

Pastor Mark R. Jacobson † Reformation Sermon † October 31, 2021

⁵Jesus said to them: “Watch out that no one deceives you. ⁶Many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am he,’ and will deceive many. ⁷When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. ⁸Nation 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. ¹⁰And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. ¹¹Whenever 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. – Mark 13:5-11

OUR REFORMATION RALLY CRY

We are getting into the meat of the 500-Year-Anniversary window for the Reformation. That window officially started in 1983, celebrating the birth of Martin Luther in 1483. I don't remember anything of that celebration, but I do remember the 500th Anniversary of the posting of the 95 theses. We made a big deal of that date as did many Lutherans. We had a Martin Luther movie night in a theatre. We had a Bible class that went for several months on the Reformation. There was a big emphasis of that anniversary and rightfully so. For the rest of this decade and all the way up to 2046, the 500th Anniversary of Luther's death, we will have more opportunities to commemorate milestone years of the Reformation. This year our Reformation Rally has as its backdrop the April 18, 1521, Diet of Worms. This is the place, 500 years ago, on April 18, where Martin Luther was asked to recant all his books and everything he had learned about the Gospel of Jesus from the Bible. And this is where Martin Luther answers, “Unless, I can be instructed and convinced with evidence from the Holy Scriptures or with open, clear, and distinct grounds and reasoning – and my conscience is captive to the Word of God – then I cannot and will not recant because it is neither safe nor wise to act against conscience. Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me! Amen.”

1. WATCH OUT! – Combat deception with truth.

I think we can easily look back on that occasion and see it as a fitting application of our Gospel lesson today. Jesus said to his disciples, “*Watch out that no one deceives you.*” The very definition of deception is to make what is fake look real. The oldest trick in the book is to make you look. The same is true for false messiahs. “*Many will come in my name,*” Jesus says, “*claiming, ‘I am he,’ and will deceive many.*” The common features of all false messiahs is they come in the name of Jesus and use his name to carry out their deception. “Watch out,” Jesus warns us, and we do that ‘watching out’ with our ears. The Apostle Paul in one of his first letters writes, “*If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God’s curse.*” Combat deception with truth.

Do you know the truth of the gospel? Are you sure? Which of these gospel-sounding statements are true: #1 “A loving God would never send anyone to hell.” Is that the truth of the Gospel? It kind of sounds true or sounds like something people wish were true, but it's not true. #2 “It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you are sincere in what you believe.” Is that the Gospel? #3 “As long you do your best, God will do the rest.” #4 “The good news is God doesn't judge.” None of those statements are true, but many people who are not listening to Jesus are deceived and believe that those statements are true.

Jesus also warns about false ideas. In verse 7 & 8, “*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.*” People would like to think that the world is getting better, that the world is evolving, getting better and better like our technology. Our technology is getting better, but our technology is not making us better people, only more sophisticated sinners. Nations are still fighting and our nature is still enduring earthquakes and hurricanes and tornadoes and flooding and fires.

The world looks bad and is getting worse, but these signs are positive indicators for us as Christians. Did you catch that positive vibe when Jesus said, *“These (the false messiahs, the destructive forces of nations and nature) are the beginnings of birth pains.”* It’s been over a dozen years since I have been in the battle of a delivery room. Those moments of great intensity are expected but so is the good news, “It’s a boy!” or in the cases of other parents, “It’s a girl!”

A beginner Christian, which is what the disciples of Jesus were, anticipate that everyone will speak the truth and that everything in life will be easy now that they are Christians. Watch out! – Combat deception with truth. The truth is as the Bible says, *“Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evildoers and imposters will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know...the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus”* (2 Timothy 3:12-15).

The truth the Bible tells us is Christ Jesus is the only Savior. Jesus, true God from eternity and also true man, lived perfectly on our behalf and shed his blood for our salvation. This sacrificial blood was powerful enough to atone for the sins of the whole world. No other Savior is needed. No other good news needs to be preached.

2. BE ON YOUR GUARD – Witness boldly by faith.

“Watch Out!” is a reformation rally cry. Combat deception with truth. Another rally cry of the reformation is, “Be on your guard!” That was Jesus’ instruction in verse 9 “Be on your guard,” sounds like fighting words and they are fighting words, but not the fighting words we might be anticipating. Our fight as Christians is not over flesh and blood, but over ministry of the gospel and the salvation of souls. Jesus acknowledges, *“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...”* Isn’t that what we read in the historical book of Acts? Peter and Paul standing before government officials as a result of their faith? Isn’t that what we also witness with Martin Luther at the Diet of Worms 500 years ago? At those moments their lives were in danger, but not only were their lives in danger, the ministry of the gospel and the salvation of souls was also in danger at those moments.

I think you may have heard the story of a Christian who went off to a college. His parents were worried because he had grown up in a Christian family and had attended Sunday School and a Christian elementary and high school all his life, but now he and his Christian worldview would be in the minority on such a secular campus. Home for Thanksgiving, he was asked, “How did you survive as a Christian on a college campus? And the answer he gave was, “I did great! Nobody asked and I didn’t tell anybody I was a Christian.”

‘Be on your guard’ is not a rally cry to save your own skin. It’s a rally cry for the ministry of the gospel and the salvation of souls. Jesus says clearly several times, “On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. ¹⁰And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. ¹¹Whenever 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.”

I don’t know who put the signs up, but someone put the signs up on the north and south side of our church. There we read: “You are entering the mission field.” Your mission field might not be the local councils and synagogues as it was for the Apostles. Your mission field might not be a diet or public assembly in the city of Worms like it was for Martin Luther. Your mission field will be at home or at work or school or with a circle of friends at times with a complete stranger. You never know when a fight might break out, a fight between the truth of God’s Word and the lies of Satan. Be on your guard. Witness boldly by faith. You have the truth and the people of this world still need the truth. Stand with Luther who stood with Jesus. And with the words the Holy Spirit provides, speak like them, too. Amen.