

Mark 13:1-13

There are some who do not regard boxing as a sport. They may think it is simply too violent to be put into that category. But St. Paul would disagree. In 1 Corinthians 9, in speaking of the games where men compete, he refers to boxing. He even says of himself, "I box in such a way as not beating the air." He is speaking here of landing his punches, not just jabbing wildly at some unknown target. Now of course this does not mean the Apostle Paul actually got into the ring and physically fought with other men. The opponent he is speaking of is his own sinful flesh, the sinful world, and Satan the evil foe. But he compares his spiritual fight to an actual boxing match. And this picture is one which we will use today as we consider Jesus' words in Mark 13: "The one who endures to the end will be saved."

I imagine that all of us have seen a fight at least once. If not in person, then on television or in the movies. So we know how the boxers in a fight will watch each other carefully. They size each other up, figure out their opponent's weaknesses. They determine their best plan of attack. They do this in order to outlast their opponent. The last man standing is the winner. And it may take round, after round, after round, where both fighters are exhausted and bloody, before it becomes apparent that there is a clear winner.

There is a very sobering message here for us: If you are not able to go the distance, then don't even get into the ring. But friends, we are already in the ring. Our baptism put us there. A boxer is not going to waste his time and energy fighting the spectators sitting out in the auditorium. They are not his opponents. The man in the ring is. Just so, Satan does not waste his time and effort on those who are already his. He concentrates his attack on those who belong to Christ. His fight is against those within the Church. When you were baptized you were thrown into the ring with Satan.

"Be on your guard," Jesus warns in our text. He knows all too well the power of the devil. He knows his evil nature and his cunning way. And he knows that you and I do not stand a chance against him. So when you were baptized Jesus armed you for the fight. He put His Spirit within you. He gave you faith to defend yourself with. He commanded your parents to train you well in His Word so that you would not be a sitting duck for Satan to easily destroy. Your parents were to read God's Word to you in the home. They were to faithfully bring you to church. They were to see to it that you were taught the catechism so you could use the Word of God like a weapon against the devil. They were to instill within you the fear and love of the Lord so that after confirmation, and after High School and college you continued faithfully in God's Word and Sacraments without your parent's guidance.

Sadly, many parents, like coaches sitting at the edge of the ring, threw in the towel. They chose to surrender their God-given duty. They surrendered to the devil and hung their children out to dry, not preparing them for the battle. Well then, they should not have even had their children baptized. Why put them in the ring with Satan in the first place if you are not going to help them fight against him? Jesus, in Matthew 28, does not say, "Baptize and then throw in the towel." He says, "Baptize and then teach them everything I have commanded you to teach." But no matter what your prior training has been in life, today is training day. Today you are here in the Word. Today Jesus is arming you for the fight so that when you face the temptations of Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, you are not a sitting duck against the devil.

In our text Jesus warns that many false prophets will come and will lead many astray. This is how Satan fights in the ring. He uses false religions, false ideas, false teachings. The Mormons are such a false church and they are building one to two churches every single day somewhere in the world. We

showed a video last month about the Mormon Church. A few came to learn. In Bible Class on Sundays and on Monday evenings we are preparing for the fight. Take advantage of these opportunities to prepare for your battle against the devil. The Mormons are only one fist Satan punches with. He has many such weapons in his arsenal and usually they are disguised so that we are caught off guard and do not see his fist coming.

If you have ever seen a boxing match you know how vital it is for a fighter to always be on guard. Close your eyes for one second and your opponent will knock you out. Let down your guard and watch someone in the crowd for only an instant and your opponent will be all over you with punches. Satan is your opponent and he never ceases to watch you for an opening. Skip church and just watch him attack. Put God's Word aside and his punch will knock you to the floor.

And he is one fighter who never becomes tired. We grow weary of doing good. We become bored with church. We feel like giving up the fight. Not Satan. He never quits. His only purpose in existing is to destroy you. And so Jesus' words are very clear: "The one who endures to the end will be saved." The fight is not over when we want it to be over. It is not over when we leave church today. It is over only when we die in the Faith and are carried by Jesus into heaven. Until that moment in time Satan is your deadly opponent.

But friend, although we grow weary, Jesus is your strength. He is not a coach sitting on the side urging you on. He is in the ring with you. He fights Satan for you. The blood covering you is not your own. It is Jesus' blood. On Calvary's cross He let down His guard. He did not defend Himself and Satan let Him have it. The punches, the beatings, the whips, the thorns, the nails--Satan attacked with a vengeance. And Jesus stood there before Pontius Pilate like a sitting duck. He was a marked Man and He chose not to speak in His defense. And so they crucified Him. His arms were tied to the beams of a cross so He could not fight back. And the mockings came. The brutality, the viciousness. Even His Father in heaven poured out His anger upon Him punishing Him for every sin and every sinner.

No boxer ever had it so bad. No fighter ever took such a beating. But He did it for you. For you, friend, He did it for you. And through it all the referee would not stop the fight. There was no throwing in of the towel. No quitting, no giving up, no surrender. Jesus endured to the bitter end. And when the end came the battle was over. With His dying words it was apparent who the winner was...and it was you! Jesus' suffering is now your forgiveness. His death means life for you. He finished the fight with Satan and you are the victor.

Now through your baptism into Christ, Satan though he is stronger than you, knows he cannot defeat you because Christ defeated him for you by His death and resurrection. Now when you become weary in the ring, remember your baptism. It's not your blood--it's Jesus' blood on you. It's not your sweat--it's Jesus' sweat. He fights hard for you. Do not fear that you are weak against the devil; that you give in so easily; that you fall into sin so quickly. Jesus is not in the ring to scold you. He is here to help you. He is here to forgive you.

And so He invites you to His Holy Meal today, for here is pure forgiveness, and it's yours--you are forgiven. Here in His flesh and blood is strength for your fight. Here is the victory sealed for you. For as long as you live; as long as you are in the ring with the devil, Jesus will be here for you so that you will be one who endures to the end. Amen.