

## Sermon for October 27, 2024 - Reformation

Mark 13:5-11

### Theme: The Gospel must be preached

- 1) Don't be deceived by the world's turmoil.
- 2) God uses Christian oppression as an opportunity to proclaim Christ through us.

*<sup>5</sup>Jesus began by telling them, "Be careful that no one deceives you. <sup>6</sup>Many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he,' and will deceive many. <sup>7</sup>"Whenever you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be troubled. Such things must happen, but the end is not yet. <sup>8</sup>In fact, nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places. There will be famines. These are the beginning of birth pains. <sup>9</sup>But be on your guard! People will hand you over to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues. You will stand in the presence of rulers and kings for my sake as a witness to them. <sup>10</sup>And the gospel must first be preached to all the nations. <sup>11</sup>Whenever they arrest you and hand you over, do not worry beforehand what you should say. Say whatever is given to you in that hour, because you will not be the ones speaking; instead it will be the Holy Spirit.*

Hearing about all that is going on in the world (like the war in Ukraine, battles in the Middle East, conflicts on the African continent, fears of war between China and Taiwan, natural disasters, crime increasing, and morality decreasing), it doesn't take long to conclude that our world is pretty messed up.

So, what should we Christians do? Should we hide away and wait for Christ to come back? Should we adapt to the new morality our society espouses, or try to "make the Church great again" through political activism?

Let us listen to Jesus tell us what he wants us to do during this chaotic time in world history, under the theme: **The Gospel must be preached.** 1) Don't be deceived by the world's turmoil. 2) God uses Christian oppression as an opportunity to proclaim Christ through us.

### Part One: Don't be deceived by the world's turmoil.

Our sermon text finds Jesus leaving the temple just a few days before his arrest. A disciple, captivated by the temple's enduring beauty, exclaimed, "*Teacher, look what impressive stones these are, and what impressive buildings!*" Jesus said to him, "*Do you see these large buildings? There will not be one stone here left on top of another. They will all be thrown down.*"

What a shocking statement! The temple's stones were enormous – one of them measuring 37 feet long, 18 feet wide, and 12 feet high. How could anything topple those stones? And more

importantly, why would God allow such destruction to befall his temple? Didn't Jesus come to establish his kingdom on earth, bringing peace and prosperity to his followers? That's what the disciples envisioned, and aren't we tempted to think the same?

Yes, like the disciples, we dream of earthly grandeur for the Church – affecting society in such a way that life in this world becomes a literal heaven on earth. Shouldn't we all want that and fight to make it happen?

But here's the thing: Jesus didn't come to make the world a better place. He came to save people from God's wrath. Those who believe in him won't face an eternity in hell with the devil and his demons because of their sins. Instead, in the peace of Christ's forgiveness, they'll live forever with him in the new paradise he promised to create for believers on the last day. It's essential to remember that Jesus' ministry was never about making this world a better place. It has always been about rescuing people from this wicked world that's burning down like a house on fire.

Confusion over Jesus' statement regarding the temple's destruction prompted four of his disciples to ask: <sup>4</sup>*“Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be fulfilled?”*

<sup>5</sup>*Jesus began by telling them, “Be careful that no one deceives you. <sup>6</sup>Many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he,’ and will deceive many.*

Yes, be careful! Throughout history, many people have claimed to be the Messiah or his representatives. The Epistles constantly warn against false teachers and false christs trying to lead us astray. Before Luther, the Roman Papacy wielded such immense evil influence over Western Christendom that the Gospel nearly vanished until God reintroduced it through the Reformation.

In our day, not only do many of the same false christs persist, but new philosophies have emerged, claiming that there is no absolute truth. They say that everyone can be their own god and decide for themselves what's true. These philosophies are highly deceptive. They sound nice and accepting, but they're actually poisonous. How so? By ignoring humanity's biggest problem (sin), they prevent people from wanting and receiving the forgiveness, love, and salvation that God offers to everyone through Jesus.

Jesus warns against succumbing to these false teachings and losing our faith. But if, as Jesus later states, these false teachers have the ability *to deceive even the elect, if it were possible,*<sup>i</sup> how can we avoid being deceived by them? By maintaining a deep connection to Jesus through the study of His Gospel. As we do that, Jesus promises to send the Holy Spirit to protect us from their lies by reminding us of everything Jesus teaches us through His Word.<sup>ii</sup>

Jesus continues: <sup>7</sup>*“Whenever you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be troubled. Such things must happen, but the end is not yet. <sup>8</sup>In fact, nation will rise against nation, and kingdom*

*against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places. There will be famines. These are the beginning of birth pains.*

War serves as a stark reminder of human depravity and our urgent need for a Saviour. It, together with all natural calamities, acts as God's megaphone, urging people to reflect on their sins and repent. And because they act as God's megaphone, they occur in accordance with His divine will. War, in particular, reveals the profound greed that resides within the human heart, while natural disasters expose humanity's fragility. They demonstrate our profound need for God's salvation.

So, how should we Christians respond to all the news of war and natural disasters that surround us? Should we fight for better government or protest against climate change?

Consider Jesus' description of these events. He likens them to *the beginning of birth pains*. As a new mother's due date approaches, she begins to feel many pains. They tell her that her child is coming. Oh, how happy those pains make her despite the hurt they cause. They move her to prepare for her child's arrival in earnest. Similarly, all the earthly troubles that have transpired since Jesus' resurrection are like birth pains. They serve as a joyful call to action for us to prepare for Christ's imminent arrival, when He will deliver all who believe in Him from every tribe and nation on Earth into the breathtaking paradise He has prepared for us. In this paradise, there will be perfect harmony between God and all creation. Every nation will experience peace. Sin will be eradicated.

God wants heaven full of people. That is why He calls the world to repent and trust in His Son for salvation. He sends disasters to serve as a wake-up call to loosen our grip on this world. Additionally, He sends Christians out with the Gospel so that people can hear His voice, repent, believe, and receive everlasting life as a gift.

Therefore, dear Christian, don't let all the chaos and turmoil in the world deceive you. As painful as these events are, listen attentively to what God reveals about them: they are the signs that your final deliverance is drawing near.<sup>iii</sup> Let go of the world through repentance and cling to the saving love God has for you in Christ. Share the Gospel with everyone God puts in your life, for *the world and its desires pass away, but the one who does the will of God remains forever.*<sup>iv</sup>

Part Two: God uses Christian oppression as an opportunity to proclaim Christ through us.

Jesus continues with another warning: *<sup>9</sup>But be on your guard! People will hand you over to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues. You will stand in the presence of rulers and kings for my sake as a witness to them.*

Even though we Christians love everyone, the devil tricks people into being afraid of us -blinding them to the truth of what we teach. Consequently, the very people we desire to save may attempt to harm us. The apostles experienced this firsthand. All of them were arrested and

brought before various rulers to testify to their beliefs. According to Church history, only the apostle John died a natural death. All the other apostles were killed for their faith.

Throughout history, the devil has attempted to deceive nations into persecuting Christianity. Even in Christian countries, believers have been called before princes, bishops, and emperors to defend what they believed. Many were executed as heretics because they spoke out against all the abuses of power exercised by the Pope and clergy in the Roman Church. For example, William Tyndale was a priest who translated much of the Bible into English. His translation became the basis for the King James translation. He tried to bring the Lutheran Reformation to England but was executed for heresy. Or who can forget Martin Luther? He stood before the most powerful men in the world at the Diet of Worms and confessed the truth of God's Word: that we're saved by God's grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone. Even though he wasn't killed for his faith, his life wasn't easy. God used him to testify the truth to the nations. And God continues to do the same today through all the missionaries and martyrs He sends into the world.

Yes, it is God's will before He comes to judge the living and the dead that <sup>10</sup>... *the gospel must first be preached to all the nations.*

God wants all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth.<sup>v</sup> That's why Jesus, the Son of God, was born. He came to win the righteousness that everyone lost because of their sins. He died in payment for everything everyone has ever done. There is no reason for anyone to go to hell, and yet the people of our world refuse to repent and receive His grace. Following the devil's prompting, they rail against Jesus and convince others to do the same. Many do so out of ignorance, not actually knowing the content of the Gospel that they rage against.

That is why God wants us, his followers, to share his Gospel with the world. He wants all people to know the truth and find salvation in Jesus. Therefore, God chose us to be the conduits through whom He would call the world to repentance and faith. Why? Not because we're intelligent or strong but precisely because we're weak and dependent on Him. He chose us so that His saving power could be manifested through us—a power that transforms us from fear to being fearless. What power is that? It is the Gospel itself.

For that reason, Jesus encourages: <sup>11</sup>*Whenever they arrest you and hand you over, do not worry beforehand what you should say. Say whatever is given to you in that hour, because you will not be the ones speaking; instead it will be the Holy Spirit.*

What a promise: the Holy Spirit himself will speak through us as we give the reason for the hope we have in Christ! Now, understand this promise correctly: Jesus isn't giving us an excuse to neglect studying His Word or partaking of His Sacraments. The Holy Spirit ties himself to these means of grace to increase our faith, and He never promises to do so without them. What Jesus is saying is that we don't have to worry about our witness. The Holy Spirit will work through our feeble human nature, moving us to recall the simple truths He taught us in His Word and then to speak them. We don't have to worry about convincing people to believe in Christ because the Holy Spirit will be there, providing the precise words He wants people to hear. Yes, even if our

testimony consists of simple Bible verses or Christian rhymes we learned as children, we can be confident that the Holy Spirit will use these statements to accomplish His will - either drawing those who listen to us to repentance, or confirming their unbelief if they reject it, showing that their condemnation is just.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: the world is in turmoil, and it will keep getting worse until Christ returns. What should we do as we see Christians and Christianity coming under increased attack? Should we fight back through political means to ensure a godly society? Should we capitulate to the new morality being taught in the world that no longer calls people to repent of their sins?

No, instead, let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus and the salvation he won for us. Let us always be in His Word, listening intently to what He says. The chaos surrounding us is a clear indication that our redemption is drawing near. Therefore, let us use our words and actions to boldly proclaim Christ's Gospel to everyone God places in our lives. Don't be concerned about how you will convince others to believe. Just lovingly speak the truth of God's Word with gentleness and respect, leaving all the rest to God. He promises to stand with you, rescuing you from every evil work and delivering you safely into His heavenly kingdom. To Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.<sup>vi</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Mark 13:22 EHV

<sup>ii</sup> Cf. John 14:26

<sup>iii</sup> Cf. Luke 21:28

<sup>iv</sup> 1 John 2:17 EHV

<sup>v</sup> Cf. 1 Timothy 2:4

<sup>vi</sup> Cf. 2 Timothy 2:18