

2018 Global Ministries Conference
“Until He Returns”
Matthew 24:14
Pastor Bryan Wintersteen
March 4, 2018 • Evening Sermon

We are blessed here at Briarwood for people who regularly hold out the Gospel to people here in Birmingham that speak a different language. Before we get into the study I'd like to take a moment to start off with prayer:

Father, thank You for the opportunity to open Your Word and look in it together. God may Your Words be spoken and not my own. May You, the living Christ be exalted in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Matthew 24:14 says *[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.* This was our theme verse for the mission's conference this past week. In this study I'd like to take a special look at the verses that precede this verse. Notice the difficulty that Jesus described for His Disciples. I believe He was preparing them for what they would face. It is like Jesus was preparing them for this warning story of how things would be for them.

Matthew 24:8–14 says *[8] All these are but the beginning of the birth pains. [9] 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. [10] And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. [11] And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. [12] And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. [13] But the one who endures to the end will be saved. [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.*

The Lord's Word here has a regular refrain that many will fall away, tempted to be led astray, and put under severe persecution unto the point of death because they name the name of Christ and because we have an opposition from an Enemy and the world is not the home of the believer. Our home is in heaven and the Enemy wants to fight, grab and take anyone from the kingdom of this world but those named by Christ are God's. Yet this passage is challenging. It is actually a very hard teaching that Jesus is giving to His Disciples.

Why do I say it's a hard teaching? Like you, I want to be one of those that stand through the tests and are able to endure. We see signs all around us today in the world that is changing. The world that we once knew, even just a generation ago, is rapidly changing. We are in a culture today that are calling historical things that have been in place for thousands of years, wrong or those things right which used to be called wrong. It seems like the world is in complete upheaval with all these revolutions. We are on that downward death spiral as a culture.

None of this catches Christ by surprise. He is prepared for this moment and is giving His Disciples a warning story so that they can take this to heart, be prepared and put on the full armor of God which enables them to face the trials and difficulties the Enemy is going to bring. But this is a hard teaching. I want to endure to the end and I'm sure you do as well. So how can we heed the warning of God?

For me, growing up in a family that was torn apart by divorce, I was aware of how temporal relationships in this world can be but I'm grateful that God brought a youth pastor into my life who discipled me when I was in high school. He taught me the ways of the Lord and

showed me what it meant to be a follower of Christ. He had small group Bible studies that I was a part of and would answer my questions. He encouraged me in the preaching and teaching of God's Word and he really challenged me to walk for Christ.

One of the things I remember him teaching me came from Hebrews 11. Some call this chapter the hall of faith because it describes how so many believers had faith and what God had done in their life to give them that faith. It shows how He used so many imperfect people to stand strong for Christ through the power of the Spirit of God. I would come to my youth pastor and wonder if I was put to the test being called out for my faith, would I be able to stand strong, because I wasn't raised in a Christian home and I had a pretty radical, wayward life up until about tenth grade. When I came to Christ I really wanted to make a difference for Christ at my high school. I wanted the Lord to use me to make a stand for Him but in the back of my mind there was that nagging doubt. If pressure came, would I stand the test? Would you stand the test?

We have had a lot of bold examples of this in recent years. I'm reminded of the Columbine shooting where the Bible study group had been meeting and the gunman stormed in selecting people seemingly at random but he would ask them before he would shoot them if they were a part of the Bible study group. I think it was attributed to one girl named Cassie Bernall that he had asked her if she believed in Jesus and she said 'yes.' Then he shot her. I have never experienced something like that but the Bible promises for Christians that there would be tribulations, trials and testing of our faith. When those things happen would we stand the test?

My youth pastor shared with me the hall of faith in Hebrews 11 and reminded me of how many imperfect characters in the Scripture by faith lived for Christ even though they were sinners, they were redeemed by God. Hebrews 11 brings out "By faith Abel...", "By faith Enoch...", "By faith Noah...", "By faith Abraham...", "By faith Sarah...", "By faith Isaac...", "By faith Jacob...", "By faith Joseph...", "By faith Moses...", and "By faith even Rahab...", the prostitute for all these were named that by faith they received and lived for Christ. Now I want to read from Hebrews 11 where it transitions in this chapter.

Hebrews 11:32–38 says [32] *And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets— [33] who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, [34] quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. [35] Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. [36] Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. [37] They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated— [38] of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.*

These people knew what it was like to face opposition. In our country we have been protected. Maybe it's been the sovereign bubble of God's Spirit that has preserved our culture, because of the foundation of how this country came to be, the prayers and revivals but it seems as though the hand of God may be giving us over to reap what we have sowed, to reap the whirlwind. This passage helps us to see that there are models to live for Christ who have withstood all the challenges and difficulties. I find that incredibly encouraging because of the warning story that Jesus told His Disciples and that they would have the opportunity to withstand.

This question of whether I would withstand or not in this opposition, would still tend to resurface from time to time in my life. These warning stories are a bit of a theme in my family and my children. My kids tend to give me a hard time about how I use these warning stories in our family. Often I will see something on the news or hear about a real life example of something in our world or at their school or sports team and I will try to use that as a bit of a teaching moment in their life. I use these to warn them to do or not to do certain things because certain things will happen as a result.

A couple of these stories are pretty regular in our house. One is I'm pretty prone to say 'Nothing good happens after midnight.' Another is when I say 'Show me your friends and I'll show you your character.' Another is 'don't text and drive.' Another one is 'Brush your teeth because you might be meeting your future spouse today.' So it's always been on my heart as their father just to want to prepare them for trials/temptations/things in life and as I sought counsel from my youth pastor to want to be prepared for those ultimate trials and temptations in life.

One teaching moment in one of my kid's life happened at the age of 14, when we got a flat tire. I had them get out of the car and said 'change the tire.' They said 'I don't know how to change the tire.' So then we'd start a conversation and have a point of learning. There are a lot of preparations and warnings that happen along the way but I want to be the kind of dad that prepares my kids for things that may happen in their life.

When my kids were young I started reading Bible stories to them. My three sons in particular we especially drawn to Old Testament passages about David and his mighty men. Some these stories came from II Samuel 23 and I Chronicles 11 where it shows David and his mighty men facing incredible obstacles but they stayed true by faith and God strengthened and equipped them so they overcame.

There was one about Eleazar son of Dodo who was with David when he defied the Philistines when they were gathered at Pas Dammim for battle and all the men of Israel withdrew. He rose and struck down the Philistines until his hand wearied where his hand had fused to the sword from all the fighting. The Lord brought about a great victory that day and then the men of Israel returned only afterwards to strip all the dead in all that he had done in the name of the Lord. Another one of my kids favorites was Benaiah son of Jehoiada, a valiant fighter from Kabzeel, who performed great exploits. He was a doer of great deeds.

These are the kinds of men and women of faith that we're talking about that the hall of faith characterizes in Hebrews 11. This is what our world needs today. We need doers of great deeds, not all mighty in battle like in Old Testament days but great deeds of evangelism and lifestyles of discipleship. This is what we have had the opportunity lately to hear from our missionaries. They are men and women committed to Christ who are facing hostility in faraway lands. They are valiant men and women who are doers of great deeds.

I came to know Jesus Christ in 1984. There was a Christian musician named Steve Camp that wrote a song in 1984 called 'Where Are the Heroes.' Some of the lyrics go like this;

*Where are the heroes now
When we need them so desperately
Who will step out from the crowd
And be strong enough to lead
Who will teach the children
Who will show them how*

Oh, I'm asking you

Where are the heroes now.

I believe God is asking us this in our day. Who are the heroes? Where are they now?

When each of my children turned 13 years old one of the things I presented to them as their father, kind of in the Wintersteen school of leadership development, was a sword with our last name 'Wintersteen' engraved on it and then surrounding that were four words that all started with 'C's' that had to do with what I wanted them to aspire to and I myself would want to aspire to as a man of God. The first word was character which is a person who is filled with integrity. The next word is conviction which is being a man or woman who knows what they are on about, who lives by conviction. Then came the word courage which is someone who is able to stand up when they face all kinds of obstacles or difficulties. Finally, is the word compassion who is someone who has a heart that is soft to the Lord and wants to bring that compassion to a hurting and needy world. It is my prayer for my children and for me that God would form me into that kind of man that represents those four words and that I would model that to my children.

I want to be that man of faith and because I see my own needs in my own soul and heart I recognize how far yet I need to go. That is the same that I would believe that our missionaries would pray over us in this congregation. Yes the missionaries are the heroes for they are taking the Gospel out to the nations. We heard about the pastors in northern India that were facing so much opposition from radical Hindus that their churches regularly get destroyed, there are beatings with people getting thrown out of the Christian villages, and even some set fire to things.

We heard about the training of indigenous Filipino tribes where some tribes that were reached by the Gospel years ago are now wanting to be missionaries to go and take the Gospel to other unreached tribes who have never heard the name of Jesus. Those tribes are now reaching other with the Gospel.

We heard about ministry to orphans with the special needs of those who were abandoned or neglected because of their special needs and how the Gospel is entering in through evangelism, ministry and practical tangible ways.

We heard about the Muslims being reached through Gospel presentations through satellite TV and radio shows. We heard many of the testimonies of people sending back responses of how they could get to know about this Jesus or how they could have a personal walk with Him or how they could know Him when everyone in their town or family would abandon them.

We heard about the pastors who were walking for eight hours in South America just to take the Gospel to those in the jungle areas. We heard about Bible translations in Niger, Africa just to get Scripture and resources to the new believers. There were preaching evangelistic crusades all across the Latin America area and in Mexico where thousands got to hear the Gospel from our brother Guillermo as he preached faithfully. He was so humble to bring this report to us and he was even on the stage with Billy Graham on many of these Latin America crusades preaching and translating for Reverend Graham. These are the kinds of heroes we have heard from in this past week.

I hope that you remember them and perhaps got some personal time with them. I hope you will develop a prayer strategy for these missionaries. They need your prayers. They need that encouragement. They need to hear from you either by letter or email or phone to let them know you are lifting them up in prayer. Where are the heroes now?

It's not just the missionaries that are heroes for I believe God wants to raise up each one at Briarwood Church to take a bold stand for Christ. We have come from a fantastic legacy here at this church and we have been given so much but we need a new generation who will respond to the Gospel, take the call and share it with the young children and those in this generation who are growing up in a corrupt world, where they won't even know before long that there was ever a time that certain things were considered immoral in our society. They are growing up in society where we need to train up new missionaries for this age who can take the Gospel to their culture, their school, their university.

We need a new generation of missionaries. Where are the heroes now? We need them so desperately. Who will step up from the crowd and be strong enough to lead? I believe each of you can be a man or woman of God, a doer of mighty deeds and a sower of Gospel seeds in the lives of those here in Birmingham and around the world until He returns. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father in heaven, we thank You for the examples we have in Scripture of the mighty men, the doers of deeds, those valiant warriors for God who stood against opposition. Thank You mostly for Jesus who endured the cross, despising the shame, and gave of Himself willingly because of His love and obedience for the Father that would set the world free because of the shed blood on the cross. Lord Jesus, I pray that You would raise up a new generation here at Briarwood to take the Gospel to all nations and may You find us faithful until You return, in Jesus' Name, Amen.