

A Condemned Threat

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 16 October 2013

Preacher: Paul Brennan

[0 : 0 0] Well, a very good afternoon to you all. Welcome to the Tron lunchtime service this Wednesday. We are carrying on in our studies of Jude, so if you would turn with me to the letter of Jude, we will have our reading for the day. Jude is on page 1027 in the Church Bibles there, so do turn with me to that, and we'll be reading the first 19 verses of the letter of Jude.

Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James, to those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ, may mercy, peace and love be multiplied to you.

Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality, and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Now, I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it, that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe.

[1 : 3 4] And the angels, who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day.

Just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire.

Yet in like manner, these people, also relying on their dreams, defile the flesh, reject authority and blaspheme the glorious ones. But when the archangel Michael, contending with the devil, was disputing about the body of Moses, he did not presume to pronounce a blasphemous judgment, but said, The Lord rebuke you.

But these people blaspheme all that they do not understand, and they are destroyed by all that they, like unreasoning animals, understand instinctively.

Woe to them! Woe to them! For they walked in the way of Cain, and abandoned themselves for the sake of gain to Balaam's error, and perished in Korah's rebellion.

[2 : 4 8] These are blemishes on your love feasts, as they feast with you without fear, looking after themselves. Waterless clouds swept along by winds, fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, uprooted.

Wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame. Wandering stars for whom the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever.

It was also about these that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, Behold, the Lord came with ten thousands of his holy ones to execute judgment on all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness that they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against him.

These are grumblers, malcontents, following their own sinful desires. They are loudmouth boasters, showing favoritism to gain advantage.

But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. They said to you, in the last time, there will be scoffers following their own ungodly passions.

[4 : 06] It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit. Well, in a moment we'll turn and consider these verses, but before we do that, let's pray together.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we come before you.

We come before the creator God, the God who formed everything that we see around us. Everything in this universe was created at your word.

And Lord, we can but stand in awe. And when we consider that the God that made all of creation is mindful of us, sinful people, we are amazed.

We are amazed at the gospel of grace that provides a way for us to come into the presence of the Holy God of all. So, Father, as we sit under your word, would you make known to us your ways?

[5 : 32] Would you teach us your paths? Would you lead us in your truth and teach us? Because you are the Lord, the God of our salvation.

God of our salvation. God of our salvation. So, God of our salvation. So, as we listen to these difficult, hard-hitting words in Jude's letter, help us to respond in obedience and in greater love for you.

We thank you for all the different churches that are represented here this afternoon. We thank you that you give us a gospel to share.

And we pray that we would be seeking opportunities to tell others of Jesus and of the gospel of grace. We think of Christianity Explored starting here next week. and no doubt many other such courses around this city.

We do pray that your words would be spoken unashamedly, that Jesus would be held out and that people might respond in obedience and faith as they see that Jesus has written in Mark's gospel, that they will respond, Lord.

[6 : 43] So, we remember particularly the course starting on Tuesday that folk would come along and encounter the living Jesus. So, help us now, Father, as we come to your word.

Help us to be teachable. Help us to be obedient for your name and for your glory. Amen. Well, do you have that letter of Jude's open in front of us?

A week ago, we began our series, our short series in Jude, and we were confronted and brought up short by this brief and punchy letter. And I can tell you it gets a bit punchier today, so brace yourselves as we consider the middle section of Jude's letter.

We spent our time last week looking at the heart of Jude's letter, his great concern for the well-being of the beloved Christians he was writing to. If you just cast your eye over the verses we looked at last week, verses 3 and 4, where Jude sets out his plea, his appeal.

You see, he was obliged, he had no choice but to write to these dear Christians, urging them to agonize for, to strive for, to contend for the one true faith, for the one true gospel.

[8 : 08] Why the need to contend? Why was Jude writing to them, urging them to do this? Well, Jude is clear, isn't he? As we saw in verse 4 last week, there is a dangerous, a subtle threat to the very foundations of the gospel, and it's going on before their very eyes.

But these dear, beloved Christians had missed it. They didn't see what was going on. These real, intelligent, taught, Christian folk had missed the danger, the danger of real people in the church with real influence, and they were subtly peddling a false gospel, and no one had spotted it.

These people that Jude is warning about didn't look like dangerous people. They wore the same sorts of shirts and jeans as everyone else. They helped make the tea and coffee.

They were people with influence in the church, but they were undermining the very foundations of the gospel. Look at the end of verse 4 there.

Two central foundations to the gospel were being eroded, the grace of God and the lordship of Jesus. So we saw, didn't we, Jude's plea contend for the gospel, and his reason?

[9 : 31] These unnoticed people whose condemnation was predicted, they're undermining the very foundations of the gospel. And we, 2,000 years later, still face the same threat within the church.

We have to face up to Jude's appeal to contend for the unchanging, the once-for-all delivered gospel. And we do that in the face of those that seek to undermine and deny Christ.

Now, I don't know about you, but as I hear Jude's message for today, I immediately want to jump to the how. How are we to contend? How do we go about this task?

But Jude doesn't go there straight away. In fact, he doesn't get to the how question until verse 20 at the end of the letter. He spends 15 verses on other things before he gets to dealing with the how question.

And it's these verses that we're going to be thinking about this week and next. Verses 5 to 19, they form a little section all of their own. Did you notice two little words that bookend this section that gives a clue to what Jude is doing?

[10 : 46] If you look at verse 5, now I want to remind you and look down to 17, but you must remember, beloved.

All that falls between these two bookends, these two calls to remember, forms the central section of the letter. But why does Jude spend so much time on these verses?

Why not jump straight to the how question? Well, Jude's readers needed to see the seriousness of the situation, to hear the warning, because people who are threatening the gospel were unnoticed.

Look how Jude describes them in verse 12. They are blemishes on your love feasts. Another way of saying is that they are hidden reefs within your church.

These people are hidden rocks threatening to shipwreck the church. And the people that Jude had written to just hadn't spotted the warning signs. They are completely amiss that going on in front of them were people who represented landmines in the church, real and present dangers in the midst of their congregations.

[12 : 00] And they were undermining the gospel that brings salvation. And Jude, in these verses, is urging us to do two things. this week, we'll consider that Jude is urging us to remember that Jesus is judge.

Jesus is judge. And that these false teachers are a condemned threat. And then next week, we will learn to recognize the danger signs, how to spot, how to unmask this threat.

So let's jump into the text. Jude is opening up the minds of his readers to the reality. The reality that these false teachers are a condemned threat.

Jude erects a big, huge warning sign, a sign with lights illuminating it in big, bold letters. And he points back to Old Testament examples to show how their folly and certain judgment is matched by the false teachers in Jude's day.

God is the same God then and now. And we need to learn the lessons of what God has done in response to false teachers and will do again. Remember that Jesus is judge, says Jude.

[13 : 20] It's scattered throughout the letter. Look at verse five. Afterward destroyed those who did not believe. Verse six, kept in eternal chains until gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day.

Verse seven, undergoing a punishment of eternal fire. Verse 10, they are destroyed by all that they like, unreasoning animals understand instinctively.

Verse 11, woe to them. Verse 13, the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever. It goes on. Jude is relentless in his theme.

God will judge. And the Christian gospel finds its root in this fact. If there's no judgment, then Jesus did not come, did not need to come.

He did not need to die to save us. Without judgment, there was nothing to be saved from. So remember, Jesus is judge. And Jude draws out two implications for his readers in light of this fact.

[14 : 24] Two things that we need to grasp, that they need to grasp, if we are to contend for the gospel. So looking particularly at verses 5 to 7, we see that the false teachers rebelling against God can never succeed.

The false teachers rebelling against God can never succeed. Anyone who rebels, no matter past achievement or position, is immune to judgment.

Rebellion against God never succeeds. Think back a few years to the MPs expenses scandal down in Westminster. Now I don't know what was going on in the minds of some of those MPs, but surely some of them had delusions of grandeur and privilege to such an extent that they thought they would get away with building their duck houses, whatever they had.

But in the end, they were not immune from facing the consequences. they were found out. And so it is with all who rebel against the creator God.

Jude gives three examples here from God's dealings with his people over the millennia, showing how this is always how God deals with those who rebel against him.

[15 : 47] Jude gives us a bit of a run through the Old Testament, be a test for our knowledge here. So firstly, Jude begins in verse 5 with the nation of Israel after they have left Egypt through the Exodus, God's great act of rescue.

The people make their way to the promised land, but they would not trust and obey. They would not enter the land. And as a result, all the adult Israelites, including Moses, who had left Egypt, apart from two men, would not enter the promised land.

they would die in the desert. God destroyed those who would not believe. And so it is with the folk in Jude's day and in ours, regardless of past privilege, God will destroy those who do not believe.

The second example in verse 6 shows how the angels, despite being given great dignity and areas of responsibility by God, rebelled against him. And they were left to a dreadful judgment.

He has kept those angels in gloomy darkness until future judgment. You see, God's judgment is inescapable, even for the angels.

[17 : 07] They thought they were above it. We must not think that we who have enjoyed great gospel privilege can get away with rebellious behavior, ignoring the authority of God and thinking that we know better.

No church, no denomination can rely on past privilege. I can recall using some of the sports facilities at the school my dad teaches in and where I had been a pupil.

And I was using the facilities that non-pupils and non-teachers had to pay for. Now, as a past pupil, and given the fact that my dad was still teaching there, I thought I was above all that.

I don't need to pay. I can just turn up and use whatever I like. But no, I was pulled up and asked to pay up. I was aghast.

Don't you know who I am? But I was met with steely resistance. Pay up. And so it is for all of us before Jesus, the judge.

[18 : 16] If we rebel, we are not immune. The fact that the false teachers in Jude's day carry special titles or have the correct qualifications mutter the right words, it makes no difference.

They have cast aside the biblical gospel and so face the consequences. The third example, verse 7, refers to Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns.

They gave themselves up, it says, to sexual immorality. That's any form of sexual activity outside the bounds of marriage between a man and a woman. And the consequence of Sodom and Gomorrah's rebellion against God was the punishment of eternal fire.

You see, rebellion against God, never succeeds. And Jude applies these examples directly in verse 8 to these people in the church.

Yet in like manner, these people, relying on their dreams, defile the flesh, reject authority and blaspheme the glorious ones. Jude is saying, this is nothing new.

[19 : 29] Such people existed in the Old Testament people of God and they still exist in the church now. God is immune from condemnation. And no one, not even these false teachers, nor you, nor me, is immune from condemnation.

Jesus is judge. Don't forget it. Those in the church who rebel against God will ultimately not succeed.

And that is why you and I must contend for the clear and final gospel revealed in the Bible. Those who push immoral living, those who deny the lordship of Jesus, regardless of who they are, regardless of past privilege, will not in the end succeed.

No outward privilege can save us on that day of judgment. If anyone walks away from the gospel of grace, if anyone rebels against God, well, Jude sets out very clearly the consequences, doesn't he?

It's very sobering. But Jude is so clear, so emphatic, because the very gospel of grace is under threat.

[20 : 51] The gospel is at stake. Don't put your head in the sand, says Jude. See these people for who they really are and act. Contend. Strive for the gospel, says Jude.

So there's Jude's first hard-hitting punch. The first thing we need to see. The false teacher's rebellion against God will never succeed, then and now.

But the second thing to point out, as we remember that Jesus is judge, is that the false teacher's condemnation is predicted. The false teacher's condemnation is predicted.

If you look on to verses 14 and 15, where we see the prophecy from Enoch, Jude is clear that these guys were predicted. So don't be surprised and see where they're headed ultimately.

Now, if you were to search your Old Testament and look in every single nook and cranny, you would not find this prophecy anywhere. And it's because Jude is quoting from a book called One Enoch.

[22 : 06] It was a book in wide circulation at the time and well known to his readers. And we shouldn't be alarmed at his use of this. It's quite common for biblical writers to use non-biblical sources.

Paul does it on a number of occasions. And Jude uses it to support and build his argument, and in doing so, he follows the overall teaching of the Old Testament. He uses it in a way that we, nowadays, might quote from John Bunyan or C.S.

Lewis. So what is the point being made by Jude here? It's simply this. Jesus is coming again to judge everyone, and he will condemn the ungodly, including these false teachers.

Their judgment is certain because of their ungodly behavior. It's been predicted. Look up, says Jude. See the true picture of what is really going on here, and where these people are ultimately headed.

It's not a possibility. It's not even a strong likelihood. It is certain. Live now in light of the coming judgment of God.

[23 : 18] Don't pretend it's not coming. Don't be taken in by the fact that everything looks good now. Don't, whatever you do, follow these people.

Their destiny is destruction. And we're not to panic either when such people emerge and flourish. Remember that there have been and always will be such people in the church.

Don't fear. See their ultimate end. So Jude is reminding his original readers and us of what we should already know.

Jesus is the judge. Remember that rebellion against him can never succeed. These false teachers won't get away with it. Remember that the existence of false teachers shouldn't surprise us.

They've been predicted. Don't be naive enough to think that it couldn't happen now. So why does Jude tell us things we ought to know?

[24 : 26] Well, we need to be constantly reminded of the fact that Jesus is judge. Because if we downplay judgment, as we're so tempted to do, then we'll have no reason to contend for the one true gospel.

If these false teachers are not condemned, then what's the danger? Do we see that as Jude reveals the reality of the situation, he provides us with the motivation to contend for the gospel?

Don't for a second consider following these false teachers who promote immoral living now, pleasure now, because their gospel is utterly unbiblical.

And it leads, as Jude so clearly points out, to destruction. Contend for the one once for all delivered to the saints faith is Jude's appeal.

Don't abandon the one true gospel. If you abandon it, there's where you're heading, says Jude. Jude gives us reason here to contend.

[25 : 39] to heed that call, to contend. Will you remember that Jesus is judge? And will you then contend for the one true gospel when those in the church seek to take us away from it?

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

Thank you.