

November 3, 2024

Mark 13:5-11

Ever since Maddie was pregnant with Dot, through those nine months, when Dot was born, and now the last year and a half that Dot has been growing and developing, I think the most common words that have left my mouth are these: “Is this supposed to happen?” “Maddie, are you supposed to be this tired and nauseous?” “Doctor, is this supposed to take this long?” “Doctor, is the baby supposed to look like this?” I’m sure Maddie gets so annoyed with me when I say, “Is Dot supposed to be able to climb on the table like that?” “Is she supposed to be this feral and insubordinate?” And the answer is almost always, “Yes, Sam. This is supposed to happen. Nothing’s wrong.” When it comes to the end of the world, Jesus doesn’t want you to be clueless like me, constantly asking “is this supposed to happen?” He wants you to know exactly what to expect so that you don’t get deceived into believing something false. And here are the five things that Jesus tells his disciples and us to expect as birth pains- signs that he’s coming to create the world completely new: **1. Expect False Prophets. 2. Expect Human Ugliness. 3. Expect Natural Disasters. 4. Expect Religious Persecution. 5. Expect Reformation.**

1. Expect False Prophets. Like last week, this happens during the last week of Jesus’ ministry- in a few days he’s going to be arrested and killed, and while he and his disciples are leaving the temple in Jerusalem, they comment on how big and beautiful the stone foundation of the temple is. And it was- they were massive stones, usually about 4 tons, and they were covered with gold- you can see one still today- the wailing wall in Jerusalem. And Jesus comments and says, in a little bit, this temple is going to be destroyed so violently that none of these stones are going to left on top of another. The disciples assume that if something so horrible is going to happen, then it must be the end of the world. Jesus says, “not quite,” but here are the real signs of the end of the world. The first one- false prophets. Specifically, there are going to be teachers that claim to be Christians and even claim to be Christ himself and they are going to distort God’s Word and lead millions of people to hell! Who could he be talking about? Well, there have been people who have claimed to be Jesus- think of David Koresh and the Branch Davidians, Sung Myung Moon and the “Moonies.” Well, those are those crazy cults- we know about those- the ones who believe that Jesus is truly God and everything- we can trust them, right? Let me read you something- this comes from the official teaching of a major Christian denomination- This person, *“enjoys, by divine institution, “supreme, full, immediate, and universal power in the care of souls.”* That sounds like Jesus, doesn’t it? Jesus has the full, supreme, universal power over his church. Except this quote comes from the Roman Catholic Catechism, and it is referring to the Pope- the Pope claims power and authority that belongs to Jesus alone. Here’s another official Catholic Church teaching: *If anyone says that the sinner is justified by faith alone, meaning that nothing else is required to cooperate in order to obtain the grace of justification, and that it is not in any way necessary that he be prepared and disposed by the action of his own will, let him be anathema.* Wow! Are you shocked yet? Listen to this! *“I believe in the nonbinary God, whose pronouns are plural,” “I believe in Jesus Christ, their child, who wore a fabulous tunic,*

and had two dads. Well, this is clearly a mockery of Jesus made to make fun of the Christian faith, right? Wrong- this was written by Lutherans and was said by Lutherans in a Lutheran church. Why am I telling you this? It's not because I want you to shove this in the face of your ELCA or Catholic relatives and friends. It's so you understand what Jesus was talking about: people are going to come in his name, claiming to be his followers, but also claiming his power and authority and preaching lies in his name, and misleading millions of people. Don't be deceived. Jesus said this would happen!

2. Expect Human Ugliness. In the early 1900's scientists, scholars, and philosophers believed that humans had evolved so much from their violent, ignorant, unsophisticated ancestors that they'd eventually no longer fight each other, poverty and oppression would be solved, and we'd be able to create a perfect society. World War I was called, "The War to End All Wars," because they believed no more wars would happen afterwards. How'd that work out? In the 20th Century, more people were violently killed than every other century combined. And the 21st Century isn't much better, is it? Actually, right now, there are 17 countries in which war is happening with at least 1000 casualties, and Israel isn't even near the top of the list in number of casualties. Human beings are not evolving. We've advanced so much in science and technology, and we use it to kill each other. This is what Jesus said would happen! Wars and rumors of wars! Nations rising up against each other because they are so filled with hate that they'd gladly slaughter millions of people just for a few miles of territory! Even in our country- rumors of violence everywhere you go! Jesus said this would happen. Don't be deceived. Humans are not going to improve, things will get worse!

3. Expect Natural Disasters. Not only are human beings devolving and falling apart- but so is all creation! I don't have to tell you this! Look at the hurricanes and earthquakes and tornados that have ravaged so many parts of our country and the world. Thanks be to God, we typically don't have to worry about famine and starvation too much in our country, but right now about 345 million people throughout the world are on the brink of starvation- either because of war or because the weather didn't do what it was supposed to do. Climate change is real! We shouldn't deny that! We shouldn't deny the fact that this planet is falling apart, and some of it is probably the fault of human beings! But we shouldn't be guilting people into buying electric cars. We shouldn't be freaking out about not having children. We shouldn't be thinking that it's our job to reverse this. Jesus said this would happen. Jesus said that before he comes, this broken world would begin to fall apart before the new perfect one is made. Don't be deceived!

4. Expect Religious Persecution. Jesus then drops the heaviest load on his disciples as he says, "Although I am victorious, I am the Lord over all the earth, I am the true God and at the end all knees will bow down to me, they won't for a long time. And because you preach the truth, because you belong to me, you are going to be punished severely, often by your own people." What? Really? The pharisees and religious leaders who claimed to know the Scriptures and claimed to worship him are going to publicly shame and torture his followers? Yes. Really, and he was right. The first main persecutors of the disciples of Jesus and the first Christians were not the riff-raff, not even the Roman government. It was the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the religious

leaders who thought they were doing God a favor. Remember Paul, the one who wrote much of the New Testament? He was a pharisee, and he lived to put Christians in jail! And after Paul met Jesus and converted, his own Jewish brothers and sisters rejected him as well and tried to kill him in many of the cities that he went to. The same thing happened throughout church history. A few hundred years later, different groups within the Christian church rose up and started teaching lies about Jesus, and they persecuted the ones who stuck to the truth of the Bible. Martin Luther himself was an outlaw, and the Roman Catholic rulers of Germany were after his life for decades. There were, in fact, many Christians during that time that were burnt alive by the Roman Catholic authorities- people who claimed to be Christian- because they declared that they believed they were saved by the grace of God alone- Jesus death on the cross and nothing else. Dead. And the same happens today. Worldwide in 2023, Almost 5,000 Christians were killed for their faith. Almost 4,000 were abducted. Nearly 15,000 churches were attacked or closed. More than 295,000 Christians were forcibly displaced from their homes because of their faith. The vast majority of this violence was from people of the same country, same culture, sometimes it was governmental, other times it was religious fanatics who thought they were doing God a favor. Does that mean God is losing? Does that mean those being persecuted are wrong and they need to change something? Does that mean God isn't actually on their side? Don't be deceived. Jesus said this would happen, and it may even happen here! Expect it! Jesus said it's going to happen! We should not expect our culture to line up and respect Christian values or tolerate true biblical teaching! Jesus said they wouldn't! But Jesus also said that through persecution, through all this violence toward his people, something would happen.

5. Expect Reformation. Even while Jesus' people are persecuted, even while the world is falling apart, even while Satan actively does everything in his power to snuff out Jesus' truth, the truth will not only prevail, but spread. Jesus says that his disciples, often because they are so hated, will be brought in front of powerful people to answer the question, "What on earth do you teach that makes you so hated? What makes you people so different?" And when that happens, Jesus says, "Just be honest. You don't have to worry about coming up with something creative. Just say the truth. Preach the Gospel. And when you do, it won't really be you talking. You'll be an instrument, and the Holy Spirit is going to speak through you." And through that simple message- the Holy Son of God came to earth and died so that his enemies could be forgiven and made holy, the Holy Spirit will reform hearts so they believe and trust in Jesus. That's what happened, and it continued to happen throughout history- that's why we celebrate the Reformation- God used a flawed, crazy, brilliant man named Martin Luther and his followers, and God reformed the hearts of millions of Christians, and billions in the 500 years since, including ours, through the message that has been taught through God's people. And the reformation of hearts continues through us. I've had people ask, "Why doesn't God just come already?" Jesus gives the answer- The Gospel must be preached to all nations- all people. There are still people God wants to hear about him and be saved. Why hasn't he come back? Because he wants your neighbors, your friends, your coworkers to hear about him from you. And don't worry about what to say! Just be honest! You were a sinner, and God has made you his forever

all for free. The Holy Spirit works through that. Don't be deceived. Jesus said it would happen. Therefore, it will. Amen.