

The Gospel Must Be Preached

Mark 13:5-11

⁵ Jesus said to them: *“Watch out that no one deceives you. ⁶ Many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am he,’ and will deceive many. ⁷ When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. ⁸ Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains. ⁹ “You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. ¹⁰ And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. ¹¹ Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.”*

Today we are celebrating the Lutheran Reformation. 507 years ago a catholic priest in Wittenberg, Germany began to publicly question what his church was teaching. He especially questioned its teaching about a place where people must go after they die, before they reach heaven. That place is called purgatory. The Church taught that in purgatory you must suffer for the many sins your committed in your lifetime. That may take hundreds, even thousands of years. But thankfully the church in Luther’s day came up with a way to free you from some of that pain and suffering. No, it wasn’t the good news about a Savior from sin. Instead, they taught you could buy your way out of purgatory by purchasing slips of paper called indulgences. The more money you spent on indulgences, the less time you’d spend in purgatory. But a priest named Luther did not agree. So he wrote up 95 theses or statements questioning his churches teaching on indulgences as well as other questionable practices. He posted them on the Castle church door in Wittenberg. He wrote them in Latin because he wanted to know what other theologians thought about it. What’s even more disturbing than what was being taught in the Church, was what was not being taught. People were not hearing about the love God had for them in Christ. They were not hearing how Jesus freed them from sin’s punishment and won them a place in heaven. In other words, most people in Luther’s day were not hearing the gospel. As we study the Scripture before us from Mark chapter 13, we pray the Holy Spirit will teach us to treasure the same important truth that God’s Spirit had revealed to Martin Luther. That truth is that the gospel must be preached. It must be preached so we are not deceived. It must be preached, so God will us to witness boldly.

Jesus wanted to make sure that his disciples were not deceived during the first Holy Week. He had spent a good portion of that day with them around the temple area. As they were leaving the temple his disciples couldn’t help but comment on the temple’s massive structure. Jesus must have shocked them when he responded: *“Do you see these large buildings? There will not be one stone here left on top of another. They will all be thrown down”* (Mark 13:2). His words must have weighed heavy on their minds. Later that day, while they were staying at the Mount of Olives, a few of his followers asked in him about the temple’s destruction and what signs to look for. Our Lord responds with the words of our text. He tells them, *“Watch out that no one deceives you. Many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am he,’ and will deceive many.”* Many would claim that God sent them to rescue humanity. But only Jesus can rescue us from sin, death, and Satan. Many promised deliverance, but only Jesus would bring it. By the time the week was over, Jesus would prove to be their only Savior. From a cross, he paid for all sin. From an empty tomb, he rose victorious to show that we are now right with God. Our Lord did not want his disciples to be deceived. He was the only Savior they had.

Jesus didn’t want his followers to be deceived by any disaster that fell around them. He told them, *“When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must*

happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains.” Our Lord lists a number of headlines that might appear in News shows or newspapers. Down through the ages there have been wars and reports of wars. No matter who gets elected commander-in-chief, there will still be wars. Fault lines shift below the ground causing the earth to shake. We normally think of this happening on the west coast. But this year an earthquake happened over Lake Michigan not far from where my relatives live in Sturgeon Bay. Drought can hit any part of the world leaving whole communities of people starving. As God’s people witness these events, our Lord does not want us to lose our focus. He doesn’t want us to worry about world’s end which no one can predict. He wants the gospel to be preached in this world of wars, and earthquakes, and famines. He wants all people to know about a place where there is no conflict, where no disasters exist. So that all people know the way to heaven is by Jesus alone, the gospel must be preached.

Deception ran rampant in the church around the time of Martin Luther. Many church leaders came in the name of Jesus preaching everything but gospel truth. And for people who took their religion serious, the way Martin Luther did, it only left them in deep despair. Deception is all around us today. We might get caught up with news about disaster around the world. There’s the threat of terror. We hear of natural disasters all the time. If it’s not a hurricane in one part of the country, it’s a raging fire in another. But our Lord does not want us to be deceived. These are just the beginning of birth pains. A better world awaits. But can we be sure we’ll reach it? Have we done enough? Have we paid the price? But don’t be deceived. The only Savior we have is Jesus Christ. He tells us, *“No one comes to the Father except through me”* (John 14:6). Can we ever be enough good to get to heaven? Can we possibly afford the price? We can rejoice that we don’t have to pay a thing. Our Savior did it all. He paid the full price from a cross. He satisfied God with his suffering and death. He rose from the dead to prove his success. Because of Jesus we have an eternal home with our God in heaven. So that we’re not deceived into thinking there is some other way to heaven, the gospel must be preached. That is true today. It was true in Luther’s day. It was true during the first Holy Week.

I’m sure the disciples were disturbed to hear Jesus speak about destruction coming to their beloved temple. How shocked they would be in just a couple days when they witnessed another temple being destroyed. Our Lord had said earlier: *“Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days”* (John 2:19). They would witness the temple of his body dying on a cross. They would see him alive again on the third day. By his death and resurrection Jesus would win eternal life for everyone. And he wants everyone to know it. He wanted his disciples to witness it. He tells them: *The gospel must first be preached to all nations.* To carry out our Savior’s will, the disciples would have to witness boldly. Jesus explains why: *You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them.* What Jesus promised was nothing more than what he himself would endure. Late Thursday and early Friday of that week, Jesus would be handed over to the Sanhedrin. Roman soldiers would flog and beat him senseless. He’d stand before King Herod and his mockery. He’d be sentenced to die by a Roman governor’s injustice. It was anything but fair. But it was only the way he could he bring life and immortality to light.

Jesus wanted his disciples to know they would suffer as well. The Book of Acts records much of the persecution that they would endure. They suffered much because the gospel must be preached. But how could these sinful men witness boldly for their Lord? Jesus tells them how: *Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.* At Pentecost and every day following, with the Holy Spirit poured out on them, we see it happen. These men stood confidently before the same enemy that sentenced Jesus to death. Though ordered not to say a word about Christ, the apostles decided, they *“must obey God rather than men!”* (Acts 5:29). When they were flogged, whipped terribly for witnessing boldly for their Lord, Scripture tells us how they reacted: *The apostles left the Sanhedrin rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name* (Acts 5:41). Filled with the Spirit, they couldn't stop. In the very next verse we are told: *Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ* (Acts 5:42). These simple men of Galilee would stand before councils and governors and kings? They kept preaching even when it brought pain and suffering to their lives? They did this because they were filled with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gave them the words to speak. God's Spirit gave them confidence and zeal to keep going. They could witness boldly because their Lord told them the gospel must be preached.

Four years after Luther wrote his 95 Theses, Luther was ordered to stand before the emperor. The emperor didn't want to learn from Luther. He simply wanted Luther to take back everything he wrote against the church. Just like with the apostles, the Spirit gave Luther boldness and words to respond: *Unless I am convinced by the testimonies of the Holy Scriptures, ... I am neither able nor willing to recant, ... Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. God help me.* Through his study of Scripture, the Holy Spirit convinced Luther that his church was wrong. You don't get to heaven by doing good or by purchasing forgiveness. You get to heaven by Jesus alone. The Holy Spirit convinced Luther of that and gave him confidence to witness boldly *“before governors and kings.”* Luther too knew the gospel must be preached.

So what are we doing to make sure the gospel gets preached in our world? Living in a land with freedom of religion we may never have to stand before a governor and defend what you believe. But you will certainly stand before a king. He's the King of all kings. He wants us to witness him boldly. He tells us in his Word: *“Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven”* (Matthew 10:32,33). Witnessing for your Lord does not sound easy. Some will reject what you have to say. They may even attack you personally. But think about that one person in your life that needs to learn about Jesus. There just waiting for you to say something. You know your Lord want them to hear it. You know your Lord wants them in heaven. So do you. He's given you the Spirit. God's Spirit has convinced you that Jesus is the only way. You have your Lord's backing and his promise to be with you. You can't lost, can you? So witness. Share what you know. And if you forget something, don't worry. He'll provide what you say.

We celebrate the Reformation because God led men like Martin Luther to know and believe that the gospel must be preached. The way to heaven does not come by you doing good or by you purchasing anything. The way to heaven is through Jesus. So we are not deceived, so we can witness boldly, God has provided us such good news. We celebrate the Reformation because of men like Martin Luther. They wouldn't back down. God's Spirit made them confident. To rid their church of all that was false, they knew, as we do, the Gospel must be preached.