

Unmasking the Threat

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[0 : 00] Well, we're continuing our studies in Jude, so please turn with me to Jude in your Bibles there. If you have one of the church hardback Bibles, it's on page 1027, 1027, the book of Jude.

Now, we're thinking particularly about verses 5 to 19 this week, but I'll begin our reading at verse 3, just to get ourselves into the letter. 1. 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 and 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 the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe.

And the angels, who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he is kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day.

[1 : 28] Just as Sodom and Gomorrah and their 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!

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.

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.

[2 : 59] 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.

It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit. Well, in a moment, we'll come to consider those verses, but let's pray together before turning to this now.

Thank you, Father, that we can come before you. The everlasting Father this afternoon is your children, because you've made available to us through the saving death of your Son, Jesus Christ, mercy and grace.

[4 : 28] and eternal life. Thank you that we have a sure and certain hope which can never spoil or fade. Thank you that you, creator God of all the universe, keep us by your mighty power for that great day when all will bow the knee as they see the Lord Jesus Christ reigning.

Thank you for the hope that we have in the midst of our daily struggles and routines no matter what kind of day we've had, no matter what awaits us this afternoon or tomorrow. We come to the unchanging God who is the same yesterday, today and forever.

we thank you as we meet together now for your precious words, your holy scriptures, and we pray that as we come to your words, we ask that you would speak to us and that our minds would be transformed, our hearts warmed, and our wills moved to obedience.

Would you take your truth, Father? Would you plant it deep in us? Would you shape us? Would you fashion us into your likeness that the light of Christ might be seen in us as we respond to your words this afternoon?

May you be glorified in our lives. And we pray this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

[6 : 06] Amen. Well, do you have Jude's letter open in front of you as we spend a few moments looking at this together?

Now, I wonder if you have ever ignored a warning sign of an unseen danger and wished that you hadn't ignored it. My brother David has done this plenty of times.

He sort of makes a living of it. He sees warning signs as an invitation to do the very thing being prohibited. So, one time, as he was boarding a train in India, he was greeted by a sign which warned passengers to keep all belongings inside the train.

Don't have anything hanging out the windows. Now, David didn't think that this applied to human limbs. So, in a bid to keep himself cool on a long journey, he stuck his feet out of the window.

And some way through the journey, his foot was hit by something. Now, he still, to this day, doesn't know what it was. But, needless to say, he struggled to walk for the next few weeks.

[7 : 15] He ignored a warning sign about an unseen danger to his peril. And it is a clear warning about an unseen danger that Jude gives us this afternoon.

He is unmasking the threat to the gospel. And he is teaching us to recognize the danger signs. As we've been thinking about over the past few weeks, Jude's letter is a call, a plea, to contend for the one true gospel.

Why this plea? Is Jude being reactionary or belligerent? Is he scaremongering? Well, no, he's not. He's writing because within the church, there is an unseen danger.

Look back with me at verse 4. 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.

live your life without living under the Lordship of Jesus is their message. They talk about grace, yes, but they evacuate grace of its proper implications.

[8 : 33] It doesn't matter how you live. God's grace is a license to live just however you want to is their message. And people are being swept along by this dangerous teaching in the church.

The matter is urgent and pressing. Hence, Jude's letter. And in this large central chunk of the letter which we're looking at this afternoon that runs from 5 to 17, Jude is wanting to remind us of certain things.

Notice that word, remind. Tops and tails this section, it brackets it. Verse 5 and verse 17. Jude is reminding us. He is unpacking the danger presented by these certain people.

And Jude is doing two main things in this section. Two key things that he wants his readers to see. Firstly, Jude is reminding them that Jesus is judge.

And we saw that last week. We saw that Jesus is judge and that is inescapable. Again and again, Jude points us to this fact. Just cast your eyes over verses 5.

[9 : 43] verse 6. Verse 7. Verse 10. Verse 11. Verse 13. Verse 15. Again and again, Jude reiterates the fact that Jesus is judge.

These people, these false teachers are a condemned threat. Just look where they're heading, says Jude. That's the reality. So don't for a second consider following them.

So Jude reminds us firstly that Jesus is the judge. And secondly, in these verses as we'll see today, Jude is unmasking the threat for us.

He teaches us to recognize the danger signs. Jude piles up image upon image in this passage. Just scan these verses with me.

We can see all the word Jude uses about these people. Verse 8. They defile the flesh. They reject authority. They blaspheme the glorious ones. Verse 10.

[10:46] They blaspheme all they do not understand. Verse 12. Hidden reefs. Shepherds feeding themselves. Waterless clouds. Fruitless trees. Wild waves of the sea.

Wandering stars. Verse 16. Grumblers. Malcontents. Following their own sinful desires. Loud mouth boasters. They show favoritism. Verse 19.

They cause divisions. They're worldly people. They're devoid of the spirit. It's overwhelming, isn't it? It's as if Jude has brought us in to this large art gallery and he's hung all these vivid portraits around the room for us.

He's seeking to expose these unnoticed, normal looking, but dangerous people for who they really are. Why is he doing it? Because they're unnoticed.

Now we'll spend the next few moments rearranging these portraits, seeing if we can distill what Jude is saying. So we are to recognize the danger signs by seeing that these false teachers have a different authority.

[11:52] They produce a different fruit and they have a different end. So firstly, a different authority. This is the first collection in Jude's gallery where we're given some insight into the identity of these people.

As we've seen, these people are peddling a different message, one that strikes at two core fundamental gospel truths, the grace of God and the lordship of Jesus.

Theirs is a different message because they do not rely upon the revealed word of God as their authority. They have a different authority.

It's quite unlike Jude who reminds us of what God has done and said in the past. These people, on the other hand, verse 8, rely on their dreams.

That is, they're relying on some sort of claimed personal revelation from God that flies in the face of all that God has revealed in the scriptures because it leads to their defiling the flesh, rejecting authority, blaspheming the glorious ones.

[13:06] They put aside the authority of God as revealed in the once for all delivered to the saints' faith and they reject it in favor of their own authority.

Jude repeats this idea in verse 16. They are following not the Lord but their own sinful desires. again in verse 18. The apostles have predicted that there would be, in the last time, scoffers following what?

Their own ungodly desires. Jude is emphatic. What they submit to, what they follow is not God's will as revealed in the scriptures but their own passions, their own dreams, their own imagination as their authority.

And in verse 11, Jude adds color to our gallery with a series of Old Testament examples. They demonstrate the point that they rely upon what they understand instinctively like animals.

Jude, speaking of the gospel underminers in his own day, says, woe to them. Woe, a word of judgment. It's the opposite of being blessed.

[14:21] It's a word of curse because these people in Jude's own day have followed down the same road as these Old Testament characters in verse 11.

Jude is giving us a grand tour of the Old Testament here with these Old Testament characters. So firstly, Cain. He says that these people have walked in the way of Cain.

Now, Cain killed his brother Abel because of a jealous disagreement over a sacrifice. God accepted Abel's sacrifice. He brought an animal to be sacrificed in line with God's revealed will.

However, Cain's offering was rejected. It's because Cain deliberately ignored God's revealed will and he decided to do it his own way, not God's way.

Surely, God would accept my way of doing things, thought Cain. He wanted to exercise personal autonomy and he thought he knew better than God's revealed word. When he didn't get his way, he killed his brother in anger.

[15:29] And Jude says that these people have followed the way of Cain. They know full well the standards demanded by God, but they decide they will not follow them.

Then there's Balaam. Balaam was hired as a prophet by one of Israel's enemies, the Moabites, and he was hired to pronounce curses on Israel.

But his magic didn't work on Israel, so he hatched a scheme that saw Israel's men enter into sexual immorality with the women from Moab. The Israelites fell for it and they fell into judgment.

And Balaam did it for personal gain. And Jude, speaking of the false teachers, says that they have rushed for profit into Balaam's error. These false teachers in the church are greedy.

They're self-interested. They stood to make some sort of personal profit from leading those in the church astray. Their primary concern is not the spiritual welfare of God's people, but rather themselves.

[16 : 45] their concern is to line their own pockets. So we're to beware of that instinct we see in people for money. Beware of teachers who live an opulent lifestyle, whose main concern is the bottom line financially.

And then the last example is that of Korah. Korah led a rebellion of 250 men, and not just any old men, they were elders of Israel, and he led them against God's chosen leader, Moses. And God destroyed those rebels in an awesome act of judgment, where the ground literally opened up and destroyed them. And the implication is that these false teachers who are seeking to rebel against God's authority by claiming their own authority will in the end face against that same destruction.

Watch out for people in the church who are itching to lead, itching to have power, itching to rebel against God's given authority.

The picture Jude builds here for us of the false teachers is that they choose to not accept God's revealed will, and instead rely on their own dreams.

[18 : 08] They go their own way, and they are bringing others with them. We must be alert to anyone that claims an authority other than that of the Bible. We must be alert to anyone who claims some new insight that in reality takes us away from God's truth.

Be alert to anyone that claims something that amounts to saying, we know better than the Bible now, we've moved on. Beware of that. If we reject God's authority, it can only be replaced by our own authority.

So these false teachers had a different authority. What about the result of all this? Where does it all lead? Well, secondly, we see a different fruit.

We'll hang a few more portraits in our gallery here. We're to ask the question, what does their influence result in? What is the fruit of their labors? And Jude provides some stark images for our gallery here in verses 12 to 13.

And we'll pick out just two or three of these this afternoon. And the first one to point out, as it has it in the NIV, they were shepherds feeding themselves.

[19 : 27] These false teachers feed only themselves, which is the opposite to what any good shepherd does. the true shepherd leads and feeds God's flock.

Now, these people are greedy and selfish, seeking only to build up their own egos through their influence in the church, and it does not result in growth and nourishment for God's people. Instead, the flock are left feeling hungry because they're not being fed the word of God. They're being fed on something else. they've been fed good stories, entertainment, but not the word of God. Just read a little paragraph from Willie Still here, which expands on this. The ministers who are the greatest failures are those who, having tried to run Christ's church as a money-making racket, a clockwork train, or a social free-for-all depart and leave a spiritual wilderness behind them in which the only thing that is not known at all is the word of God.

Shepherds feeding only themselves. Waterless clouds is another image Jude gives us. Now, Jude was likely addressing churches in Palestine, which, as we know, is a hot, dry place.

[20 : 59] So any sign of a cloud was a sign that water was on the way and the local farmers would be very grateful indeed. But a waterless cloud promising to bring life to parched lands is instead blown away by the wind and utterly useless to the farmer.

Now, these people in the church that Jude is writing about, likewise, seem to promise much. it's like a cloud on the horizon. They promise to teach the true biblical gospel, but the reality is they do not preach any gospel at all.

They are like waterless clouds. They are useless. No lasting good. Another picture that Jude gives us is they are wandering stars.

Now, until the advent of sophisticated navigation systems and our sat-navs, stars were used for navigating. They were used as a fixed point which helped travelers head in the right direction. However, a wandering star would be absolutely useless. It would lead you astray. And in a similar way, these people promise security.

[22 : 16] They promise a safe road home, but actually, they deliver uncertainty and danger. these people result in a different fruit because in reality, they're just in it for themselves.

They're feeding themselves. Read the danger signs. See their fruits. fruits. Thirdly, we have a different authority, a different fruit, and a different end.

These people have a different end. Look how Jude concludes his little series of illustrations in verse 13. They are wandering stars for whom the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever. That is where they're headed. And it links back to what we thought about last week, that Jesus is judge, and that the destination for these people is condemnation, which is in stark contrast, isn't it, to the eternal life that awaits the Christian.

Look down to verse 21, where he urges the Christians, he's writing, to keep themselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.

[23 : 39] Two different ends. If you follow the false teachers, their destination is condemnation. That's where you'll be led.

It's a different end. So there is our vivid portrait gallery of these people, and we are to recognize the danger signs when we see them.

These people have a different authority. They produce a different fruit, and ultimately they are destined for a different end. Can we see the fundamental danger posed by such people who go unnoticed in the church today?

Be alert, because on the surface, these people look like anyone else. They wear the same jeans. They go to the same restaurants.

learn to recognize the danger signs is Jude's plea. Remember that Jesus is judge. Allow these things to motivate you to contend for the one true gospel.

[24 : 48] Don't be like my brother David, ignoring the danger sign. Take it on board. Lord, that's what Jude is urging us to do with these hard-hitting, vivid illustrations.

Don't let false teachers shipwreck your faith or shipwreck your church. Contend. Contend for the one true gospel.

gospel. And we do this, not hopelessly, but with our eyes on Jude's reassurance that he gives us, that God keeps you.

God keeps you. He alone is able to keep you from stumbling. So depend upon him as we contend for the gospel. And we'll be thinking next week more about how we do go about contending for the gospel.

How do we fight for the one true gospel? Recognize the danger signs. Let me pray. Father, we do thank you for Jude's clear letter, his clear warning, his clear appeal to us to contend for the one true gospel as delivered to the saints.

[26 : 08] Help us to feel the weight of Jude's punchy letter. to remember that Jesus is the judge, to see the danger signs.

And Lord, might we be motivated to contend for the gospel when we see people leading us astray, people embedded in the church who would seek to proclaim a different gospel, a self-serving gospel, a gospel that denies Jesus, a gospel that perverts grace.

Give us wisdom, give us discernment, help us to test what we hear so that you may be glorified and your church may be built. We pray this for your name and your glory.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.