

Essay 2: The Gospel and the End of the Age

For we know that the **whole creation** groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. (Romans 8:22)

And He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to **all creation.**” (Mark 16:15)

“This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and **then the end will come.** (Matthew 24:14)

if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, **which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven,** and of which I, Paul, was made a minister. (Colossians 1:23)

So, what does the preaching of the gospel to the whole creation have to do with “the end?” First, Jesus is answering a question about the end of the age, and this question was asked in response to Jesus’ declaration that the temple was going to fall.

Jesus came out from the temple and was going away when His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him. And He said to them, “Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down.” As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?” (Matthew 24:1–3)

The disciples correctly understood the fall of the temple to coincide with the coming of Christ and the end of the age (Acts 6:13-14; cf. Matthew 26:59-61; John 2:19).

Jesus answers their questions in the following verses beginning with a few things that preceded the end but didn’t mark its arrival.

And Jesus answered and said to them, “See to it that no one misleads you. “For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will mislead many. “You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end. (Matthew 24:4–6)

He goes on to say that the thing that will mark the arrival of the end is their preaching of the gospel to all the nations which is something Paul said that they had accomplished in the verses quoted at the start of this short essay. “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14). All of these things, Jesus said, would happen within that generation (Matthew 24:34).

Now that we have the context, let’s get back to the original question. To answer it, we have to ask another question: what is the gospel? The gospel, which means good news, is a military term. In the Hebrew Scriptures, when various armies would win a skirmish, they would send good news back home (1 Samuel 31:9). So, the good news of Jesus is an announcement of victory. Jesus is victorious over all His enemies, and those who follow Him are made more than conquerors through Him.

This produces another question: what does the victory of Jesus have to do with the end? Allow me to answer this question with a passage.

But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, “DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory. “O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 15:54–57

The capital letters in this text indicate an Old Testament passage is being quoted. In this case, the two passages that are being cited are Isaiah 25:8 and Hosea 13:14. Regardless, victory has something to do with resurrection, and it is made possible through Jesus.

The connection between victory and resurrection is that the victory is over death: “The last enemy that [is being – DR] abolished is death” (1 Corinthians 15:26). This victory takes place at the time of “the end” (1 Corinthians 15:23-26). So, what does the gospel of Christ have to do with bringing about “the end” in which death is abolished and victory is given through Christ? My belief is that the gospel is the means by which death is abolished, and life and immortality are offered through it. Thus, when the gospel was preached to all creation, the end came.

When I quoted 1 Corinthians 15:26 above, I said that death was being abolished not that death would be abolished. The reason why I quoted it this way is that the word translated abolished is in the present tense and passive voice. In 1 Corinthians 15:2, the same tense and voice is used in respect to salvation. It is for this reason that the ESV translates 1 Corinthians 15:2, “and by which you are being saved.” What was it that they were being saved by? The same thing that was abolishing death: the gospel which is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). Compare this passage that uses present passive with another in Paul’s writing:

Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for **the gospel** according to **the power of God**, who **has saved us** and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity, but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, **who abolished death** and **brought life and immortality** to light **through the gospel**, for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher. (2 Timothy 1:8–11)

It is the gospel which saves, and it is the gospel which abolishes death. This is Jesus’ point in John 5:

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, **has eternal life**, and does not come into judgment, but **has passed out of death into life**. Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, **when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live**. For just as the Father has life **in Himself**, even so He gave to the Son also to have life **in Himself**; and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man. (John 5:24–27)

So, when the gospel, the power of God to abolish death and save, is preached to the whole creation, then the end comes. Death is abolished for those who accept the victory message, the ministry of death

that gave sin power (the Law, 1 Corinthians 15:54-57) fades away (Hebrews 8:13), and the creation is redeemed. All of this happened within their generation as Jesus said it would. Paul even said of his audience: "Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, **upon whom the ends of the ages have come**" (1 Corinthians 10:11). The gospel was preached to all creation, so death has been abolished and we have the victory in Christ.