

The Spirit Speaks Through You

Mark 13:5-11 • 2021-10-31 • Festival of the Reformation



As President Abraham Lincoln entered to give his inaugural address in 1861, a senator tried to humiliate him. He said, “Mr. Lincoln, you should not forget that your father used to make shoes for my family.” The whole Senate laughed. But Lincoln responded, “Sir, I am very grateful to you for reminding me of my father just before I give my address to the Senate. My father was so beautiful, and such a creative artist—there was no other man who could make such beautiful shoes. I know perfectly well that whatever I do, I will never be such a great president as he was a great creator. I cannot surpass him. I know that my father used to make shoes in your house for your family. If you have any complaints, I can make another pair of shoes. But as far as I know, nobody has ever complained about my father’s shoes. He was a genius, a creator, and I am proud of my father!” The whole Senate was dumbstruck; soon laughter turned into sincere applause.

Has anyone ever tried to make you feel like you were too insignificant to speak up? It happens in more than just the political sphere. It has happened many times for many Christians throughout history. This Reformation Sunday we look at Mark 13 and see how we are prepared to speak up for the gospel in the face of opposition. The Holy Spirit carries us from facing intimidation to making a bold proclamation. And the Holy Spirit speaks through you.

Jesus’ disciples left the temple courtyards in amazement. One of them remarked, “*Teacher, look what impressive stones these are, and what impressive buildings!*” Herod Antipas had worked on reconstructing and building up the temple area in order to impress the world. One face of the temple cliff stood towering above the valley hundreds of feet below. The walls around the temple area were expanded to encompass the size of six football fields, reaching the height of a twenty-story building. Each of the 162 pillars in the courtyard were said to be so large it took three men to reach around them. Some of the stones used weighed over 100 tons. They were cut to such an exact fit that you reportedly couldn’t even fit a piece of paper in between. And these walls were just the prelude. The temple itself was made of marble and inlaid with gold. Its enormous gates of bronze shone brilliantly. It was no small project! The refurbished temple was completed when Jesus was about 20 years old. But the work on the outer courtyards and surrounding areas remained under construction for decades. It was beyond a doubt impressive!

Jesus, however, was not impressed. His response was basically, “Don’t be too impressed by all this. It won’t last.” They later ascended up the Mount of Olives which overlooked the temple area from a distance. Some of them asked, “What do you mean it won’t last. How? When?” That’s where our reading picks up today. And in response Jesus helps us to see just how significant and important we really are in this immense and ever-changing world. Today we’ll look at four main points which Jesus shares. Each part of his response prepares us to take a stand and speak the gospel.

Firstly, he tells us to hold onto the truth. Don’t be deceived. “*Watch out! Many will come in my name claiming, ‘I am he!’ and will deceive many.*” The biggest threat against the Christian faith is not from the outside. It is from within. And Jesus doesn’t say there will be a handful of false teachers taking on the name Christian. There will be many. Nor will they be just a small threat to the souls of those around them. “They will deceive many.”

The early Lutheran reformers were aware of how many false teachers had taken over the visible church. Many were deceived. But they continued to hold to the truth. What about us? Our situation seems intimidating. You see false churches growing in great numbers. Some of the fastest growing religions right now include ones which take the title “...of Jesus Christ.” Throughout history the greatest threat to the gospel was not necessarily the Muslim or the Buddhist or even the Atheist. The greatest threat to the gospel’s spread has been found from those claiming to serve Christ. And *many* have been deceived. When you look at the large mega-churches, the best-selling Christian authors who teach a false financial prosperity gospel, you have to just stand back and say like the disciples, “Wow! Look what they’ve been able to accomplish with all their money!” And some are impressed. It can make you feel insignificant. But Jesus warns, “Hold onto the truth even when you walk among large and impressive figures.”

Secondly Jesus tells us to hold onto our mission. “Don’t be alarmed.” When you look at the state of the world don’t let that lead you into panic or despair. The things he mentions here certainly could be cause for great concern. Wars, rumors of wars, earthquakes, famines, nation rising up against nation. “Don’t be alarmed...*The end is yet to come. This is just the beginning.*” We might be alarmed by the news and think, “Things have gotten so bad. What difference can I make?” The latest political turn, the latest threat, the latest bombing or shooting give us concern. I’ve heard a number of those of the older generation here lament what the younger generation is up against. But Jesus’ reminder is, “*This is all just the beginning of birth pains.*” One hundred years after the start of the Reformation the Thirty Years war began in Europe. Conservative estimates say 20% of the population perished from this long war. Did that religious war silence the reformers? They knew it was coming. Jesus said, “Don’t be alarmed by it.” God has sent us out into this world to declare his Word. But we face a hostile world. Many hate the gospel. The fact that things are in such a state of decay and conflict shouldn’t silence us. They should rather be the reminder that the end is coming. Until then I need to speak and spread the word. My world is changing, yes. But my mission remains the same! What about you? Don’t be alarmed. Hold onto your mission even when you walk among large and impressive powers at war.

Thirdly he tells us to take a stand for the gospel. Don't shrink into silence. Our mission is stated, *"The gospel must be preached to every part of the earth."* The devil cares very little if you or I or anyone gets on a pedestal to preach morality. This is in fact the message of many false teachers. The devil has no problem with a society that has strict laws and rules. This is what much of Islam leans toward—outward observance of customs and rules. But the devil cannot stand what you and I are called to do, share the good news of forgiveness of sins in Jesus. Our enemy will seek to silence the gospel with all his might. When the apostles began to preach forgiveness of sins in the name of Jesus – freely won for us by the cross and sealed by the empty tomb –they were dragged into court. They were handed over to rulers and authority and beaten and threatened so that they would be silent. It's been like that throughout history. When the Roman papacy supported the selling of forgiveness of sins for money, a man named Martin Luther openly protested. And when he was called to trial, his life was on the line. But the gospel couldn't be silenced. Many other faithful Christians would not be silenced even in the face of threats. What about you? How much does it take for you to be silenced? Is it being dragged before councils and synagogues and flogged and interrogated, or is it the peer pressure to not testify about your Savior on social media? Whenever you feel like you are too insignificant to take a stand, remember this charge: *"Be on your guard... you will be put on trial...but the gospel must be preached."* Don't be silenced. Speak the gospel message even when you are threatened by impressive powers who seek to silence you.

The fourth and final point we'll look at today emboldens us to speak. We've been told three things so far: 1) Don't be deceived. 2) Don't be alarmed. 3) Don't be silent. Now Jesus adds a fourth truth. "4) Don't worry." Why should we not worry as we speak the gospel? **"The Spirit speaks through you."** Our Lord doesn't leave us to face this struggle alone. He assured his disciples that they have a power greater than the magnificent and impressive powers around them. A Christian never needs to worry as they make a stand against the powers of this world. The Holy Spirit gives them the powerful words they need to speak. The apostle Paul describes these words as having the power to demolish strongholds and tear down every argument and make it captive to Christ. The power of the gospel comes with the Holy Spirit who works through his Word. The Spirit always works to give the gospel power.

He did it for the early apostles. *"When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished, and they took note that these men had been with Jesus."* (Acts 4) This is how men like the apostle Paul, the early Christian missionaries, and Luther were able to stand in front of emperors and kings and say, *"Here I stand, on the Word of God."* Even when their very life was at stake. God was with them. His Word was in them. And they knew his Spirit spoke through them.

What about us? His Spirit's power is working through you as you speak today. You are of a higher status and standing than even the President of the United States. Though your origin is no greater than many around you –we stand as ordinary people in a world of great figures, impressive teachers, and powerful authorities. But we have a power and position above all else. There is no greater authority or power than that of the Holy Spirit given to each and every Christian at their baptism. So we can now say, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, it is the power of God for salvation."

Jesus was led into those impressive temple courts and made to stand trial before the high priest. For all the times you and I failed to take a stand –he did not. When asked if he was the Son of God he made the bold confession, "I am." And when they sentenced him as worthy of death, he confessed before the ruler Pilate, "You're right. I am a king." When he spoke all the impressive power of this world crumbled. He conquered the grave and shattered the power of sin, and crushed the devil and all his servants.

The living and powerful Savior told his disciples "Receive the holy Spirit." He sent them saying, *"Go into all the world and preach the good news of forgiveness in my name."* This is the gospel. This is why we can take a stand and speak boldly today. Because he has forever defeated all those who oppose him. Unlike that temple in Jerusalem, which was overturned, his kingdom will never be overturned.

And our God doesn't rely on the power of this world to get that message out to the world. He sends weak, unimpressive men and women who carry his gospel and have his Spirit. He sends me. He sends you. He sends his Spirit into our hearts to make us his witnesses. "Forgiveness is yours in the name of Jesus! Won for all the world!" Marvel at that: each Christian carries that powerful message which changes the world and eternity for all who believe!

We could stand back and look at the magnificent success of false teachers and false churches and also false religions. We could look at the times and the way the world is in disarray and despair and toss our hands up in defeat. We could close our mouths when we are brought to trial or have our message questioned by those who oppose it. We could worry that we just don't have the words to speak, and so stumble on our own words and our own understanding.

But we stand and marvel at the impressive glory of the cross and empty tomb. The apostles were brought before the very men who walked those halls of giant stone and massive arches. They stood on trial and received floggings. The disciples who came after them did the same –even being fed to the wild animals and hunted down for their testimony. Men like Luther and many more throughout these end times have spoken up. All of them spoke up in the name of Jesus and with his gospel message. They proclaimed forgiveness of sins to all who in repentance and faith trusted in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection for them. They did it all by the power of the Holy Spirit. And so will you and I today.