

## Gospel - Mark 13:5-11

Introduction: If I gave you a sheet of paper, and told you to write down everything you know about the Reformation, how much would you be able to write down? It happened in Germany; October 31, 1517 Martin Luther pounded the 95 theses on the Castle Church in Wittenberg. It concerned a return to Scripture, and not letting human traditions trump God's Word. Would there be more? Would there have been that much?

Why do we celebrate the Reformation so many years after it happened? After all, it doesn't have much to do with us today, does it?

The truth is that we celebrate the Reformation because it could happen again. The Reformation was a return to God's Word, forsaking the traditions of men as the main authority. The Reformation was like setting a broken bone, putting something back into place that had been broken long before, and the need for a reformation could happen again in the future, because the cause is still around. That cause is sin, we celebrate the Reformation in the hopes that history does not repeat itself.

In our lesson for today, on this Festival of the Reformation, we hear a strong warning from our loving Savior. Jesus tells us that **the life of a Christian is a constant reformation; in a world deformed by sin, the Christian is reformed by grace.**

In our reading for this week, we see our Savior spending time with his disciples, leaving the temple in Jerusalem for the last time. It is Tuesday of Holy Week, and the days are quickly counting down to when Jesus would no longer be with them. As they are leaving the temple, the disciples are awestruck by the grand temple being restored by Herod. It is reported that the largest stones were up to 40 feet long, 8 feet tall, weighing more than 100 tons. The disciples marveled at the impressive work that was being done, and Jesus tells them that not one stone will be left on top of another.

The disciples then ask Jesus when all this would happen, and Jesus responds with the verses of our text for this week. The disciples asked "When?" and Jesus gives his loving reply in the form of a warning. This section is known under the heading "Signs of the End Times."

**Vs. 5-6 - Jesus said to them: "Watch out that no one deceives you. Many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and will deceive many."** As you hear this verse, think of the people throughout history that fulfill this prophecy. Jim Jones, Charles Manson, Sun Myung Moon, Joseph Smith, Mohammed, Brigham Young. Indeed many have been deceived, as Jesus said.

In addition to actual people that claim divine authority, we can see philosophies in existence today that try to replace Christ. For instance, evolution would have us believe that there is no God, so that we are not responsible to any "higher power" for our actions. This removes all accountability and executes the conscience. Humanism would have us believe that "man is the measure of all things." The dangerous teaching that people are the center of their own universe leads people to look inside themselves for their salvation. These ideas are rampant in our society, and are considered almost the social norm. These philosophies are deceitful, and they seek to replace Christ.

Jesus continues his prophetic description by telling his disciples that there would be wars, rumors of wars, earthquakes and famines. In verse 8, Jesus says that **"nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom."** Just think of the wars from our own American

history, recent world history, ancient history. Iraq and Israel are only the latest in a long line of conflict, going all the way back to the Old Testament.

Jesus also said that there would be earthquakes and famines, things that out of our control. Remember San Francisco 1906, Tokyo 1923, Mexico 1995, Indonesia 2005. We see pictures of starving children in faraway places, and even here in the United States.

Jesus' prophecy reads like a newspaper so far, doesn't it. But what he says next is not something you'll hear on the 6 o'clock news. Jesus says **"the end is still to come. These are the beginning of birth pains."** This picture of the pains of birth implies pain and suffering that gets worse before it gets better. It also implies that there is an end to the suffering, and new life to begin.

The point is that Jesus tells us not to be disturbed by these signs. In verse 7, Jesus says, **"do not be alarmed"** when these things happen. He has warned us that they were going to come, so it should not surprise us when they do. The only thing that is surprising is the creativity of the sinful nature, and the new ways to do the same old things.

We can certainly see that the outside world has been deformed by sin. And we are not quarantined from the effects of the sinful world. We, too, have been deformed by sin from conception on, and we see evidence of this fact all too often. How often do you fight with your spouse? Kids, how often do you disobey your parents? We argue about nothing. Go behind other peoples' backs. We hoard our time, talents and treasures. Even when we are here in church worshipping, we get distracted and allow sinful thoughts to linger in our minds.

All these things are evidence of how sin has deformed our lives. These things try to pull us away from Christ. We are attacked by temptations, and instead of fighting the good fight, we give up in the spiritual battle. How often do you take the path of least resistance, and give up the fight?

The apostle Paul warned about such apathy in 1 Corinthians 10:12 - *if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!* When you think you are too strong to be tempted, you don't even resist when temptations come near. How many of us would have failed in the battles that Luther fought? When told to back down or die, would we have tried to save our own skin, or testify to the truth?

How often aren't our ears closed to our Savior's warning? When we fail to stay rooted in God's Word, we are easily corrupted by the deformed world. If you think that we have nothing to fear from the devil, you have already been deceived. Jesus warns us to be on our guard in this deformed world.

→ Transition: Brothers and sisters, we are bombarded on all sides, and it is difficult to keep up the fight. But like the potter from our first lesson, God re-forms at his own discretion. He takes the useless lumps of deformed clay that we were by nature, and he makes us into useful vessels to bring about his purpose. **The Christian life is a constant reformation; the Christian is reformed by grace.**

Our Savior continues his prophecy of the signs of the end times in verse 9 with another warning – **"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."** On account of me. What about Jesus? Because of Jesus, you are a

different person. Your relationship with your Savior has changed you in every way. In love, Jesus came to fight *for* you, *instead of* you. By nature, we were dead, stuck in our sin, but Christ came to defeat death for us. He has removed your sin and guilt forever. Your life is different now than it was before you knew Jesus.

You are no longer a sinful piece of deformed clay; you have been reformed by our Potter into a useful vessel. God has made you to carry his message to others. Jesus conquered in the struggle so that we can spend eternity with him, and he sends us out to tell others.

Your life is different now than it used to be. You have been changed, and people can see that. Verse 9 says, “**On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them.**” Because of Jesus, you will be called upon to witness to others.

Have you ever noticed that nobody likes Christians? We see opposition when we give witness to others because the sinful world hates the message that Jesus offers. That message is offensive to the ears of the world, because sinners don’t like to be told that they’re sinful. We will see opposition when we witness. Nobody likes Christians, except Christ. He tells us in Matthew 10:22 – **All men will hate you because of me**, and in John 15:20 – **If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.**

Yet, the Gospel will prove victorious. You will stand before kings and governors, and you will witness, because God gives you the strength. He who gives these gifts is with us. As we sang in our hymn, *For us fights the Valiant One*. Jesus is the hero in this fight, and the leader in this mission. He tells us in verse 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.** God will make you stand, and he will strengthen you, even providing the words to testify. The Holy Spirit carries the burden, especially when we would appear at our weakest.

Christ tells us that the Gospel must first be preached to all the world before the end will come. This is our mission. He says “Don’t worry about the drawbacks, or the failures. Be faithful to the Lord. Do not hesitate to stand against the whole world when God is on your side.” The Holy Spirit will be present to guide and protect us. The same Holy Spirit that worked through the Apostles, through Stephen, the first martyr, and strengthened Luther, still works in our hearts and lives today. You will be used to witness to the Truth, and spread the Word of God for the salvation of souls.

Conclusion: Brothers and sisters, watch out that no one deceives you. Our Savior tells us that we live and operate **in a world deformed by sin**, but that we have been re-formed by the hand of God. By his grace, he has molded us to be useful in his plan of spreading the Gospel of free forgiveness to all people. On this journey, we are hard-pressed and challenged, but our Lord promises to guide us and protect us. He equips us to share this message with others. We stay continually rooted in the Word so that we can repeatedly fight against the deformities that infect the sinful world, and testify to others concerning the Sure Hope that is ours through Christ. **The Christian life is a constant reformation, and the Christian is reformed by Grace.**