

5 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.

Dear People who have inherited the Scripture message of Salvation by Grace,
I had to give testimony in a deposition. A couple of attorneys and a recording secretary or court clerk. There was no judge. It was pretty straight forward. However, the whole setting with these professional legal people present made me nervous even though all I had to do was to witness to what I had seen.

Can't imagine how Luther felt when the whole German parliament or government was staring at him. Everyone expected a straight forward recantation or denial of Luther's teachings. However, Luther knew in his heart and conscience that this was not possible. He was guided by the word of God. It is the Word of God and his Gospel promises that caused Luther to not only overcome any nervousness, but to stand and witness to Jesus Christ. We can do the same. **In Christ Lutheran Christians Stand and Witness.**

In Mark 13 Jesus had just predicted the fall of the Temple in Jerusalem. The disciples understand that Jesus' isn't just referring to the fall of the Temple, but to the end of the world. They are curious. Four of the disciples come to him in private and ask for more information. Jesus gives them more information. He not only answers their question, but he gives the disciples promises that will help them in difficult times.

1. We have a promise that we will stand. (pic)

I am sure that you have had to have a difficult conversation with a fellow Christian, perhaps a son or daughter. You may have prayed, *“Lord, just help*

me get through this.” As we see the last days approaching, we pray the same thing. We have a promise from Jesus **“you will stand.”** The name of Jesus will get us into difficult situations, but remember that it will get us through those situations.

A. What Jesus want us to do is to **“watch.”** He says, **“Watch”** and **“be on guard.”** What are we to watch for?

1. Be on the lookout for **deceivers**. I will mention two types. One group is deceivers who pretend to be Christian, but they are not. Groups like Jehovah Witnesses, the Mormons, Seventh Day Adventists and others can put on a mask of Christianity, but they deny Jesus as the one and only Son of God who paid for all our sins at the cross. The other group is deceivers within the Christian church. Like the church of Martin Luther’s day they teach that Jesus is the Son of God, but we must do our part to be saved. They leave salvation in the hands of humans.

How are people deceived? They may have beautiful churches and services. They may have extensive programs to meet the needs and interests of all kinds of people. When it comes to salvation, they do not teach salvation by grace through faith. Deceivers are one sign of the end.

2. Jesus goes on to tell his disciples that they are to watch for signs of the end of the age. **“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.”** (7-8) I would simply say that all these signs are evident in our world.

B. Jesus wants them to know that as this all happens there will also be persecutions. **“On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them.”** His words also indicate that things will go well enough that they will be able to stand firm and witness.

1. Already in the book of Acts, in the early days of the church, we see this happening. Peter and John are brought before the Sanhedrin and then later on all 12 Apostles have a day in court and are beaten. (Acts 4 & 5) Such persecutions have continued to our time. Fox News reported on their website last year (Jan. 2017) that evangelical Christians were facing beatings at the hands of the drug cartels in northern Mexico and in the southern part of the country there were beatings of evangelical Christians at the hands of

sectarian religious groups. Jesus warns us of these things, so we can take up our cross and follow him.

2. How can we possibly stand firm in our Christianity in the face of such difficulties? We can't. Our sinful mind doubts that God can rescue us when we are in dark times. We also forget or refuse to listen to his promises.

It was on account of sin that Jesus came into the world. Jesus carried his cross never doubting God, his Father. Our sins are washed away in the life and blood of Jesus. On account of Jesus and in faith, we can stand. We stand as the apostles did. We stand as Martin Luther and other Christians have stood. In God's promises we stand confidently that all things work for good.

C. So what does Jesus want us to do as he says, "**Watch!**"? We can watch nature and the news for signs of the end. Better is watching in the pages of Scripture. (*Pic of Bible app.*) The warnings and promises help us to be alert and confident. We know Jesus is coming back to take us to heaven. We know he is watching over us. By watching the Scriptures, we can be prepared. And we can prepare others.

2. We have a promise that we will be given the message. (pic)

Remember that the authorities 500 years ago attacked Martin Luther. Their attacks created opportunities to witness by Luther and others. They were ready with a message. Today, the turbulence of the last days will create opportunities to witness. Jesus promises that we will be given a message to share.

A. Jesus has more information about the end times for the four apostles. He tells them in verse 10, "**And the gospel must first be preached to all nations.**"

1. After Easter Sunday Jesus would tell his disciples, "**Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.**" (Mark 16:15-16) Jesus disciples have a mission to proclaim the good news. The end of the world will come only after the Gospel has gone everywhere that Jesus wants it to go.

2. Jesus tells us generally that the gospel is to go to all nations. We don't know if that has been accomplished, although the gospel seems to be everywhere. As long as there is daylight we want to spread the gospel. It means witnessing. It means supporting world missionaries who go into

foreign countries in our name to preach about Jesus, the Savior.

B. I believe I once heard someone say, *“I am glad I am not a world missionary in a foreign country. I couldn’t do that.”* I wonder is such a belief also makes us feel that we can’t witness here either. Or if we are confronted by an antagonistic relative we might think, how am I going to answer their religious question? We have a comforting promise from Jesus. Jesus says, **“...do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time...”**

1. Something will be given us. One of our members mentioned in a Bible class that a person said that in Holy Communion you only receive bread and wine. Our member answered, “Jesus says in the Bible that, ‘This is my body and blood.’” This was a good answer! In another incident years ago a mother told her children that she did not know what they were going to do during a family crises. Her son, a seventh grade boy in Confirmation, said, “Mom, we need to pray to God about our problem.” In each case God provided the right words.

2. This is what Jesus promises. He tells us that the Holy Spirit will give us words. He will be speaking through us.

I want to caution that words don’t come out of “thin air.” They are words that the Holy Spirit plants in us when we are hearing and reading the Word of God. Then at the right time, the Holy Spirit resurrects those words to use in our testimony. I want to encourage you to spend time in Bible study. The most helpful Bible study is where we go through all the main teachings. That is the Bible Information class.

Martin Luther was excellent at answering questions about our Christian faith and he spent hours and hours in the Scriptures. We may not do this as much as he did. However, we can dedicate some time each week to looking at Scripture.

Conclusion: When I gave my deposition in regards to a traffic accident, I wasn’t giving Gospel witness, but my attitude and behavior certainly showed my Christianity. I was able to do my best because of Jesus Christ.

Martin Luther was giving a Gospel witness at the Diet of Worms. (pic) He was able to stand because of Christ’s promise that he would. He was able to witness because of Christ’s promise that he will give us words to speak.

This is true for you and me as the enemies of the Gospel are ramping up their efforts to harm us and stop the spread of the gospel. More and more

Christians may be called to give testimony in hostile situations, like Luther, like St. Paul and like Jesus. These promises are given to see us through. We have the promise that Christ will cause us to stand. We have the promise that we will be given the words that we need. After that how things turn out is up to God. We have the promise that he will watch over us and he will ultimately take us to the victory celebration in heaven. Therefore, continue to stand and witness in Christ. Amen.