

# 'This Gospel Of The Kingdom Shall Be Preached'

by David C. Grabbe

***Forerunner, "Prophecy Watch," May-June 2011***

Matthew 24:14 has been one of the most-quoted scriptures during the last few decades of the church of God: "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come."

As we know, the Feast of Tabernacles pictures the Millennium, which is the fulfillment of the gospel of the Kingdom of God. By the time Jesus Christ returns, the good news of His Kingdom will have been preached, and the end of the present age will have come. Everyone on earth will have heard that message, and some will have repented while others will have been destroyed. But the Kingdom that has been anticipated for thousands of years will finally be a reality.

This verse is frequently interpreted as a command—or at least used to justify a certain course of action—but the plain fact is that it is a *prophecy*. It is a statement of a definitive future event, rather than an instruction.

Consider for a moment what this prophecy does *not* say. There is no mention, either in the verse or in its context, of *who* will have done this preaching. It does not say whether one individual will preach it or two individuals, one organization, seven organizations, or an angel. This verse just says it will be done.

Matthew 24:14 also does not tell us the *time* involved in preaching the gospel, except to say that it happens before the end. It does not indicate whether it is preached over the course of several decades, or whether it takes 42 months, or whether there is a singular announcement that all the world hears at the same time through some form of mass media.

This verse also says nothing about *how* this preaching will be accomplished. There is no mention of television stations, radio programs, websites, Internet streams, or any other technology. The verse simply says that it will be done. Only God knows exactly how it will be fulfilled.

## **Sanctified and Sent**

When Jesus Christ was on earth, He preached this same gospel of the Kingdom (Matthew 4:23; 9:35; Mark 1:14-15). However, something foundational happened before He began preaching the gospel and performing the various miracles that showed He was from God. Something essential happened before He could preach and perform works as a man. We can find what this was in John 10:36-38:

. . . do you say of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, "You are blaspheming," because I said, "I am the Son of God"? If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him.

The key element appears in verse 36. Jesus says that He was *sanctified* before He was sent into the world. He was *set apart* in order to do all that He did, and that certainly includes the preaching of the gospel. His three-and-a-half-year ministry was the result of the sanctifying done by the Father.

The gospel accounts are overflowing with statements by Christ that show that all of His words and actions had their source in the Father. His preaching of the gospel is no exception. The content of His message and the power to proclaim it both came from the Father.

Jesus testifies in Luke 4:18 that He was "anointed" to preach the gospel to the poor, another way of saying that He was set apart. He says that He could do nothing of Himself, but only what He saw the Father do (John 5:19, 30). He declares that the works He did bore witness that the Father had *sent* Him, meaning He was being directed by the Father (John 5:36-37; 8:18). He asserts that He could do nothing of Himself, but He could speak only as the Father taught Him and of what He had seen while He was with the Father (John 8:28, 38). He states that He did not speak on His own authority, but that the Father commanded Him in what He should speak (John 12:49).

John the Baptist demonstrates this same principle when saying, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven" (John 3:27).

All of these statements set the stage for understanding Christ's preaching. When Jesus went about preaching the gospel, saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:14-15)—the only reason it had any effect is because He had been sanctified—set apart—by the Father to do this.

When Jesus said that it was the Father who was actually doing the works, the preaching of the gospel was one of them (John 10:32; 14:10). This means that, regardless of what human instrument God uses or what method He employs, the reality is that it is *God* who preaches the gospel! If He is not the Source of everything, as He was for Jesus, then it is a work of *man* and not of God, and "the weary workers toil in vain" (Psalm 127:1, paraphrase).

It actually does not take anything miraculous to *know* what the true gospel is or to speak the words. In fact, when Jesus sent the disciples out to preach the gospel, they did not even have the Holy Spirit. They were not even really converted yet, though they had been called. Even so, if something is going to be accomplished, it will be as a result of God's sanctification, which the disciples had. That is the consistent biblical pattern.

The bottom line, then, is that the gospel is *not* preached through human effort or human will. It is proclaimed through *submission to God's leadership*. If submission to God is absent, the works that God desires will not be produced. If men go outside God's will—however well-intentioned they may be—their words, to borrow from Shakespeare, may as well be the proverbial "tale, told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

## **Spiritual Preparation**

In his book, *Of God and Man*, theologian Aiden W. Tozer could clearly see what the priority of the church should be in this regard: "The popular notion that the first obligation of the church is to spread the gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth is false. Her first obligation is to be spiritually worthy to spread it."

First things must come first. Spiritual preparation *must* precede physical activity. We already saw that God sanctified Jesus Christ to do what He did, and yet He still went through thirty years of

preparation before preaching for three and a half. The fruits of Herbert Armstrong's life and ministry bear out that he, too, was prepared and sanctified to do what he did—something that had not been done for 1,900 years and has not been done since.

Not all of us have the exact sanctification. Not everyone has been set apart to do what Paul did, or what Peter did, or what John did, or even what Herbert Armstrong did. They received a specific calling, a specific sanctification to do what they did. God directed these men as He saw fit, and they submitted to Him. Nevertheless, He does not direct everyone to do the same thing. There are many offices in God's House, and many functions within the Body of Christ (see I Corinthians 12:1-11, 28-30).

However, if we have been called by God, we have been given a general sanctification (I John 2:27). We have *already* been set apart from the world (John 17:6). What is more, we are *being* sanctified (Hebrews 2:11). We are being purified and having God's character and nature created in us. This is the work that the Creator is doing. This is what Tozer called being "spiritually worthy," and what we call "go[ing] on to perfection" (Hebrews 6:1). This is the foundational, underlying, core responsibility of each of God's children, regardless of whether another, more specific sanctification is added to it.

We are assured in Matthew 24:14 that the gospel of the Kingdom will be preached. God will see it done. He will preach it through whatever means, by whatever agency, and in whatever time He has *already* ordained. The question for us, then, is whether we will be in alignment with Him and usable by Him so that we can be directed by Him as He completes His work. However, this will be successful only if we let Him lead, rather than assume we already know what He is doing.

Because God is the One who preaches the gospel, and because He sanctifies and prepares His servants to perform His will, He also determines the results of His various works. For 1,900 years, it was not His priority to preach the gospel in a major way. We know this because it was not done. During the last century, a major witness was made because God had ordained it be so. He controls the results and the effects of His preaching. His word does not return to Him void, but it will accomplish what He pleases (Isaiah 55:11). Thus, when we look out today at the various efforts to preach the gospel, and we do not see the same results, it is because something else is God's priority—not that we are not trying hard enough.

### **Spiritually Worthy?**

Is it possible that the church is not yet "spiritually worthy" to be involved in making a witness to the world? In its present spiritual condition, could the church end up making a witness *against* God rather than for Him? If a witness is being made against God, does it even matter if the true gospel is spoken?

A simple example will illustrate this. Many readers will recall from Herbert Armstrong's autobiography that he talked about God having to humble him before He could use him. Humility is a function of not only being able to see God's hand, but also then submitting and giving deference to that Creator who is so far superior to His creation. Yet today, we do not see humility among those claiming to be Herbert Armstrong's successor. Instead, we frequently see competition, strife, one-upmanship, and derision.

The reason for this is quite simple: The focus is on something other than God! Is God divided (I Corinthians 1:13)? Does God war against Himself? Can a true and faithful witness be made if the church is focused on things other than God?

When God sanctifies one servant, that sanctification will not interfere with the sanctification that He gives to another servant. Conflict arises from *people* taking on responsibilities that God has not given them. John the Baptist recognized that his sanctification did not supersede Christ's authority, so he told his followers, "He must increase, but *I must decrease*" (John 3:30). There was no conflict there.

On the other hand, the twelve disciples argued among themselves about who would be greatest, and there was conflict. Without learning this simple lesson, could today's church of God handle twelve such leaders? It was not until the disciples had matured into the twelve apostles that they finally got it. Then they were each humble and self-controlled enough to recognize the limits of what God had given them to do, and not encroach into another's territory (see II Corinthians 10:12-16). They feared God rather than seeking a name or position for themselves!

The bottom line is that we cannot insert ourselves into God's plans. God already knows what will be done, how it will be done, when it will be done, and whom *He* will use to do it. Our task is to be close enough to God that we recognize His guidance of our lives and to be practiced in submitting to it. When the time comes for Matthew 24:14 to be fulfilled, it will be, according to what God has ordained.

However, whether or not we play a part in the fulfillment of that prophecy, our focus is to be the sanctification that God has already given us. It is through that process of becoming holy and going on to perfection that we become "spiritually worthy" and able to be used by God in whatever capacity He ordains—large or small.

*Our goal should not be to fulfill Matthew 24:14.* Our goal is to get to the place where we, like Jesus Christ, "always do the will of [our] Father" (John 8:29)—no matter what His will may entail. God is doing far more than just making announcements. He is creating us in His image (Genesis 1:27), and that requires a lifetime of submission and a level of focus and energy far beyond simply preaching to the unconverted world. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10).