

5th November

The Sermon by Timothy James.

Read Romans 8:31-39, Matthew 24:1-14: Jesus Messiah

In our study of Matthew's gospel, we are nearing the last act. Jesus has spoken to his followers about his own approaching end, and now he talks about the end of the age.

We must understand what his followers, and the Jewish people, expected with the coming of the Messiah. They were looking for God to send a king to save them. The disciples seem now to associate Jesus' mission with the coming of the new Messianic age, and of course they are right – that is exactly what is going on. But they do not understand what the new age will be like, and how the Messianic kingdom will come into being. What will happen to the Temple, to the world and to themselves?

The answer in all three cases seems at first to be "nothing good". The Temple was destroyed, as Jesus foretold (v.2), about forty years later. The world has indeed suffered war, famine, earthquake and all kinds of misfortune, and it still does, as our daily news makes only too plain. And the disciples themselves, and many followers of Jesus since, suffered the persecutions he mentions. We ourselves suffer very little for our faith, but many Christians today still follow Jesus at peril of their lives.

But if we read on to the final two verses (13-14), there is hope.

In the light of Jesus' warning and guidance, how should we live our lives?

There are negative commands:

1. Don't be fooled (v.4, and also v.23)! There are indeed many who would like to deceive us into following something other than the truth of Jesus to cope with the evils around us, but we are not to be led astray. There is only one truth upon which we can rely.
2. Don't be alarmed (v.6)! It is easy to fear that something has gone wrong, and that God's plan for history is not working out. But these things must take place, and we are not to be knocked off balance.
3. Don't get hung up on "when"! Jesus never answers the question asked in v.3, because the timing is not the important thing. Indeed, as he goes on to say in v.36, nobody knows the answer, not even Jesus himself. It is easy to be sucked into playing detective games with prophecy, or to look at current events and think "Now, surely?" But we must avoid this; it is not important, or we would have been told.

The two positive commands are:

1. Stand firm and endure whatever comes (v.13). As Paul says at the end of Romans 8, nothing in all creation can separate us from God's love in Jesus. We can do this because we have a firm and solid foundation in the truth of

Jesus. We have what the world desperately wants and needs, a faith and a person upon which we can wholly rely, and so ...

2. Proclaim the good news to all nations (v.14). Look again at the great commission at the end of Matthew's gospel (28: 18-20). Our job is undoubtedly to start with the nation in which we live. Our neighbours and families need to know the good news of the kingdom in such a troubling world, so that they, too, can endure to the end and be saved.

We live in the Messianic age, and it is the age of the Gospel.

Prayer:

Father, thank you that we live in the age of your Son. Thank you for his warning and guidance. Give us strength to endure to the end, and to proclaim the good news of his and your kingdom while we still have time. For his sake, Amen.