

**October 26, 2003
Reformation Sunday**

"The Gospel Will Prevail"

MARK 13: 5-11

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.

Do you like being tricked or fooled? My dad told us story about going to the state fair and seeing a tent with a large sign that said, "See the horse with its head where its tail should be." People dropped in their dimes, and most of them were laughing when they came out the other side, and some were angry. The horse was a normal horse, but its head was in the back end of the stall, and the tail was in the front where the horse ate its hay. "The horse with its head where its tail should be." P.T. Barnum has been tagged with the now famous quote, "There is a sucker born every minute."

Getting tricked out of a dime at the circus is no big deal, but what if you are a teen buying your first car. You ask if the car has been in an accident and they tell you the only accident is the small scratch on the bumper. Later you discover that the car was actually in several accidents, including one major accident, and this bad news is on the permanent record of the vehicle.

Getting tricked at the circus, or getting tricked buying a car is nothing compared to getting tricked out of the blessings of eternal life. That's what happened to Martin Luther. He was told a pack of lies when the church in Rome told him he could save himself by the quality of life that he lived. How many people do you know who are still being tricked by churches, by their own sinful nature that deceives them, or by the devil himself?

Jesus said, "Watch out that no one deceives you." As we get closer to the end of the world, the devil knows he only has a short time. In fact Jesus said things will get so bad even the elect could be deceived if that were possible, "For false Christ's and false prophets will appear and perform signs and miracles to deceive the elect-- if that were possible."

The good news is that no matter how bad the deceptions become as the end draws near, **the gospel will prevail** as Jesus said, "And the gospel must first be preached to all nations." No matter how bad things get in your personal life, the gospel will prevail. The blessings you have in Jesus will never change.

1) The times will get tough as the end draws near

We cannot underestimate how bad things will be as the end draws near. Jesus tells us to watch out so that we are not deceived. That word for deceive is a word also used for sheep that wander off the path and get lost. Satan's whole agenda is to keep people on the wrong path that leads to destruction, and pull Christians onto that path.

Jesus warns about many false prophets. "Many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and will deceive many." I tell my kids when they write that they should not use the word "many" because it actually weakens the point they are making rather than strengthening it. Jesus is not using this word "many" lightly. There will be many false teachers. Many will be deceived.

The Lord has given us signs to remind us the end is near, and also remind us there will be a plethora of false teachers that go out into the world. There will be wars, rumors of war, nation will rise up against nation, kingdom against kingdom. Every soldier killed in battle is a reminder of the greater war that exists on this earth. It is the battle for the souls of people as Satan deceives people in large numbers to believe that everything is OK between them and their God because they have done their best to live a decent life. The very name "devil" means liar. Jesus called him the father of lies.

Martin Luther knew what it was like to be deceived by false teachers. He grew up worshipping saints, and visiting relics and buying slips of paper called indulgences that were supposed to get him time out of purgatory. People were taught that purgatory was a place where you were purged before you were taken to be with Jesus. A person could spend a thousand years, or a hundred thousand years in such an intermediate place of suffering and pain. However, if you gave money to the church, and attended masses, and bought little slips of paper that said you get time out of this place of suffering, you could cut down the time of suffering. Even to this day masses are spoken for the dead to help them get time out of purgatory. The Bible simply does not teach this. Martin Luther read the Bible and became filled with fear every time he ran across the word, "righteousness" because he could never do enough to make himself worthy, purge himself, and cleanse himself. He was told that the blood of Jesus was not enough. He had to do something to make amends for his past life of sin.

There is no greater joy in life than realizing the truth that God has provided me with righteousness in Jesus that is totally free, and totally takes care of my problem of sin. As Paul writes in Romans 1, "I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes... For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith.'" When Martin Luther realized this truth, his eyes were opened and he saw how he was right with God, not on the basis of what he did, but solely on the basis of Jesus' death, Jesus' perfect life, and Jesus' resurrection from the dead." From first to last it is all Jesus.

In a sermon sent to me by my brother Charlie, who serves as a pastor in St. Peter, Minnesota, he tells the story of a man he once knew named Ernie. Ernie did not want to come with his family to church because he did not want to hear my brother preach that our

good works do not count towards our salvation when we stand before God on judgment day. One night my brother was talking to Ernie at his kitchen table and trying to show him from the Bible that good works do not get us eternal life. Ernie shook his head in disgust and said, "Pastor, I do not want you to take away my merits." Charlie told him, "Ernie, "I wish you would throw them all in the garbage can, where they belong, and trust in Jesus instead."

Martin Luther threw his good deeds into the garbage can. He made a valiant effort to purge himself of sin by becoming a monk, and even abusing his body beating himself with a whip, sleeping on cold floors, praying continually. Then he threw it all away for Jesus. He wrote, "Then I began to comprehend the 'righteousness of God' through which the righteous are saved by God's grace, namely, faith." He writes that he perceived this righteousness to be something in the passive sense. He saw that God declared righteousness to be his, without any action on his part. He writes, "Now I felt exactly as if I had been born again, and I believed that I had entered Paradise through widely opened doors. I then went through the Scriptures as far as I could recall them by memory and I found in other parts the same sense."

Martin Luther realized he had it all backwards. Faith in Jesus comes first, then the works follow. The merits of Christ, the death of Christ, the resurrection of Christ, the Word of God, the blessings of baptism declare us to be Christians. From that the works begin to flow and with these works comes a burning desire to tell the world the truth, and get rid of the lies when it comes to the important question, "How are you right with God?"

I don't know how you are, but if someone tricks me and deceives me, I feel it is my obligation and duty to warn other people to watch out so they too are not deceived. People who love Jesus and his salvation and care about other people feel compelled to tell the truth as Paul said, "I am not ashamed of the gospel" or as he said in 2 Corinthians 4, "We believe, therefore we speak."

2) The message of the gospel will prevail

As the end draws near, and the deception gets worse, Jesus will raise up an army of people who will die if necessary to share truth with people. He warned his disciples, "You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to local councils and flogged in synagogues." This is all part of the process of preserving the message of the gospel in the last days. What would happen to you if you were in a Muslim country and openly confessed to a crowd coming from the mosque that Jesus is Lord and God, and the followers of Muslim with its five pillars are being deceived? Jesus words to his disciples will come true in your life. What if you did this in a discussion with college students who are not Christian?

Martin Luther faced a similar crisis in his life. The pope in Rome had excommunicated him from the church. With that excommunication came the very real threat that people would end his life because they would be doing the church a favor. He took a stand. When asked to recant and take back his writings about Jesus and his blood and his righteousness as the source of salvation, he refused. He spoke the famous words, "Here I stand, My conscience is bound by Scripture." He wrote in his hymn, "Tho devils all the world should fill, All eager to devour us. We tremble not, we fear no ill, they shall not over power us."

This world's prince may still. Scowl fierce as he will. He can harm us none. He's judged the deed is done. One little word can fell him." Martin Luther confessed his faith boldly and freely in hymns, sermons, the catechism, and volumes of writings and lectures.

Where did he get the courage to do what he did? Jesus has the answer for us. "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." Have you ever seen the picture with the title "Rock of Ages?" It shows a woman in a storm clinging to a rock with a cross on top of it. Perhaps even a better picture might be clinging to the cross with one hand, and reaching out to help someone with the other hand. The Lord will give you the words to help someone who is deceived into thinking they can save themselves.

How many people do you know that are like that horse my dad saw at the state fair. They are turned around, confused, bewildered, trusting in their works instead of Jesus. Lord, use me to help the truth of you gospel prevail, as the end draws near. Amen.