

Remember!

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Preacher: Sam Parkinson

[0 : 00] Well, a very warm welcome to you all today. It's good to see you, especially on a rather chill, drich day like today. And I hope that the next few minutes are refreshing and encouraging for you. Let's begin with a prayer. Dear Lord, we do thank you for this day that you have in it shown us many kindnesses, many gentlenesses, that even amid the rain, it is a beautiful world, that you have given us good food and drink and friendship and all the countless little good things you give our in each day. And we come now and ask that you would help us to lift our minds to you, to your goodness and your glory, and that the next few minutes would really help us to live for you, to hunger, to be more like Jesus, and to love you more.

Amen. Well, we're in the second of three weeks on the little book of Jude. It's near the back of your Bibles. It's the second last book in the New Testament. Last week, we saw the necessity of contending for our faith. That's Jude's big message, that we have to fight for our faith. Next week, we'll see how to contend for that faith. This week, though, we're going to see in quite a heavy passage, actually, what the threat to our faith is. It's a call not simply to look at that threat and to understand it, but a call as well, as we'll see, to remember.

To remember how that threat has always been there in the past of the church, and to remember the warnings of the future that Jesus' apostles gave. So let's read this little letter together.

It's on page 1027 in the Bibles in front of you, in the book of Jude. And we'll start at the beginning. 1027.

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.

[2 : 29] 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, afterwards 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 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, 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. 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 their deeds of ungodliness that they have committed in such an ungodly way, and all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against him.

[5 : 04] These are grumblers, malcontents, following their own sinful desires. They are loud-mouthed 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 ungodly passions.

This is God's word. Now, Jude, I think, despite what we have just read, was quite a gentle, gracious man.

You can see that in the beginning and close of the letter. Some of the warmest expressions of the goodness of Christianity and love for the people he writes to, that you see in a smaller space as this in the New Testament.

But he is writing with a very strong warning, as you just heard. Warning of a real danger. Now, modern Christians are very aware, in general, of a danger that has faced previous generations and been a great danger to them.

[6 : 15] And that is the danger we call legalism. The danger of thinking that if we obey the rules, we'll get to heaven. That thinking that our good behavior will bring us to God.

And, of course, it is actually the kindness, the forgiveness that is in the cross of Jesus Christ that brings us to him. And we cannot do anything good enough to contribute to that.

And legalism, which takes away from that grace, is a great danger to the church and always has been. But it is not the only danger. And Jude is warning us of the opposite.

It is probably, I think, the greatest danger facing the church today. It is the danger that saying, if God forgives us in his grace, then it simply does not matter how we live.

It does not matter what our behavior is because it is forgiven. And that to place moral demands on Christians is to be a legalist. It is to deny the love that God has for us.

[7 : 15] And this is a danger that today we face in the church. And it is a danger that, as these stern warnings from Jude make clear, risk destroying our faith if we will not contend for it, as Jude tells us to do.

We are going to look at this passage in three little sections. Firstly, we see the consequences of rebellion in verses 5 to 10.

The signs of rebellious teachers in 11 to 16. And thirdly, we will remember the warnings in 17 to 18.

So firstly, rebellion has consequences in 5 to 10. Jude wants us to see that there are people teaching in the church whose teaching is in direct rebellion against God.

And he wants to assure us that they will face justice. He wants them to see, though, that this is nothing new. He begins by saying, remember.

[8 : 23] Remember, this is the pattern that things have had from the beginning. You should recognize this. He says, I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it, this is something you should know.

It's not something that should slip the mind, but something that should shape the very way you live. And in verse 5, he reminds them of, in a sense, the oldest old story in the Bible.

The classic description of God's salvation. The story of the Exodus. When God saved his people from slavery in Egypt. And brought them out and brought them to the promised land.

And it is a wonderful story of God's kindness. Of hearing his people's pain and rescuing them. And if we're to understand salvation, it's good to reflect on that story and remember it.

But he wants them to reflect very carefully. Because it does have another side, that story. When God was about to lead the people into the promised land, they rebelled against him.

[9 : 26] And it wasn't for the first time. They refused to obey him, point blank. And they turned their back on his commands. And so they did not enter the promised land at all. They didn't have the blessings God had promised for them at all.

And instead, as it says here, God destroyed them. They refused to obey him, to have the good gifts he was giving.

And so they died in the desert. A whole generation. And instead their children received the blessings that they had been offered. That's a stern warning.

But Jude wants us to see this as a pattern. Those who are so satisfied with the wonderful blessings they have that they think there is no need to obey God. Again and again in the past have been punished for it.

He gives them another example in verse 6. The angels themselves who had been given so much authority, so much glory, so much good. Some of them rebelled against God. And they too were

punished.

[10:30] And are still being kept in chains for the final day of judgment. That of course is, we think, the origin of the devils themselves. Rebels against God. Not content with the privileges they had.

But they will be punished. And then in verse 7 he gives another famous example. The example of Sodom and Gomorrah. Cities that Genesis tells us were hugely privileged.

They were in a fertile land, lush and watered. It says like the garden of God itself. But they chose to turn away from the most basic rules that God has implanted in each human heart.

Ezekiel tells us that in their pride and their greed and the ease they wouldn't help the poor or the needy. And in a gruesome story in Genesis.

They chose to gang rape, homosexually gang rape, visitors to their town. In one of the most unpleasant inversions of rightness and welcome and kindness that there could ever be.

[11:37] And God gave them, he says, as an example to us. An example of judgment when he destroyed those places with fire. These three examples are examples of privileged people.

Turning their back on the privileges. Redefining things so that they can choose their own way and their own morality. Choosing not to worry about obedience to God in any way.

But they are not, Jude says, just old stories. Look around, he says.

Yet in like manner. In other words, in exactly the same way there are people, he says, in your churches. Relying on their dreams, defiling the flesh, rejecting authority and blaspheming the glorious ones.

There are people, in other words, teachers it seems. Who treat their dreams, their ideas as messages from God. Allowing them to disregard and to disobey all that God has commanded.

[12:40] And isn't that contemporary? When we have whole denominations saying that the spirit of God is leading them away from clear truths expressed in the Bible and kept by Christians ever since.

Not the things that are difficult to understand or difficult to interpret, but the clear ones. When there are many teachers out there in this city and in every other city who will dismiss clear instructions in the Bible.

And it says here, these teachers also defile the flesh. This looks back to verse 4 when it said they pervert the grace of our God into sensuality.

In other words, they take the Bible's sexual ethic, which is one of goodness and blessing, of a rich gift of sex in marriage.

And they change it. They turn it around. Whether that's sleeping around or homosexual relationships, as the reference back to Sodom and Gomorrah may be reminding us of.

[13:43] And it's worth a little aside here. Jude is not treating these as particularly the worst sins of all or unforgivable sins. Neither sexual sins nor homosexual sins are that.

And God certainly doesn't have a special hatred for gay people. And gay people are welcome here, just like everyone else. But there is something here.

It's a sort of diagnostic sin. Because God has implanted in us about every aspect of our lives a sense of right and of wrong.

That to murder and to steal is wrong. That to give and to love is good. And when we sin, we try and wipe out that sense in us. That sense that keeps us from doing those things.

And the way that Jude and also the book of Romans use, talk about this, is saying that homosexual sex in particular is taking what is natural, what is imprinted in our hearts and upending it.

[14:46] It's a clear evidence that we're stamping out the part of the sense of right and wrong that God has given us. And so when Jude is saying this, he's saying these leaders, when they justify or practice these things, they are discarding God's ways for their own ways.

And coming back to the text, they are, it says, rejecting authority. They are even, and this is a little harder to understand, blaspheming the glorious ones.

Now there are a few possible interpretations here, but I think the meaning is this. The Bible says in many places that the law in the Old Testament was given through angels, the book of Hebrews, for example.

And they are turning their back on that law, on God's instructions for morality. And in the course of it, they're slandering, blaspheming those who gave it.

Now Jude wants his readers to understand this in their time and their context. So he gives them an illustration. It's an illustration which is very odd to us. He talks about the archangel Michael arguing

with the devil.

[15 : 54] Now if you know your Bible well, this story will and probably should confuse you. Because it doesn't occur anywhere else in the Bible. It seems a little odd, a little mythical. And the reason for that is that it isn't in the Bible at all.

It's a story that was current in Jude's time that was very familiar to his readers. And one that Jude actually rewrites quite a bit to tone down the strangeness and oddness of it and to bring it into line with things that are taught in the Bible.

It shows he's not teaching this as a, it's not something that is in the Bible he's teaching us, but rather an example, an illustration to show us what he's talking about.

Just as if I, if I were slightly less poor-faced, might illustrate this sermon with an example from a contemporary TV show. In this story, Michael and the devil are the archangel Michael, that is, the most powerful of all the angels, arguing with the devil about whether Moses deserves to get into heaven or not.

He's been disobedient to God. Sure, he's a great servant of God, but he's disobeyed him. And the interesting thing in this story is that Michael, the most powerful of all the angels, the greatest being in the universe beside God's himself, doesn't actually pronounce a sentence one way or the other.

[17 : 13] He doesn't say whether Moses should get him to heaven or not. He leaves it up to God. He will not pronounce a judgment for the simple reason that it is God who decides these things.

God who gives grace and God who judges. These teachers are not like that. They want to make up the rules for themselves.

They want to redefine the rules in every way. And that is why, in verse 10, Jude says, these teachers are the kind of people who will blaspheme what they don't understand.

When they come to a bit of the Bible they don't understand or they can't make it fit their system, they discount it. They say, oh, that doesn't count anymore or, you know, that kind of thing was useful in the past, but we know better now.

Or one of the countless other explanations people use for discounting it. And in this case, perhaps, they said, you're saved by grace.

[18 : 20] God is a God of love. They understood that bit, you see. They're destroyed by the bits that they do understand. Verse 10. And they used them, twisted them, to get rid of the bits they did not.

Now we go on to 11 to 16, where we see the consequences of this kind of teaching. They, too, are solemn verses.

And it drives the lessons of 10, 5 to 10 deeper. Jude makes it very clear. He is talking about teachers in the churches of that time. People who are teaching dangerously and wrongly about God and about the way of life Christians should have.

And again, he has the same structure. Three Old Testament examples. A little explanation about the teachers, followed by an illustration. And he begins by saying, woe to them.

This is serious. And he says, they are like Cain. Verse 11. They have chosen, like Cain, who was the first murderer.

[19 : 31] Who, in the jealousy he had for his brother, ignored even a direct warning from God. Turned against him and killed his brother. They are like Balaam, who turned up in the story of the Exodus.

Someone who God would not let oppose his people. So instead, he manipulated them and twisted them into sinning against God. So that they would be punished.

They are like those who died, it says, in the rebellion of Korah. Someone who opposed God's leader, Moses. Tried to mount a coup against him. In the face of God's clear, repeated choice.

And so God destroyed him. And these examples make it very clear. These are people who want to lead God's people. They want to take the role of leadership. And they want to teach.

They want to be in charge. They want to set the tone for everything. They want to say what goes and what doesn't. And they want even to rewrite God's own commands and laws and ways.

[20 : 29] And in each of those examples, those people face judgment. And so Jude tells us what these people are like who do these things.

They are stains at your love feasts. So when you have the Lord's Supper, they're like a stain on your church. They're shepherds who starve the flock. Instead of teaching good, healthy teaching from the Bible that will help people grow in godliness and wisdom and love.

They leave the people hungry and feed themselves. They're waterless clouds. You know, you live in a desert country. You see rain coming, a cloud coming to water your crops. Rain is coming. And it goes by with nothing.

They're fruitless trees. You hope to find something good to eat. But they're dead. Dead from the roots up. They're wild waves of the sea. Nothing but foam and froth and vanity and self-indulgence. They are wandering stars. You know, if you're a navigator in an ancient ship without a compass, you need to be able to see a good fixed star. The stars wander all over the place that the planets did.

[21 : 34] Won't tell you where to go. And for them, Jude says, the gloom of utter darkness is kept for everlasting judgment.

These are serious words, aren't they? Again, Jude turns back to a story of the time to illustrate what he's talking about. It was about these that Enoch VII from Adam prophesied, saying, Behold, the Lord came with ten thousands of his holy ones to execute judgment and to convict all the ungodly of their deeds of ungodliness.

Again, he's reshaping a story of the time. And he's saying, God is coming with great armies of angels, ten thousands of them, to bring judgment on the world, on the ungodly, on those who oppose him, and especially on those who would mislead his people by teaching these things. Because these, verse 16, are people who grumble about the way God leads them. They are malcontents, discontent, and dissatisfied with the Christian life, following their own desires instead of the right way, boasters, manipulators.

These, he says, are the teachers you've let into your churches, and this will be their fate. Now then, Jude turns in verses 17 to 18 and reminds them of something else.

[23 : 01] These things happened in the past. There are plenty of warnings to look back for. But the apostles of Jesus Christ said it would be this way, that in the last time, there'll be scoffers following their own ungodly passions.

In other words, you were warned, forearmed, forewarned. It's a little like when Churchill spoke that great speech and promised this nation blood, toil, sweat, and tears.

After that speech, people knew bad things were coming. They couldn't think the great British army will roll across and destroy the Germans and we'll all live happily ever after.

And so when things went wrong, they would know that that doesn't mean they should give in straight away. They would know things were hard, but they would also know that the things being hard didn't mean it was the end, that they should panic.

It wasn't time to run around shouting, don't panic, don't panic, don't panic. But it was also not time to sit back in luxury. Jude has told us that from the past and through the future, we need to be on the lookout in our churches for this kind of teaching.

[24 : 24] There are people in our churches who teach that it does not matter how you live, that the Bible's ethics are unnecessary, that they are outdated, or that because of one Bible truth which they understand or partly understand like God is love, that it's okay to dismiss other Bible truths, like that God is a judge.

And that comes in many forms. As we've seen, a common form is redefining the Bible's sexual ethics, redefining them completely, saying it's fine to sleep together before marriage if you love each other, or that a sexual relationship with someone of your own sex just is fine in God's eyes.

That's what they said in those days. And there are many who say it today too. But as we look around this room, I think we need to be careful of more subtle forms of this teaching.

We are often afraid of legalism, and it is a danger. But there is a great danger for all of us in simply rejecting the Bible's call to a holy life, to a life of self-sacrifice, of love, of devotion, and of self-giving, of being unwilling to measure ourselves against the Bible's high standards.

We must never let grace, let twist grace, into letting us forget that God calls us and helps us to change.

[26 : 01] There are many teachers out there who will teach in a way that makes it seem as if we just lie back and wait for heaven.

That it doesn't matter how we live now. They are wrong. And Jude tells us that however innocuous they seem, they are dangerous. At the best, they will starve our souls, and at the worst, they will do far worse.

A great sign of healthy Christianity, whether in ourselves or the teachers we listen to, is that we are willing to fight hard to be more like Jesus Christ, to contend, to make war on ourselves as much as anything else, to fight to be more like Jesus Christ, to know that this life will be a struggle, to not twist the truths of Scripture to make it too easy, to make it, the Christian life, just what we want it to be.

No, it's hard. But as Jude said, showed us at the beginning and will show us again at the end, it is good. Do not let teachers who say otherwise deceive you.

Let's stand firm and let's contend for our faith. Dear Father, these warnings are terrifying.

[27 : 30] They are awesome. And we pray that you would keep us safe from the judgments described in them. You would help us to contend for the faith.

Help us stick to the truth. Help us see this wrong teaching wherever it is and flee from it. flee to you.

In Jesus Christ we pray.

Amen.