers for this harvest field

D. Draw Near to God Daily

1. First step: ask God to draw you close to Him... to enflame your heart with His love
2. Second step: ask God to give you a heart compulsion... an overriding passion for an unreached people group... get one from JoshuaProject.net and pray for them daily for the rest of 2010

E. Be Earnest Not to be Left Out

1. Christ will most certainly fulfill this promise
2. The question is... will you be involved or not?
3. There is no promise in the Bible that you personally will not be left out
4. Many Christians live lives far beneath what God would have them do
5. Beg, plead, beseech the Lord not to leave you out of what He's doing to advance the gospel to the ends of the earth

F. Pray for FBC to be a Launching Pad for Missions

1. We have sent out some... let's send out MANY