

## Advancing His Kingdom

Good morning! For the next few weeks, we will take a break from our regular expositional preaching of the Bible to focus on the progress the elder board has made in summarizing and fleshing out the many listening discussions we've had with all of you over the last several months. If you weren't here last week, I would encourage you to go to the website and listen to the message, as our vision and mission and core values were introduced by a few of the elders.

As a reminder, here is the vision/mission.

### **Vision**

*That Christ would be seen by all*

### **Mission**

*To bring pleasure and glory to Christ Jesus by expressing his life, obeying his will, and advancing his kingdom.*

Last week, we focused on the second part of our mission statement: obeying His will. We discovered that foundational to everything is our union with Christ; that living the Christian life – and pursuing a vision, our vision that all may see Christ - is not based on own self-effort, but is an expression of the life of Christ within us. The key principle we explored from John 15 is that obedience to Christ is an expression of our love to Him. To love Jesus is to obey Jesus, and to abide in His love for us, just as the branch stays attached to the vine. This week we move to the final part of our mission statement: advancing His kingdom. This statement the elders have crafted is intended to reflect something of our priority, our focus, our mission. That as we express His life, obey His will, we are to be advancing His kingdom – why? So that all may see Christ. So there is a connection between these three statements, which culminates with this aspect of mission.

So the question to be addressed today is: what exactly is the “Kingdom” we are supposed to be advancing? And, practically speaking, how do we advance it? Lets go to the Lord in prayer...

### **What is the most pressing issue in the world today?**

If I were to ask you this, how would you answer? Some might say...; others might say... I think we might all agree that these are indeed urgent matters that need to be addressed. However, as followers of Jesus, we want to answer this question from God's standpoint. And to do that, we must turn to one source we have which provides us with God's perspective on the issues of our days, and that is the Bible. However, the Bible is a big book with lots to say about a lot of things. Where do we go? I want to suggest that a good starting place is Jesus Himself. Jesus, the Son of God, who images God and embodies the fullness of God. Ironically (or maybe not), today is the first Sunday of advent in which we celebrate the coming birth of Jesus – Christmas! – who is both fully human/fully divine. So what would Jesus say is the most pressing matter in the world today?

I want to invite you to open your Bible's to Matthew 24... In this text, Jesus answers the Disciples questions about the destruction of the temple and the end of the age (i.e. history). Now, this chapter is long and complicated with lots of different interpretations. It's a favorite of prophecy teachers, and no doubt many of you have probably heard references to this passage in regards to the end-times. I would encourage you to go to the EBC YouTube page and listen to Pastors Stan's messages on Matthew 24 from last year.

We don't have time this morning to go through this whole chapter and untangle all the knots it has. But I want to direct our attention to the opening section of the first 14 verses, where Jesus

lays out what is to happen during the present age. In this section is a little verse that gets overlooked and is rarely talked about or factored in to how we think about the future. However, this verse is absolutely critical for understanding the times that we live in and the priorities we are to adopt as a church.

Lets begin in verse 1... Matthew 24:1-8. I take this as the character of the present age. The character of history. And this is exactly what's been happening for the last 2,000 years since Jesus spoke these words. But there is more... Matthew 24:9-13. Again, this is what the current age will be like for believers. And again, its exactly what we have seen throughout history. None of this should sound surprising to you! But, here is the little verse that ends this section that doesn't get the attention that it should. Matthew 24:14 - Did you hear this? While all this turmoil is happening throughout history, underneath it all is the advancement of the gospel of the kingdom, throughout the world, to all the nations. And when this gospel, this kingdom has progressed to its intended climax – a climax that only God knows – then the end will come! Then we shall see again the appearing of our Savior. Now, almost the exact same thing is taught by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:20-28. In both cases, there is a process unfolding on the stage of world history with God's kingdom advancing in quiet, sometimes unobvious ways, that will be fully manifest on that last day.

I realize that there other signs that the NT talks about preceding Christ's return, but this one here – the advancement of His kingdom – I believe is the primary one that governs all others. The reason I say that is the emphasis Jesus, Paul, and John (Revelation) put on mission. Let me show you: Matthew 28:16-20, Acts 1:8, Acts 28:30-31, Romans 15:20-21, Revelation 14:15, Revelation 19:6-8

***From Christ's viewpoint, the most pressing issue in the world today is the advancement of His kingdom***

This is Jesus's priority and burden, if you will. And it's a priority and burden that He calls us to share with Him. Matthew 9:35-38. In Luke's account, we find Jesus urgent about proclaiming the Kingdom of God. Luke 4:43, Luke 9:60. Earlier in Matthew, Jesus tells His disciples that seeking the kingdom needs to be their first and utmost priority. During the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6:33, Jesus says: Matthew 6:33

Putting this together, we might say then that: ***The main priority for the church during the present age is the advancement of Christ's Kingdom and the fulfillment of the Great Commission.***

How does this happen? How is Christ's kingdom going to be advanced? Jesus tells us two ways. Going back to our text, Jesus says two things will characterize this age for us: Perseverance and proclamation.

***The key characteristics for believers during the present (tumultuous!) age: Perseverance & proclamation***

Perseverance is a key theme that runs throughout scripture. Staying faithful and holding on to the end! Believers in this day are familiar with this. However, we are not just supposed to hold on to the end, but as we hold on to the end we are supposed to be a proclaiming people! The call to perseverance in the New Testament isn't doom and gloom but one of joy!

Listen to Paul: Colossians 1:9-14

Listen to Peter: 1 Peter 1:6-9; 2:9

Proclamation includes warning, but also invitation. A joyful invitation to enter the kingdom of God by faith in Jesus, the one who died and raised on our behalf, that we might share in His glorious resurrection life.

**Main Point:**

*Believers are called to advance Christ's kingdom throughout the world by proclaiming the gospel and persevering in their faith, until He returns again in glory.*

**Application:**

So friends, lets read the signs of the times in our day *biblically*; and by that I don't mean predictions of the end but I mean the call of Christ to persevere and to proclaim, and to do so with joy!

***First, may your heart be encouraged that by the historic advancement of Christ's kingdom***

Can I share some encouraging news with you in regards to what God is doing around the world?

- **The number of evangelicals in the world has increased from 112 million in 1970 to 386 million in 2020.**
- **Currently 77% of all evangelicals living in the Global South in 2020. This is up from only 7.8% in 1900.**
- **At its current growth-rate, in 2050 Africa will be home to more than 1 billion Christians.**

If you would have told a first century inhabitant (Jew or Gentile) in the days of Jesus and the Apostles, that one day the only significance Rome would have is that it attracts lots of tourists to see old ruins and has great Italian food, they would not have believe you. But it's true! Christianity has survived and will continue to survive the world's empires until Christ's return. Why? Because Jesus promised that not even the gates of hell will prevent the advancement of His kingdom through His church.

***Second, may your heart be stirred to prayer and action by the task that remains***

Can I share some other statistics with you?

- **Estimated 16,000 People Groups in the World**
- **Of these 16,000, roughly 7,000 are considered Unreached (less than 2% are Christian)**
- **Of these 7,000, roughly 3,000 are considered Unengaged (no known Christians/churches/missionaries active)**
- **This leaves roughly 3 Billion people considered Unreached or Unengaged**

“We talk of the Second Coming [of Christ]; half the world has never heard of the first” – Oswald Smith

***Third, may you (joyfully!) embrace the place where God has strategically placed you for the sake of the gospel***