

Editorial: Completing the Task that Remains

One of the most profound passages of Scripture is found in Matthew 24:14, with its parallel passage in Mark 13:10. Speaking about the signs of the end of the age, Jesus said, "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." The Markan version, with the same focus on the end of the age, simply states: "And the gospel must first be preached to all nations." (NIV)

This passage is so profound because it clearly links the preaching of the gospel with the end of this present age and the ushering in of the new. No where in all of Scripture is any event so clearly linked with the statement concerning when the end will come. I want to remind our readers of the powerful commentary of the late Dr. George Eldon Ladd on this important passage of Scripture. I will quote Dr. Ladd at length since it is worth its every line. As I see it, it directly speaks to the theme of this issue on completing the task of world evangelization with the biblical impulse underlying it.

Dr. Ladd, author and scholar of the Word—especially on the Kingdom of God—says:

Perhaps the most important single verse in the Word of God for God's people today is the text: Matthew 24:14. This of course refers to the manifestation of God's Kingdom in power and glory when the Lord Jesus returns. There is wide interest among God's people as to the time of Christ's return. Will it be soon, or late? Many prophetic Bible conferences offer messages which search the Bible and scan the newspapers to understand the prophecies and the signs of the times to try to determine how near to the end we may be. Our text (Matthew 24:14) is the clearest statement in God's Word about the time of our Lord's second coming. There is no verse which speaks as concisely and distinctly as this verse about the time when the Kingdom will come.

... The Word of God does indeed teach that there will be an intensification of evil at the end of the age, for Satan

remains the god of the age. But we must strongly emphasize that God has not abandoned this age to the Evil One. In fact, the Kingdom of God has entered into this evil age; Satan has been defeated. The Kingdom of God, in Christ, has created the Church, and the Kingdom of God works in the world through the Church to accomplish God's purpose of extending His Kingdom in the world. We are caught up in a great struggle—the conflict of the ages. God's Kingdom works in this world through the power of the Gospel. 'And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony unto all nations, and then the end will come.'

... What this verse of Scripture firmly establishes is that the Good News of the Kingdom of God, or the rule and reign of God in Christ, must first be communicated to the whole world, to all the nations, tribes and peoples of the earth—they must all have the Gospel as a testimony unto them, that is to say, they must all know its deepest message—before this age comes to an end and the new age, of a new heaven and a new earth, is ushered in. This must happen before Christ returns or before His second coming.

... Let this verse burn in our hearts. God has said this about no other group of people. This Good News of the Kingdom of God must be preached, if you please, by the Church, in all the world for a witness to all the nations. This is God's program...

This means that for the ultimate meaning of modern civilization and the destiny of human history, you and I are more important than the United Nations...the mission of the Church is more important than the march of armies or the actions of the world's capitals, because it is in the accomplishment of this mission that the divine purpose for human history is accomplished. No less than this is our mission!

... Here is the motive of our mission: The final victory awaits the completion of our task. "And then the end will come." There is no other verse in the Word of God which says: "And then the end will come." When is Christ coming again? When the Church has finished its task. When will This Age

end? When the world has been evangelized. The disciples asked: "What will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?" (Matthew 24:3). "This gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations; and then, AND THEN, the end will come." When? *Then*, when the Church has fulfilled its divinely appointed mission...

When we have accomplished our mission, He will return and establish His Kingdom in glory. To us it is given not only to wait for but also to hasten the coming of the day of God (II Peter 3:12). This is the mission of the Gospel of the Kingdom, and this is our mission." (Quotes taken from Dr George Eldon Ladd's article "The Gospel of the Kingdom" in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement, A Reader*, Revised Edition, eds. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne.)

Matthew 24:14 gives us a clear biblical precedent and a strong impulse to consider completion of the task that remains—looking at the main dimensions of the task with its goal to start a church movement for Christ in every people group among whom that still hasn't occurred. This is the focus and purpose of this special issue of the Journal, dedicated in its entirety to completing the task of world evangelization.

Every article in this special edition deals with that focus. The goal is that every tribe, tongue and nation will have the Church planted among them, so that all will have the Gospel "as a testimony unto them", so that all will have adequate access to the Gospel thus making the Good News available to every person on planet earth. Finally, this will make it possible for all to be able to call upon the Lord and be saved. (Romans 10:13-15) May it be soon, even by AD 2000, to the glory of our Lord and God!

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