Message Transcript

BE ON GUARD | THE KINGDOM REVEALED
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Traders Point, how are we doing? Good. It's good to be with you. It's good to be in this fall season. I think this is when Indy is at its best. Anybody agree? Fall. Beautiful. Let's just check this out. Who here is from Indy—born and raised? Yeah, clap it up. Same, same. I'm from the west side of Indianapolis. I've made it all the way up here to Whitestown, Indiana.

And maybe this is familiar to you too. But growing up in Indiana you seem to always hear stories about famous people from Indiana. And I would say one of these people is definitely the guy I'm going to show you in a second. This is his picture and I just want to know if you recognize this man from Indiana. Larry Bird. Right? Larry Legend.

Some have said that my game reminds them of his. You all always laugh at the wrong things. That was a serious statement.

But Larry Bird was obviously a champion. One of the best players to play. But there was something really unique about Larry Bird that was just specific to him. And if you've never heard stories about this, he would sit down in interviews. Like, yeah, Larry Bird was great. But there was something that he did that most couldn't believe that he was doing. What he was known for was telling his opponent exactly what he was going to do before he did it.

He was playing against the best people on the planet and as they are walking down the court he would just whisper to them, "Hey, when we get down there I'm going to catch the ball on the wing. I'm going to pump fake. You're going to jump. I'm going to take two dribbles to the right off the glass. And in interview after interview they were like, "He did it. He literally called the shot and did it and we couldn't stop him."

Now, why did I say that? I think there is something important in here for us and it's this truth: Knowing what is coming isn't necessarily the same thing as being prepared for it. Right? Can anyone agree with that? It's not just enough to know something is coming. The fact is that we need to prepare, we need to be instructed. Why do I tell you this? Because today in Mark, chapter 13, Jesus is going to continue talking about the judgment that is coming. He's going to even flirt and move into some talk about the end of time. There is going to be a lot of talk of destruction when the world comes to an end. We're going to start to talk about that.

And anytime we talk about judgment, when we talk about the end of the world, what's the question everyone wants to know? When. When is it going to happen? Can you tell me when this is going to happen?

And I think as Jesus is getting to the end of His earthly ministry here, and his human history moves to an end, I think Jesus is showing us here, "I'm not going to give you information," which is what all of us want, "about when." He says, "I'm going to give you instruction because it's far better for you to be prepared for what is coming than for you to just know what's going to come."

I think what Jesus is getting to is, "I know you want the answers and you want to know what it looks like, but wouldn't it be better if I just gave you everything that you need to remain faithful in these last days?" That's what Jesus is going to give us here in Mark, chapter 13, starting in verse 1.

Here's what we are going to do. I'm going to read the section in its entirety and it's like 20 plus verses so get comfortable. Get ready to hear my voice quite a bit. We're going to read through all of it. I'm going to pray. And then we're just going to move through it line by line. Sound good? Alright. Mark, chapter 13, starting in verse 1. It says:

"And as he came out of the temple," this is Jesus, "one of his disciples said to him, 'Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!' And Jesus said to him, 'Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.'

"And as he sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, 'Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?' And Jesus began to say to them, 'See that no one leads you astray.

'Many will come in my name, saying, "I am he!" and they will lead many astray. And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be Earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. These are but the beginning of birth pains.

'But be on your guard. For they will deliver you over to councils, and you will be beaten in the synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them.

'And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations. And when they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit.

'And brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death. And you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

'But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where he ought not to be (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let the one who is on the housetop not go down, nor enter his house, to take anything out, and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak.

'And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! Pray that it may not happen in winter. For in those days there will be such tribulation as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, and never will be.

'And if the Lord had not cut short the days, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he shortened the days. And then if anyone says to you, "Look, here is the Christ!" or "Look, there he is!" do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the elect. But be on guard: I have told you all things beforehand.'" Mark 13:1-23 (ESV)

Let's pray.
Father, we come to You today and we lift up Your words and we trust that Your Word has something for us in this moment. God, we so often want to know when, information, but You seem, in this unique, season that You want to give us instruction for faithfulness, to stand firm against deception and fear. So that we would remain and endure.

God, I pray that we would hear Your Word today, that Your Spirit would call us and convict us. That we would hear what You have for us. And we would be prepared for whatever comes next. Jesus, be with us as we walk through Your Word today. We love you. It's in Your perfect and holy name we pray. And everyone said: Amen.

Well, the tension here, if you've never studied these verses is that there is a lot of debate around what exactly is Jesus talking about here from a timeline standpoint? Is this something that already happened? Is this something that is happening? Or is this something that will happen one day?

Now, I think if God wanted to tell us exactly when, He would have done that. But He makes it pretty clear here, in the Scripture that we read and in other Scriptures, He's not divulging that information right now.

And I love the teaching from a guy, a professor named Allen Stibbs, who talks about verses like this. And I think there is a lot of wisdom for us here. Look at what he says. He says, "Do not try to satisfy an unhealthy curiosity. It is a serious misuse of Scripture to try to make it disclose more than God has purposed to reveal."

Now, I think a lot of times our curiosity tries to get us to read between the lines. Like, "I hear You, God. I see the code." And I feel like God is like, "What code? No code. Don't read between the lines. Just read the lines. There is enough there in the lines." Because God could have told them exactly when it was going to happen.

He could have said, "Hey, set an alarm for this day at this time." But He doesn't. Why? I don't know completely, but maybe because if He did that's exactly what we would do. We would go home. We would set an alarm. We would go to sleep and wait until Jesus comes back. But, God is making it really clear in these verses that you and I have a very active role in the last days.

So, today is not a lot of speculation of how we determine the signs and what is to come. Let's focus on what He does tell us and the instruction of how we can be prepared in these last days. Because here in these verses Jesus' words reveal timeless truths about deception, suffering, endurance, and faithfulness that apply to every believer. Because no matter how you slice it, we are living in the last days. Now, it could be tomorrow. It could be years from now or centuries from now. But the instructions are the same for me and you.
So, the title of today's message is:

Be On Guard
Keep your head on a swivel. Don't be surprised by what comes because some crazy things are going to come. And Jesus doesn't give His disciples a detailed timeline to satisfy their curiosity. He gives them instructions to prepare for what is coming. So, with that lens and that focus, let's work through these verses and double click on a few as we go.

So, if you have your Bible, get back to verse 1. And we're going to read this again. It says:

"And as he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, 'Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!' And Jesus said to him, 'Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.'"

What I love about the Bible is how real it is. It just adds in a passing conversation. This guy who started the conversation had no idea he would be in the Bible one day.

Chances are... Think about where they were, they've been in the Temple. Jesus has been going toe to toe against all of this opposition. He's forecasting all of these things that are going to happen.

And I'm guessing there is like an awkward silence as they are leaving. And this guy is just like, "Hey, Jesus. What about these stones? The are pretty big, right?" And Jesus is like, "Yeah, they are pretty big."

And they were. This Temple, we've got to get our eyes around it of how big this was. This was a wonder of the ancient world. It was described as a mountain of marble decorated in gold. With its courtyards it spanned 35 acres. If there was ever a thing that was going to be sustained and live through no matter what was coming next, they had their hope in this. This thing was going to be there. And often, do we tend to put eternal confidence in temporary things? I know for me, I got exposed to this truth at a very young age. Things do not last forever. Even the strongest things that you experienced growing up, they are not always going to be there.

Because this place that I would go to when I was growing up, it was indestructible. It was this place that I thought I would be able to take my kids to one day, and my grandkids one day. It was called The Discovery Zone. And, unfortunately, if you ever drive by today, you know that it is no longer there. The things that we think are so strong that they will always be there, even they crumble.

So, what Jesus is getting to as He is about to step into this discourse, He says, "I want you to look around. I want you to remind yourself of what your hope is in. And I want you to have this teaching, this instruction."
Don't Be Deceived

Don't be deceived. You're going to see things fall. You're going to see cities fall. You're going to see buildings fall. All of this. And I don't want you to be deceived into thinking that I'm not in control. Because, the Temple, at its highest point, it would have been indestructible to them. But Jesus is saying, "It's not eternal but the Kingdom that I've come to bring, the Kingdom I'm establishing, it is. It's wrapped up."

The disciples can't shake it. Jesus says this thing and they need to know more. So, later on in the day, when they are at the Mount of Olives, four of them: Peter, James, John, and Andrew privately go to Jesus and they say, "Hey, what you said earlier about the Temple, can You tell us more? Can You tell us when? And I want you to look at His response in verse 4. They say:

"'Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?' And Jesus began to say to them, 'See that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name, saying, "I am he!" and they will lead many astray. And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be Earthquakes in various places; there will be famines.'"

Are you noticing the pattern? "Okay, can you tell us when this is going to happen? When is this going to happen?" And Jesus' first piece of instruction is, "Hey, don't be led astray." Translation. Don't be deceived. Many are going to come in my name. Don't believe them. Wars and rumors of wars—don't be alarmed."

Now, this isn't to say: Don't be unwise. Don't be unaware. Be present and know the real threats and dangers going on in the world. What He is saying is, "Don't get so swept up in the wars and rumors of wars and all of these external things that are happening that cause you to lose faith in Me and My plan for what I have for you in this season." Right?

And if you follow along in your Bibles as you read this I would circle this line, I would highlight this line when He says:

This must take place, but the end is not yet
This must take place but this is not the end yet. What Jesus is pointing to here when He says, "This must take place," He's saying that this is about God's sovereign plan. Jesus wants us to know that even in the middle of deception, craziness, wars, and rumors of wars, which we are in right now, this is all within God's plan. God is sovereign even when it's scary. God is sovereign even when our world and our lives begin to fall apart.

I don't know about you, but it becomes really easy to start to lose a little bit of faith when our world begins to crumble, things that we thought would always be there. And when they are not there we begin to lose faith, "God, are You really still in control?"

When we get a diagnosis or our marriage is falling apart or we're losing a job or the death of someone we love, a future that suddenly looks drastically different than what we expected, we begin to interpret every crisis as evidence that this thing is falling apart. But Jesus teaches us that crisis doesn't mean God has lost control. Don't be deceived. Not for a second.

Know The Truth
So, if deception is what Jesus warns us about, how do we prepare ourselves for deception? For lies? We need to know the truth. We need to be familiar with the truth. We need to be able to know the difference between what is true and what is a lie. Well, how do we do that?

Well, something fascinating came up when I used to work at a credit union. You are like, "How many jobs has this guy had?" I've had a few. Okay? But one of the things that was fascinating to be is, when they were going through trainings with the tellers and talking to them about everything, they talked about how they train them to be able to spot a counterfeit.

And this makes sense now, but I never really thought about it. They don't just bring in all of the counterfeit that they found and say, "Look at this. This is fake. This is fake. This is fake." No, what they do is they get them to spend so much time with the real thing, they know how it feels. They know what it looks like. The moment something that is not real comes in they can spot it.

There was an agent who worked at the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston who said you develop something resembling a sixth sense for detecting counterfeit bills. People who are trained to identify counterfeit money become deeply familiar with the real thing. They study its details, its characteristics, the things that make it authentic. And the more familiar they become with what is real the easier it is to recognize what is fake.

The same is true for followers of Jesus. One of the best ways to guard yourself against deception is to be familiar with the truth. So that you can recognize when something doesn't line up with it. Because here's the truth. Cult leaders, cultural shifts, and even persuasive religious voices are going to continue to put their voice out there, and it says to lead people away from Jesus.
We have to fine tune our ears in such a way that we know the voice of God. We have to know the truth. Well, how? I just want to give us a few reminders. Nothing groundbreaking here but really just a chance to anchor us in the fact that this is a big deal. And we're going to see the implications of it here in a second.

But we have to know the truth. And the three things that I would give you to do that are:

One:
Come Ready
This is something we talk a lot about as a church. And it's more than just coming and attending and participating in a religious activity, of coming into this room. There are no participation trophies. When we come here we are coming to have an encounter with God.

We believe that we are positioning ourselves to worship and to the teaching and to serving that we are going to hear from the Lord. We are going to have an encounter, "I'm showing up expecting, believing. There are so many voices out there. I need this time to be able to get back and hear from my Father. I come ready."

The second thing is:
Daily Bible Reading
This year we started something we've never done before. We did a year-long Bible reading plan for all of our people. We are reading together. Five days a week we are giving you a chance to read along, to have unity, to have the resources to be able to make sense and to know that this is real [holding up the Bible].

Like those agents handling fake, and counterfeit, and real money you get so familiar with the pages, you get so familiar with the voice of God that when something comes up on TV or out there from a coworker, a family member we can go, "No, no, no. That's not in here [the Bible]. That's not true. That's deception. That's a lie." So, what I would encourage you to do is get signed up, subscribe, and read the Bible along with us.

Podcast
And then the third thing I would point you to is to make you aware if you don't know this, is that our church has a podcast, Taking Ground. Our lead pastor, Aaron, and our executive team do an unbelievable job working through real conversations to help us identify one of the misconceptions of the things that we are all working through and point us to truth.

And if you listened to the podcast that was released this week, it's crazy how it matches up with our message this week. The podcast is all around syncretism, which is this idea that what happens a lot of times when Christianity and culture try to find a way to blend together.

How can we sync these two things together? How can we lower what Christianity is and make it more moldable so that they can come together? It's done in such a subtle and deceitful way that a lot of times we can't tell the difference between: Is that real? Or is that false? When we say, "Don't be deceived," it's not going to be blatant and easy. That's when we have to know the Word of God back and forth. Because half truths are full lies.

And so if you haven't had access to those things, if you are curious about them, I believe we have a slide right here with a QR code to download the app. That's where you can find the Daily Bible Reading plan, additional resources, and you can find the podcast—just a way to say, "I'm going to be intentional. I know how loud the world is. I know the voices that are coming.

I know that there are going to be rumors of wars and all of these deceptions. I need to be anchored to truth." This is a great way to do it.
So, the first thing, the timeless truth that Jesus gives us is, "Hey, don't be deceived. Don't be deceived." The second thing Jesus give us is:

Don't Be Afraid
Now, don't be afraid is a command that is given over and over again in the Bible. Some have studied through and said that there are 365 times that it is commanded: Do not be afraid. One for every single day. But this one is tied to something very specific that we don't want to be fearful of. So, let's read and see exactly what I'm talking about in verse 9. He says:

"'But be on your guard. For they will deliver you over to councils, and you will be beaten in the synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them.'"

So, Jesus tells them, as they are talking about the end and what it's going to look like, what the last days are going to be like, He says, "You are going to suffer. There is going to be a lot of persecution. You are going to be brought before them. But don't be afraid."

And the question I would have if I was you is, "Hey, Jesus said this. Did it happen? Did it begin to happen almost immediately?" Yes. Were people thrown before councils and stood before authorities? Yes. We've got a whole book about it. The book of Acts is the beginning of the church. This is the situation over and over again.

And Jesus is telling them, "This might be scary, but don't be afraid." He even tells them and us in verse 10 why all of this is happening. He says:
"'And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations. And when they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit.'"

Once again, if you have your pencils out, your pens, I would circle must. Once again they are thinking we're with Jesus. This is going to be different. And in the days forward he said, "No, no, no. There is going to be a lot of pain and persecution that will be coming. There is going to be suffering." But He says must. So, we're tying this back again to God's sovereign plan, what He has for us. And Jesus makes two promises here in these two verses. One: the gospel must be preached to all of the nations. And it's through opposition that is actually going to be theplatform in which Jesus does it.

So, one: The gospel must be preached to all nations. And then two: The Holy Spirit will give them the words they need. Will give them, not might give them. When they are in this situation, when they are preaching the gospel, even under fierce opposition, "Don't be afraid because I'm going to give you the words to say. My Spirit is going to be working through you."
So, in this sense of don't be afraid it's to something very, very specific. And it's speaking the name of Jesus. So, I'd say if we don't want to be afraid then we need to:

Speak The Truth
This is our role. Jesus said that you were brought here and will be brought there for My sake, to bear witness before them. And if you've wondered, in this season of life, as you started to follow Jesus, you're like, "What is my role? Am I supposed to be working at a church full-time? What am I supposed to do?" I'm telling you, there is a high calling on your life, one that Jesus Himself gave you. And it's above any career you have; it's above any other title that you have. You are to be a witness to all of the things that Jesus has done and said.
This comes up in Acts 1, the beginning of the church. Jesus is about to ascend into heaven. He hasn't even left yet and His disciples are already asking the question, "When are You going to come back?" And, once again, He doesn't answer it. But look at what He does say. And this is timeless for me and you. Acts, chapter 1. Jesus replied:

"'The Father alone has the authority to set those dates and times, and they are not for you to know. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.'" Acts 1:7-9 (NLT)

In these last days you and I will be witnesses. We are going to bear witness before anyone and everyone, telling them all that we've seen and heard Jesus do. And here's the thing with a witness.

And this is what I've learned over countless years watching, pretty much exclusively, detective and law shows. Okay? So, I get it honest. What's the question that always comes up in the case when they find out that there is a witness? What's the question they always ask the witness?
Are You Willing To Testify?

You experienced something, you've seen something that could be really beneficial. But are you willing to testify? Are you willing to put your credibility on the line? Are you willing to face the consequences of telling the truth?
It's the same for us. God has given you a truth. You have things that you have seen, miracles God has done. You've experienced the love of God.

. That's incredible. Are you willing to testify? That's the call Jesus put on your life. You are to be a witness to Him.

Not to get caught up in watching a world fall into destruction, but even in the chaos and the mayhem, you and I are standing before everyone saying, "This is Jesus. It may look like the end is coming, but I can tell you about the Savior of the world." That's our role. That's what we get to do. And we are eyewitnesses, not expert witnesses. All we are called to do is to tell everyone everywhere all that we've seen Jesus do and what we know Him to be.

Maybe you're thinking, "I am afraid. I don't know enough." Even better. God works better; God works perfectly in our weakness. What we need to do is be faithful enough to put ourselves in that situation. Faithful enough to stand in opposition.

And He says, "I promise the Holy Spirit will give you the words to say." That's our role in these last days. We are witnesses who cannot stop telling everyone everywhere about all that Jesus has done.

Now, think about this. If we are in the last days, if there is evil opposition that is going against God's sovereign plan and what He wants to have, what would we expect to see? What would the demonic powers of this world try to do? If there is power in the name of Jesus, we're called to speak and to testify to all that He has done, what would we see? We would see claims of, "Hey, stop talking in the name of Jesus." The name of Jesus would be a problem.
What I would ask you is: Do you feel the name of Jesus is a problem today? One hundred percent. What would I ask you is: What about back then when Jesus is launching His church? Did we see something? Was there proof of it then? One hundred percent.

Once again, go back to the book of Acts. In chapter 4 they are called in front of these high councils. Charges are being brought against them. They are facing everything up to death in this moment. They are going to let them go. But I want you to see the instruction that they try to give the apostles:
"So they called the apostles back in and commanded them never again to speak or teach in the name of Jesus." Acts 4:18 (NLT)
And I want you to see the response and I hope it gives you confidence today. Verse 19:

"But Peter and John replied, 'Do you think God wants us to obey you rather than him? We cannot stop telling about everything we have seen and heard.'" (NLT)
We can't stop. This is literally why we are here. What's fascinating is that over and over again the apostles speak the truth in front of opposition. They preach the gospel. They testify to all that they have seen Jesus do over and over and over again,

And do you know what they prayed for after they barely got through? They finally get released, they are beaten and close to death. A lot of times… When they come out of it they almost always pray for the same thing. And I would think that after coming through that they would be praying, "God, thank You for carrying us through. God, please spare us from another one. God, please remove the opposition from our life."

But that's not what they prayed for. It's almost like they remembered the words of Jesus who said, "My gospel must be proclaimed. And this is the way it's going to go. You are going to stand and be My witnesses in front of the powers that be and My gospel will penetrate the hearts of men and women." Because look at what they prayed for. The don't pray, "God, remove it from me." They prayed for something very specific in verse 29. It says:

"And now, O Lord, hear their threats, and give us, your servants, great boldness in preaching your word. Stretch out your hand with healing power, may miraculous signs and wonders be done through the name of your holy servant Jesus." Acts 4:29-30 (NLT)

Why do you think they immediately prayed for boldness? Because they knew if God didn't fill them with boldness they would be filled with fear. And for me, I was convicted this week because I pray a lot for more. I pray for better. I pray for holiness. But I don't pray enough for great boldness to remind myself that I have been called to be a witness, to testify to all of the things that I've seen Jesus do. And I've seen Him do too much to turn back. But am I testifying to it? Speaking the truth begins with praying for boldness to preach God's Word and then we step forward and we do it. And maybe you are like, "Okay. That was true for them. You've proved that. They faced persecution. But where is it in the Bible that that is still going to be true? For me to be a follower of Jesus, that I should expect persecution?" I'm so glad you asked. 2 Timothy, chapter 3, verse 12:

"Yes, and everyone…"
Once again, study the Greek and you will see that that word everyone it means you. It means you.
"…everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." (NLT)

Two thousand years later our opposition might look different but our witness is still needed in the face of whatever that opposition is. And the call in the last days, the instruction, is don't be afraid because, when you are in that moment, the Holy Spirit will give you the words to say. And I also know that there are people here at all of our campuses and you are thinking right now, "I have never had that moment. I've never been in a moment where I've felt like the Holy Spirit was speaking for me."

And here's what I would ask, lovingly, but challengingly. Have you ever been a spot against opposition where you needed to speak? Have you ever testified to the name of Jesus? Have you ever put yourself out there? Because the Holy Spirit is called a Helper. He's here to help you do what Jesus has called you to do. And if you're not in a position to need help, He's not going to help you.
The Holy Spirit is known as a Comforter. If you've never been in a position where you are uncomfortable in the face of opposition, you probably haven't felt the comfort. But what I'll tell you is that the Holy Spirit is still speaking and it's real. I have experienced it.

I was talking with a friend of mine the other night and we were talking about this time a few years ago when we were talking with this guy, we were counseling him. He had these crazy ideas of what he thought this was. And he was like, "I began talking and it was like I wasn't talking. The Holy Spirit was talking through me. I didn't even know I knew that. I didn't know... It was like I wasn't talking." Because he wasn't. The Holy Spirit was speaking. And that same Holy Spirit is still speaking today.

So, here's what I want to ask you:
Who in your life needs you to be bold enough to share God's Word with them? Who in your life? It's probably on the other side of some feeling of opposition or tension. It could be someone at work. It could be a co-worker, a boss. It even could be someone in your family. There is this space, this opposition, that you feel and you feel it in your bones like, "I should say something. I should testify." Are you bold enough in this moment to be able to preach the gospel, to testify to all that Jesus has done? Because I'm telling you what Jesus seems to be doing in these verses is, "Hey, the world is spinning out of control a lot of times. Wars, rumors of wars, it's still true to this day, right now.

But what if everything, when you hear that opposition, the world is ending, chaos and pandemonium, all of these things, you would be the voice that when people are talking about all of these things that you would say, "Hey, I don't know exactly what this specific thing is going to do and how it's going to shake out, but I can tell you what anchors me in the midst of this storm, what anchors me in the midst of this war, what anchors me in the midst of this natural disaster is that I believe in a God who is sovereign over all of it. I believe in a God who has already overcome. I believe in the Holy Spirit who gives me peace when I should have no peace. Can I tell you about that God?"

What if God is setting the stage for us in these last moments giving us ample opportunities to preach the gospel? Are we taking advantage of them? That's what I've been convicted of this past week. I need to take every opportunity that I get to speak the name of Jesus. Jesus, Jesus, Jesus over and over and over again.

In our final part of our passage today, Jesus is going to circle back and He's going to end where He began with this line of: Watch out. Beware. What I want you to see is what He hasn't done. He hasn't given the disciples every detail about the future. He hasn't answered every question. He hasn't promised an easy life. But what He's told them is everything we will need to remain faithful in these last days.

He says, "Don't be deceived. Don't be afraid." And finally He doubles down and He says:
Don't Be Caught Off Guard

In the last part of our message, this is really where it begins to drift into the future events of what is going to happen. And some unique language is here. I don't have time to go fully into it, but I want to touch on it for just a second before we close out. And this is in verse 14. If you have your Bibles. He says:
"'But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where he ought not to be (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.'"

Now, abomination of desolation is probably not a phrase you hear every day. Right? Jesus is actually referencing something from the book of Daniel. And without getting too deep into it, the idea is desecration. Something that is holy, something that belongs to God is being defiled. And historically, the language was associated with the desecration of the Temple, which what we know… There are different interpretations. But what we do know is that in A.D. 70 the Temple was destroyed and horrible things were done on the inside of it. The desecration did exist in this time.

But what I want us to see is it's not necessarily speculating: Is this is once and for all? Is it a little bit of the future fulfillment? What I want us to notice is what Jesus says next in verse 22. He says:

"'For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the elect."

There is this warning again: Don't be deceived. There is going to be another one and another one. There are going to be all of these little anti-christs who are going to be doing everything they can to deceive you, to desecrate the holy things of God, to lead people astray. And what Jesus is saying in this is, "Hey…" look at verse 23:
"But be on guard:"
"'But be on guard: I have told you all things beforehand.'"

So, when we find ourselves in a situation, when things are happening that we can't believe are happening, "I can't believe that they would do that in the name of God. I can't believe this kind of desecration would be going on," we are reminded of this. God called it way before it ever happened. And it's within His plan that it is going to continue to happen until it's done once and for all.

And His last words for us are: Be on guard. It's what He began the conversation with. It's what He ends it with. Why? Because Jesus knows that what we believe about the future will shape how we live in the present. And He doesn't want His followers to be caught off guard by opposition, suffering, or deception. He's already told us these things are coming.

And here's what I find so encouraging about, not only the fact that He says all of this, but He calls the shot and then it happens. Jesus doesn't just tell us what is coming, He tells us how to understand what is coming. And I want you to remember back to one of the verses we read earlier in verse 8. I think it signals, it reframes, what we see. He says:

"'These are but the beginning of birth pains.'"
So, I want you to think about that. He's talking about wars, earthquakes, famines, and He doesn't say these are the beginning of the death pains. He said this is the beginning of the birth pains. And there is a big difference.
Over the years I've found myself in the room where a lot of birthing was happening. We have four kids. And I was fully present for almost all of them. I did pass out one time, but I still have a lot of experience. And what I can tell you is there is a lot happening in that room. The pain, the breathing, the screaming, the blood.

And if you were on the other side of that wall and you didn't know what was happening inside there, you would think something has gone wrong, terribly wrong, "I think someone is dying." But here's the thing about birth pains. The pain isn't announcing the end of life, it's announcing the arrival of new life.
So, I think what Jesus is getting to here is if we're not going to be caught off guard we need to:
Remember The Truth

Remember the truth. And Jesus tells us we need to understand what is happening to the world around us. These aren't death pains; these are birth pains. And even in the midst of them, sometimes we can't see clearly what is going on. The world might look and feel like it's falling apart, but that doesn't mean God's plan is falling apart. What looks like the end is actually pointing toward a new beginning. God is making all things new, just like He promised.

And the cross might be the greatest example we have of this. Jesus told His disciples exactly what was going to happen. He told them He would suffer. He told them He would be rejected. He told them He would be killed. And He told them that three days later He would rise again. Jesus told them exactly what He was going to do. He called His shot and they still couldn't stop Him. Jesus is unstoppable.

And I hope that brings you a sense of peace and security in this moment. What looked like the end was actually the beginning. And that's going to be the cycle in these last days. Because what we know is three days later that tomb was empty. Jesus was alive. And church, that's the truth that we remember. That's the truth that we testify to. And the cross reminds us that God is still at work, even when it looks like everything is falling apart.

And the promise of His return reminds us that God isn't finished yet, not with this world and not with you. So, don't forget what Jesus has already told you. Don't be deceived. Know the truth. Don't be afraid. Speak the truth. Don't be caught off guard. Remember the truth.

And here's the truth, church. The King is coming back. And that's what gives us confidence in thismoment, in the midst of uncertainty, in the sense of chaos, we have an anchor that we are firmly planted with.

As we close today, I just want to put this out to anyone who has never put their faith in Jesus. Maybe you are here because you have a lot of questions. There is a lot of chaos and paranoia out there. And you just want to know, "What is real? What can I trust?"

Can I tell you what so many of us have come to place our faith in? There is a good God who is sovereign over all. He has proven to us that He loves us so much that He not only created us, but He has walked with us through all of human history.

And that He loved us so much that He was willing to give His only Son. And that only Son lived a perfect life and went to a cross for me and you and died on our behalf. He took the penalty we deserved.
And He proved He has authority over heaven and
earth. He proved that He has authority over life and death when He resurrected three days later. And the promise that we have in the name of Jesus is that one day we will too. This world will pass. Everything will come to an end. But a new heaven and a new earth will be brought down. And we will be with God forever. That's what you can place your faith in today. Don't leave here without that.

And for the rest of us, the way we're going to close out today is that we're going to remember. And one of the things Jesus gave us to remember the truth is a meal called communion. And this is something we take together as a church. We encourage our groups to take it together. It's this sacred meal when we get together and we are reminded of two things. What Jesus has already done, and what Jesus has promised to do.

So, for followers of Jesus we take the bread, which represents the body of Jesus and we remember the sacrifice that He said He was going to make, the sacrifice that He did make. His body was broken on our behalf. And we remember.

And we take this cup of juice, which represents the blood of Jesus, and once again we remember that we have been made right because of His blood. We are covered by the blood of Jesus. It's because of His sacrifice that now we have been entrusted with His Holy Spirit that will empower us to be witnesses to a watching world. So, we take this juice and we remember.

Church, the King is coming. And until He does, you and I have a very active role to play. Here's the thing that we know from the Word of God. Not just what is happening in the moment, but what is going to happen at the very end.
Do you know what it tells us in Revelation? It says that we will overcome. And do you know how we are going to overcome? It gives us two things: By the blood of the Lamb and by the word of our testimony, of everything we have seen God do. So, what I want us to do right now is close in a moment of prayer. Would you pray with us?

Father, we come to You today and we thank You for Your Word, we thank You for instruction, we thank You that You reframe things and give us the answers that we really need. God, I pray that we wouldn't get so caught up in the win or try to understand what's happening. But, God, that we would be faithful in this moment because You've given us enough to be faithful in this moment.
God, I pray for everyone at our campuses that we would not be deceived, that we would not be led astray, but we would know the truth. That Your Word would come alive. It is living and active and it would pierce us to our hearts. It would move us.

And we would be reminded of our role to play. That You have called us to be Your witnesses. Your credible witnesses to a watching world. God, that we would be willing to testify to all of the things we've seen You do, to who we know You to be. That we would over and over again speak the name of Jesus, Jesus, Jesus.

And, God, in our lifetime we would be prepared. We wouldn't be knocked off kilter. We would stand firm. We would take ground for the Kingdom of God. That we would see heaven fall. That Your Spirit would empower us. That we would speak the truth. God, we don't know what is exactly coming in our future, but we know the One who walks with us. We know the One who is sovereign over all. Let that give us confidence in these last days. Jesus, we love You. It's in Your perfect and holy name we pray. And everyone said: Amen.

Bless you guys for being courageous enough to come. Some of us it's fear. Some of us are watching way too much news, scrolling way too much on social media, it has gotten us spun off to where we've taken our eyes off of the King of kings who is sovereign over the kingdom of men.

For some of you it's an addiction of some kind and you've tried everything. You've tried covenant eyes, you've tried accountability, you've tried counseling but none of it is working and you need to stop negotiating and be in full surrender to God.

Some of you, you've been contemplating taking your own life. You've not told anybody that yet. And you are teetering right now. You need to come and you need to let that go before God.

Some of you are seeking approval for the wrong things. Some of you I haven't hit your thing, but you know what your thing is and you need to let that go and bring it to the altar and come before the Lord.

Right now, I want all of us whether you are standing at your seat or you've come down to the altar to lean in and to ask the Holy Spirit to do what only He can by taking full control of our lives.

King Jesus we stand before You today and we do not want to be in the place of the contenders who tried to take you out in our text today. God, we want to have a heart like the scribe who comes to you with genuineness and authenticity and we want to be people who step into your Kingdom coming. So, Father, would You please meet us in all of these rooms that we may be gathered in? Would Your Spirit please move right now as we lift up our voices to live for Your Kingdom and Your Kingdom alone? We ask this in the power of Jesus' name. And everybody said: Amen and Amen.