

### **Mark 13:5-11**

**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.**

Dear Christian Friends,

What a world we live in – a world that is full of people who are trying to trick and deceive us. Every day it seems that we hear of another person or business or scammer that is being dishonest. At times we might ask ourselves, how do we trust anyone anymore. We have phone callers that are trying to trick us to get some part of our vital information in order to hack our bank accounts or worse or getting us to send them some sort of money. We have internet scams trying to hack our computers. We have people trying to tell us one thing when their intentions might not be very good. How I the world do you know who and what to trust? For these worldly scams, we need to turn to the experts who can tell us what to look for and how to keep our lives and computers safe and what scams we need to look out for.

But as we look at how bad some of these worldly scams are, God is telling us that we need to be watching out even more for spiritual scams and those who are dishonest with God’s Word. God is telling us that we need to keep our eyes and hearts open for these same kinds of warnings when it comes to our faith. There are people in this world we are trying to trick us and deceive us into believing something that is not the truth about God and the consequences can have eternal results. We need to be on our guard against the many things and many sinful people in this world who are trying to destroy our faith. Our theme for this Reformation Sermon will use this very thought:

#### **Theme: Be On Your Guard**

- 1. So that no one deceives you**
- 2. Armed with the power of the Holy Spirit**

The context of these verses is the disciples talking to Jesus during Holy Week about the Temple. The talk is about the beauty and size of the temple. Even the building stones are mentioned. Some of these stones were up to forty feet long and weighed over a hundred tons. This, in part, accounts for the fact that it had already taken forty-six years to build the temple and that it still wasn’t complete. But

Jesus' response was even more astounding. This temple which took decades to build would be completely destroyed. Not one of these huge stones would be left upon another.

This statement would need further explanation. Somewhat later, when Jesus was with four of his disciples sitting on the Mount of Olives, in full view of that temple, Jesus was asked to explain what he meant. These four disciples were especially concerned with the times and signs of the destruction of the temple. Jesus' answer was given in prophecy typical of many prophecies of the Old Testament. His words would have a preliminary fulfillment in the destruction of Jerusalem and a future fulfillment in the destruction of the world at Judgment Day..

**“Jesus said to them: “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.”**

Jesus begins with the problem of false teachers. There were false teachers in Jesus' time and there are certainly false teachers in our day in age. We have had the beginnings of cults based on false christs, cults like the Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons. We have philosophies which are meant to replace Jesus, philosophies such as humanism and evolution. The tragedy behind these false messiahs is that so many souls are lost eternally. That's why Jesus warns us to watch out for them.

How well are we at spotting false teachers? If someone came to your door and said that they believed in Jesus the son of God who lived on this earth and died on a cross, would this raise any red flags? Maybe not! The problem is that I had in my lifetime young men come to my door and tell me these exact words about their beliefs. At first glance they may sound rather familiar. They might even sound like something we believe and teach from the Bible. The problem is that these men were from the false non-Christian church of the Jehovah Witnesses. As I talked with them, they told me that a man named Jesus was born into this world as the very human son of God. He lived a good life and even gave his life on the cross for his faith. The problem was that that these men and all those who follow the Jehovah Witness faith don't believe that Jesus is really the true divine Son of God who had the power to take away sins on the cross. They believe the false teaching of trying to live a good life to earn your way into heaven. They will not come out and tell you this, but they are tools of the Devil who are trying to deceive and sadly have deceived many children of God who have fallen from the faith.

How in the world are we going to be able to know if people are telling the truth? It is not easy. In fact at times it is very difficult. That is why we can thank the Lord that we have his Holy Word the Bible to study from and look to when we are in doubt. That is why we will want to be in God's Word as often as possible. If the Bible is the only true foundation of God's saving work, then we will want to know as much as we can so that we are always ready against the attacks by false teachers.

As we think back to the Reformation during the time of Martin Luther this is one of the main thing that we can be very thankful for. During Martin Luther's time the church didn't allow the average lay person to own a Bible -- much less open a Bible. The Church felt that the average lay person would do more harm to their faith if they tried to study God's Word on their own. The only way that people knew any of God's Word was from the leaders of the Church who told them what they thought was important. But how would you always know if you were being told the truth? You didn't! That is why Martin

Luther worked so hard to make sure that the people would have God's Word in their hands and that it would be in their own language. For this we can be very thankful. If we have questions about the message we hear, we can always go to the book that God has given us – the Bible. With the Bible in our hands through the work of the Reformation we need to do the next step and remember what the Bible truly is. It is God talking to us.

## 2. Armed with the power of the Holy Spirit

**“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.”** With these words Jesus was reminding his disciples and his disciples of all ages. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If you read the book of Acts you can see that all of the disciples faced this persecution for their faith, and Christians of all ages feel this persecution in some way on a daily basis as a consequence of being believers. This was true of a Martin Luther as he stood on trial before the leaders in his day, and it's true of the Christian harassed by our world today. I was reading some startling statistics which estimated that there are an estimated 300,000 Christian killed each year in the world today – 300,000! I can't verify if that number is correct, but the point is that the world we live in is not always easy for God's people.

This might be alarming news, but it is not news that should lead us to live in fear. These persecutions remind us when it comes to preaching the gospel throughout the world, don't worry. Even when they were standing before council or in synagogue that God's Word is being spread around the world and that there are people living their faith and sharing their faith. How can we have this strength as we remain on guard? It comes to us through the power of the Holy Spirit who works through his Word and Sacraments. Jesus reminded his disciples that they were going to have to stand before various people and tell them what they believed. He told them to not worry about what to say, but rather to draw comfort from the fact that they Holy Spirit would fill their hearts and mouths with the words he wanted them to speak. He would be with them every step of the way. They would never be alone.

And how does the Holy Spirit gives us this confidence? It comes as he strengthens our faith through the regular reading and studying of his Word. If the tool the Holy Spirit uses is his gospel found in his Word and Sacrament, then this is where we need to bury our noses and spend most of our time. If the only thing that is going to keep us safe against all the attacks and deceiving of this world comes from the Holy Spirit through the Word, then we better be making it our number one priority to connect ourselves closely to this Word. We need to know what it says, but more importantly we need to find the strength that God alone can give to keep us on guard.

Martin Luther faced things in his lifetime during the times of the Reformation that were extremely difficult. He had to stand before Popes and Councils. He faced life and death situations on a regular basis. How did he stand firm? He would tell you that he would spend hours each morning in God's Word. Some might say, but my schedule is too busy to fit God's Word in. Luther, following what God has commanded, would say that he couldn't make it through the difficult things in life if he hadn't spent

those long hours in God's Word. But I am not naive -- I get it! Our lives are busy. It seems like we barely have enough time to breath as we run faster and faster in life. But God is reminding us that we can't make it through one day in this life without God talking to use through his holy Word. Read a devotion. Read a chapter or two from a book of the Bible each day. Listen to one of our Bible Classes or Worship Services that are recorded as you drive in the car each day or as you get ready in the morning or as you are winding down at night.

I'm not a real boxing fanatic, but I've watched enough to know that a good boxer will always make sure to keep his hands up high to protect his face and head. A good boxer knows that he will lose the fight if the opponent lands to many punches to the head. He is taught to be on guard against the punches of his opponent, because he knows that it might only take one good punch to the head to knock him out. So he trains and practices so he remembers to protect himself. It almost become second nature to him after hours and hours of practice. In much the same sway, we are in a life or death match against the devil and all his evil accomplices. On our own we are sure to fail and let our guard down. All it takes is one deadly blow from the Devil and we can be led astray which may have eternal consequences. That is why we can daily thank the Lord for what God accomplished during the Reformation as we are once again given the opportunities to open our Bibles to read and study about the truth that God has given us. As we dig into God's Word over and over, it is like having God protecting us from the many blows the Devil is trying to deliver is. This is one of the most valuable tools to be brought back through the Reformation and one of the most important thing we have to protect our faith against the many attacks the devil and sin. As we make use of every opportunity to be in God's Word, we realize that the Holy Spirit is leading our faith to grow which makes us ready for all of these attacks. May we not only own a Bible, but may we make us of every opportunity of hearing, learning and studying the Bible to help us to grow in our knowledge of God's saving Word. Amen.