Sermon Series: A Kingdom Culture  
Sermon Title: Mission Possible  
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Matthew 24:1-14

Introduction

We are in a series entitled A Kingdom Culture. We are talking about how God intends for us to live as citizens of the kingdom of God. The Kingdom has its own culture and we are trying to understand what that looks like. Last week, I ended by talking about the only way the Church can succeed in its mission: by having absolute confidence in the Gospel as God's power. It's not our strategies, plans, programs or anything else that changes people but God through the instrumentality of the Gospel. It's not wrong to strategize, lay plans, have ideas of where we think God is taking us.

But what or in whom are we ultimately placing our trust? Our plans, programs and strategies? Or in God and his Gospel? Luther answered this same question long ago when he said:

Take me, for example. I opposed indulgences and all papists, but never by force. I simply taught, preached, wrote God's Word: otherwise I did nothing. And then, while I slept or drank Wittenberg beer with my Philip of Amsdorf, the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that never a prince or emperor did such damage to it. I did nothing: the Word did it all. Had I wanted to start trouble... I could have started such a little game at Worms that even the emperor wouldn't have been safe. But what would it have been? A mug's game. I did nothing: I left it to the Word.

Luther's Works

So I have entitled this message, “Mission Possible” Our text today is Matthew 24:1-14.

As Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. But he answered them, “You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.” As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” And Jesus answered them, “See that no one leads you astray.

For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.
“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. And then many will fall away* and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. 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.”

While growing up in Philly, my favorite TV show was **Mission Impossible**. Remember that show? (I’m dating myself). The program follows the exploits of the IMF (The Impossible Missions Force), a small elite task force used for covert missions to overthrow dictators and crime lords and evil operations.

I loved it because every mission was virtually impossible. But in each episode, this covert group accomplished what seemed impossible against incredible odds. My favorite part is how they received their mission. Jim Phelps, the main character, would go to some undisclosed location where he would find a tape recorder and pictures. He played that tape recorder and the voice on the tape told him what the mission was. Then, after the mission was played, the final words were, "This tape will self-destruct in five seconds." The show was intriguing because each week they accomplished their mission against impossible odds. I thought of that show when I read this portion of Matthew this week.

**Mission Impossible Made Possible By God**

The apostles were given a mission that from all human vantage points was impossible. Essentially, this was the mission: in the midst of increasing deception, in lieu of people arising claiming to be the Christ, in the midst of increasing turmoil among nations, amidst increasing famines and earthquakes, amidst increasing numbers of disciples being martyred, amidst betrayals, amidst increased lawlessness and wickedness, they were to plant the Gospel of the kingdom in all the nations of the known world in forty years!

Here’s the bottom line: they did it! By 70 AD, the Gospel was planted in every known part of the world (Roman Empire). Jesus stated it as an absolute fact and examining the rest of the New Testament, we must conclude that his word came to pass. Look at what Paul said in Colossians 1: “We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it understood the grace of God in truth”

Then, in Colossians 1:23 he says, “if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.” Then, Paul says in Romans 1:8 that “I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the world”

And in the last chapter of Romans Paul says this: “Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept
secret for long ages but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made
known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of
faith—to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen” Romans 16:25

What is important to know is that the term “world” in vs. 14 here is not the word for the physical world
but a word used in the NT to refer to the Roman Empire. I know that many of you were not taught that.
You were taught that what Jesus is teaching here that the end of the world can’t happen until everyone
has heard, that every people group has a witness of Christ. That is not what Jesus is actually saying here.

Let me explain using Matthew’s Gospel. It’s Passion Week. In chapter 21 of Matthew, Jesus made his
triumphal entry into Jerusalem for his final stay there (Passion Week). It was during those days that he
would render his judgment on Israel. Why did He come into Jerusalem to bring his judgment? That
might be best understood by something that happened during Passion Week, the cursing of the fig tree.
Jesus saw a fig tree with leaves which would indicate that it was ripe with figs but the fig tree had no
fruit so He cursed it and it withered.

This was analogous to the situation with Israel. Outwardly, they looked like the people of God but there
was no fruit, so He was announcing his judgment on their fruitlessness. That judgment can be seen in
three parables He told during his time of ministry in the temple. One is the Parable of the Two Sons (one
said he would not go and work in the vineyard but afterward He changed his mind and went, while the
second said he would go and didn’t.

Jesus asked them, "Which of the two did the will of the father? They responded 'the first." He said,
"truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom before you.”) The second
was the Parable of the Tenants (master plants a vineyard and then sends his servants to collect the
fruit). "The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits"

The third was the Parable of the Wedding Feast which amplifies what the Parable of the Tenants said
and demonstrates how God would now call the Gentiles to Himself. From there, Jesus moves in
Matthew 23 to his denouncement of the leaders of Israel, the false shepherds, for their hypocrisy.

He concludes that sermon with those stinging words: "Your house is left unto you desolate." Then he
leaves Jerusalem and the temple area and goes to the Mount of Olives. As he leaves, the disciples are
admiring the buildings of the temple (this was Herod’s Temple). It was then that He said the most
shocking words ever to fall on Jewish ears: “You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will
not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”

That word rocked their world. They could not conceive of the temple being destroyed. It could only
mean one thing: the end of Judaism, the end of Israel. As Jews they were taught that Messiah would
come to save Jerusalem and the temple, not destroy both. Later, as He sat on the Mount Olives four of
his disciples asked him the obvious question: “When?” (When would this happen?). The disciples, in
Matthew, actually asked three questions which Jesus would answer in this teaching.
But there is the main question that we can’t lose sight of: when will these things be? What things? When will the temple be destroyed and the end of the Jewish age? Jews divided time into two ages: the age of law and the age of the Messiah. They assumed rightly that if the temple was destroyed it signaled the end of the age. Jesus gives a whole host of signs that would lead up to the destruction of the temple and the end of Jerusalem. I don’t have time to go through them this morning. One of the things I want you to know though is there was a Jewish historian in the First Century named Josephus who documents all of these things: (deception, earthquakes, famines, wars, increased iniquity, etc).

The Gospel of the Kingdom

I want to focus this morning on a phrase in verse. 14 because I think it summarizes why they were successful in spreading the Gospel so quickly. The phrase is, “And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations…” Success in mission was not found in their strategies or planning or structures but in their absolute confidence in the proclamation that the long awaited kingdom of God had come.

Mark 1:14/"time is fulfilled/ Daniel 2

Knowing that, they went as heralds throughout the earth proclaiming to everyone that God’s kingdom is here and it can be entered through repentance and faith. It’s sad that most Christians know almost nothing at all about the kingdom of God. Theologian Gordon Fee says,

You cannot know anything about, anything, if you miss the kingdom of God. You are zero on Jesus if you don’t understand this term. I’m sorry to say it that strongly, but this is the great failure of evangelical Christianity. We have had Jesus without the kingdom, and therefore literally done Jesus in.

The Kingdom of God is Central to the Bible

Why was this such a powerful announcement and why was it so successful in their day? I believe that it is in that good News of the kingdom that human beings find the answer to their deepest needs. Humans basically have three needs: they need to know where they come from (history), where they are going (destiny) and how they will get there (power). All three of these are found in the reality of the kingdom of God (Let’s look at each of these).

The Good News of the Kingdom Tells Us Our History

Good News Of The Kingdom Tells Us Where We Come From (History). Someone said, “The kingdom of God is the central theme of Scripture.” In the midst of the decay of human culture, the proclamation of the good news of the kingdom was the grand, great, merry news that God is King and He is in the process of restoring the earth and men and women to Himself.
Immediately after the fall, it becomes clear what God is doing. The Fall didn’t take him by surprise so that he had to initiate Plan B. God, the King was working out his holy plan which was hidden in God since the beginning of time.

The Bible never sugar coats how bad things have gotten on planet earth. But it focuses on God’s plan which he purposed before creation. It is all rooted in the fact that God is Sovereign, He is King. His purpose revolves around a unique people whom the King would call to be his own. He is King and He has already purposed what He is going to do. Sometimes when I hear people speak about God I get the impression that they feel that God is waiting on Man to get it together and help him out.

Does this sound like God isn’t sure about the outcome of things (read Eph. 1:3-14). Over and over in this passage he says, “purpose of his will”, “to the praise of his glorious grace,” “making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Him, things in heaven and earth.” The Bible is not about us, about what we get; it is about the greatness, the grandeur, the majesty of the King and his plan being worked out. This is the cure for so much man-centeredness in the church.

The Kingdom Tells Us Our Destiny

Good News of the Kingdom Tells us Where We Are Going (destiny). This means that God has determined the outcome of history. There is going to be a consummation, an end to human history that is clearly determined. There is an amazing passage where Paul tells us what that looks like (I Cor. 15:24-28).

In the end He says, “God may be all in all.” Think of the all the slaves in the First Century that led meaningless lives who entered the kingdom. Suddenly, they know where they come from (they were known by the Father in eternity past) and where they are going.

They have a destiny summarized in the words “they shall see his face.” Even this world in all of its corruption is slated for an overhaul when the fire of God purges it from all the effects of sin. We all know in our gut that things are not as they should be and that they must change. Only the Christian Gospel defines that. It is called the “blessed Hope.”

Even when Christians were called upon to lay down their lives they were encouraged to do so because their real identity is to be found in what is coming. Jesus would tell a man with riches that he is better off selling it all and giving it to the poor than keeping it. He would tell people they are better off with one eye or hand if it gains heaven than to miss what is to come. We will never be effective until we believe that it is worth whatever we have to go through to enter the kingdom.

We should be very clear on this hope because it affects the way we live. It’s not going to heaven when you die but glorification.
The Good News Tells Us How His Power Takes Us to Destiny

The Good News of the Kingdom Tells us How We Get There (power). It is found in the Christians’ confession in this life: Jesus is Lord! In between the fact that he has called us from eternity past and destined us for glory in eternity is the now. The good news of the kingdom is that we have entered it now. For us, we live in a kingdom for a real King who governs every detail of our lives. The power of the kingdom is found in surrender to Him in every area of our lives.

People should be able to tell whether we are living in the kingdom or whether we have a form of religion. Paul is talking to Christians at Corinth. A man is having a relationship with his stepmother and their not dealing with it. Other Christians are suing others. What does Paul say? It's not nice. You shouldn’t do that? No; he says, How can you guys say you're living in the kingdom? (1 Cor. 6:9-11) “Don't be deceived.” Notice the all-important phrase "but such were some of you." My purpose now is to live in the grace that was given me in Christ Jesus in eternity past and in the light of my destiny of glorification in the future to glorify Him in the now by fully and completely surrendering to the King

- Have you surrendered to the King? Are you really living in the Kingdom?
- "Not everyone who says, Lord, Lord shall enter the kingdom of heaven but he who does the will of my Father in heaven"
- Don't be deceived. Examine your life for evidences your life is under the government of the King

Ed Rosen has provided the questions that follow to use in your House Church Discussions.

1. Neil spoke of Jesus cursing the fig tree (Mt 21:18-19) followed by three parables, The Parable of the Two Sons (Mt. 21:28-32), The Parable of the Talents (Mt 21:33-46), and The Parable of the Wedding Feast (Mt 22:1-14). How does all this relate to The Olivet Discourse in Matthew chapter 24? Explain.
2. What has been your understanding of The Olivet Discourse (Matthew chapter 24) and the parallel passages in Mark chapter 13 & Luke chapter 21, and has it changed since listening to Neil’s sermon?
3. Were you surprised to learn that Matthew 24:14 “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” was fulfilled by the apostles and the early church by the time the temple was destroyed in 70 A.D.?
4. If you were asked if the church could fulfill the great commission in our own time, how would you respond: mission impossible or MISSION POSSIBLE?
5. How does what the Apostles and the early church accomplished in 40 years motivate you to advance The Kingdom Of God?
6. Do you have absolute confidence in the gospel as “the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes”? Explain.
7. If someone were to ask you what the three basic needs of all humans were, how would you answer?
8. How could you use the Three Basic Needs as an effectual witnessing tool?