

On the Line: Tough Love in High Stakes

Week 2: Lessons from the Past

I. One of our non-negotiables is that we:

[Slide]: Bend to the book!

A. It's one of our core values statements and something that is easy to say but much harder to practically live out. I recognize that we're all in process; none of us have arrived. But we don't do anyone a favor by diluting the truth of God that has been given in His Word. God has gifted us the manual for living out a godly life. In the process of bending our lives to His book we're going to experience friction but that's a good thing. We find life when we lean into His Word!

B. The Letter of Jude is a tiny letter in the New Testament that's easy to breeze past due to its brevity, but one glance at this letter is like "whoa!" This letter of Jude, the half-brother of Jesus and brother of James, is packed with intense instructions. Warnings really. There's a reason why the Holy Spirit worked through a variety of people to compose the canon of Scripture. It's remarkable that the 66 books of the Bible were composed by so many different authors (humanly speaking) over a vast amount of time. Why? Because the consistency and unity of Scripture points to the divine inspiration and authority of that which it contains. It is why context is so important because there are certain passages for example that emphasize the grace of God. Grace is truly amazing and should be emphasized! And yet other passages, like the Letter of Jude, emphasize the holiness of God and our call to pursue the holiness of God.

1. Grace isn't a free pass to slap God's forgiveness on our ungodly decisions. Grace is the free and unearned gift of salvation that reconciles us to God and enables us through the Spirit to live a godly life. We can't impress or earn our way into a relationship with God, but precisely for that reason once we recognize the magnitude of the gift, we begin a process of transformation from the inside out. The gift is available for the taking today by trusting Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord. He was sinless yet died a sinner's death, arose from the grave, so that we might have eternal life.
2. Do we instantly, or ever, morph into perfection? Absolutely not! We fail forward and God's grace catches us when we fall. But when we accept Jesus as our Savior and Lord, we get a spiritual heart transplant that beats to the rhythm of a new song. When we sin, and we will, the Spirit of God in us lets us know that something is off. We're convicted of our sin. We turn from that sin and turn back to God. We keep pursuing the holiness of God.
3. Last week we began a journey through the letter of Jude and the letter was written to a group of Christ followers comprising one of the early churches and it was a letter of exhortation. An exhortation is a call to action! And here's the aim of the exhortation:

[Slide]: Contend for the faith!

a. Not just a faith but the faith that has been delivered to the saints once and for all. False teachers had stealthily entered their midst and were diluting the faith through:

(1) [Slide]: Godlessness

(2) [Slide]: Cheap grace

(3) [Slide]: Denying Jesus Christ, our only Master and Lord

b. Jude gives a strong warning to be on guard against those who would take up the mantle of teaching and present truth in the forms of half-truths and conduct themselves in a way that disregards reverence for God, uses the forgiveness of God as a free pass for sin, or promotes the lordship of Jesus in a way that contorts it into a palatable form within a particular culture. If our version of Jesus shaves off the rough edges so that He complies with everything in our culture, we've ceased to follow the One true Lord. God have mercy on us.

c. Jude reminds us that we cannot be diplomatic when it comes to false teaching because:

[Slide]: There is too much on the line!

- d. The purity of the faith is a matter of eternal significance and as such must be contended for. You may ask, “why is false teaching a matter of eternal significance?” Perhaps most of us can see how it could be detrimental or harmful, but eternally significant may seem extreme? Here’s why I would caution us against that thinking.

Hebrews 6:4-6 (CSB) [Slide]: 4 For it is impossible to renew to repentance those who were once enlightened, who tasted the heavenly gift, who shared in the Holy Spirit, 5 who tasted God’s good word and the powers of the coming age, 6 and have fallen away.

- (1) Does that mean we fall in and out of our right standing before God? Absolutely not! We don’t earn our salvation or maintain it through our behavior. A transformed, regenerated heart is a work of the Spirit, period!

However, ...

- (2) Just because someone walks through the doors of a church building, it doesn’t make a person right with God. In other words, just because someone goes to church, it doesn’t mean they are a born-again Christ follower. And that’s o.k.! It’s better than o.k., it’s great in this sense! Where do we want people to learn about God? At a bar? That means that if someone is seeking God, you are welcome to be a part of this community and engage in the process of discovering who God is. But there is a risk of being religious and inoculating oneself to the gospel without accepting God’s grace and the gift of salvation.

II. We’ll continue to unpack this letter of Jude today and it will give us a stark jolt of just what is at stake when it comes to the purity of the faith! Jude is going to go back into Israel’s past and demonstrate that God has always taken the protection and preservation of His people seriously and this is associated with the purity of the faith.

- A. One of the challenges for us when reading a letter like Jude is that the culture we find ourselves in (western culture) is hyper individualistic. When we read God’s Word we likely do so through a primarily individualistic lens. We enter a relationship with God because we personally accept His salvific work for the covering of our sins and enter into a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. But our connection with God in Christ also brings us into the body of Christ. And God watches over His family. When we come to New Testament passages on judgement, if we have an issue, it is likely because we’re reading Scripture through the lens of individualism. Don’t get upset because God protects those who belong to Him. Plus, Jude is going to give us advanced warning of what happens when someone starts diluting the faith. It’s something God takes seriously.

Jude 5-7 (CSB) [Slide]: 5 Now I want to remind you, although you came to know all these things once and for all, that Jesus saved a people out of Egypt and later destroyed those who did not believe; 6 and the angels who did not keep their own position but abandoned their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains in deep darkness for the judgment on the great day. 7 Likewise, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns committed sexual immorality and perversions, and serve as an example by undergoing the punishment of eternal fire.

- B. The message today is entitled Lessons from the Past because Jude is going to give 3 examples, lessons if you will, from the Old Testament that demonstrate God’s protection and preservation of His people and the purity of their faith. If God watched over His People in the Old Testament, how much more will He do so for those in Christ! I hope we’re not discouraged by the Scripture today but encouraged. God goes to battle for His family!

1. The first lesson is (Reject God’s Authority):

[Slide]: The Exodus

Jude 5 could either be alluding to Exodus 32 or Numbers 14, but more likely Numbers 14. Numbers 14 is just after the 12 spies return from scouting out the Promised Land. Out of the 12, only 2 are fueled by faith. The other 10 have a blatant disregard toward trusting God, which leads the people of Israel to grumble and demonstrate a lack of trust in God. Not just that, they start to actively plan for a return trip to Egypt! The LORD strikes down the 10 who plant the seed of distrust. Jude is using this as an example that the purity of the faith is a very serious matter. When false teachers plant seeds that distort the character of God, there is judgement. Again, perhaps some of the difficulty in texts like Jude rest in our obsession with individual

rights. We have a difficult time looking from the other perspective that God takes the spiritual preservation and protection of His people seriously.

2. Lesson two (Usurp God's Authority):

[Slide]: The Nephilim

Here Jude is referring to Genesis 6 which happens to be one of the most complicated chapters in Scripture. The most important point of emphasis for us is to determine how Jude was using this example, but let's go back and briefly look at Genesis 6:

Genesis 6:1-4 (CSB) [Slide]: 1 When mankind began to multiply on the earth and daughters were born to them, 2 the sons of God saw that the daughters of mankind were beautiful, and they took any they chose as wives for themselves. 3 And the LORD said, "My Spirit will not remain with mankind forever, because they are corrupt. Their days will be 120 years." 4 The Nephilim were on the earth both in those days and afterward, when the sons of God came to the daughters of mankind, who bore children to them. They were the powerful men of old, the famous men.

- a. One option is that the Nephilim are descendants of a mixed line between the descendants of Seth and Cain. Both sons of Adam and Eve. God chose to work through the line of Seth and not that of Cain because he murdered his brother. Some people (some heavy hitters I might add, John Calvin and Martin Luther) believe these descendants are the Nephilim.
- b. The early church fathers and Jude took a different view and they seemed to believe that the Nephilim originated from angelic beings who stepped out of their authorized realm to impregnate women. The result of this was a breed of people who were extremely powerful and extremely corrupt.
- c. Maybe there's a hybrid view in which these evil angels (demons) possess men to somehow gratify their sexual deviousness.
- d. Just taking Jude at face value, which again, this letter is Scripture and Jude is the half-brother of Jesus, Jude holds the position that the Nephilim were angels that stepped beyond their God given authority and not only did this contribute to the flood, but it will also bring judgement on these angels. Jude lets us know that even angels who don't stay in their authorized lane will pay a sharp price for their disobedience. Because of their corruption and the resulting devastation, God is chaining them in place awaiting the day of their judgement. Those that would dilute the faith should be warned of what happens to those who step beyond their authority.
- e. This is so important because even angels don't have the right to step beyond their God given authority. As those who would teach, our primary task is to proclaim the faith delivered to the saints once and for all. My task as a preacher is to open the Word of God and present the meat to us each week that comes from digging into the Scripture. I try to make it engaging, but that's not the primary task. My job isn't to entertain us, but to expose God's Word. My job isn't even to talk about politics or current affairs. I don't watch the news, so I would be a terrible person for that anyway. My job is to point us to the Word, the faith delivered to the saints once and for all. The Word has application for our everyday lives, but it must be derived from the Word, not the other way around. When preachers use the pulpit for political or personal authority, that's a dangerous position in which to place oneself.

3. Lesson 3 (Manipulate others using their authority):

[Slide]: Sodom and Gomorrah

The last example is that of Sodom and Gomorrah, which is a well-known example in the Old Testament of God's judgement. It's in Genesis 19 if you'd like to look later, but Jude is making a connection to what happened with the Nephilim to that of which took place in Sodom and Gomorrah. Jude is equating this to the false teachers and he's showing a progression from these past lessons. These false teachers are coming under judgment, and it begins with distrust in God which leads to a manipulation of authority. When that happens it usually isn't long before a person in authority, like a false teacher, begins to indulge in sexual immorality or perversions. Sadly, church history is full of examples. God will bring judgement on those who would dilute the faith and it usually doesn't take long for diluted or polluted faith to make itself evident in teaching related to sexuality and our sexual conduct. Sex is such a strong desire and sadly one of the first

areas that seem to be compromised when people in positions of authority aren't following after (or pursuing) the things of God. God doesn't turn a blind eye and will judge these actions.

C. Jude uses these 3 past lessons to remind his readers that God will bring judgment against those leaders who would reject God's authority, usurp God's authority, and manipulate others using their authority. Do not follow such people because God has designed the world and He alone has the right to define reality through His Word. I say this with a grieved heart, but many people are sitting under teaching each week that is presenting a false reality. Someone can easily find teaching to sit under that makes them feel good, but that doesn't change the reality that we will all (me too) one day answer to God. He doesn't answer to us. Those who would willfully teach in a way that dilutes the faith will face the severe judgement of God. God takes the protection and preservation of His people seriously.

D. Here's how Jude brings past lessons into this future call to contend for the faith against these false teachers:

Jude 8-10 (CSB) [Slide]: 8 In the same way these people- relying on their dreams- defile their flesh, reject authority, and slander glorious ones. 9 Yet when Michael the archangel was disputing with the devil in an argument about Moses's body, he did not dare utter a slanderous condemnation against him but said, "The Lord rebuke you!" 10 But these people blaspheme anything they do not understand. And what they do understand by instinct- like irrational animals- by these things they are destroyed.

1. Jude concludes this first set of past lessons that give example of God's judgement by zeroing in on the false teachers. How could someone get to this point of being exposed to truth and knowing the faith while ultimately rejecting it? Jude is clear, these false teachers have walked away from the faith, they have never been believers, but they have diluted the faith. And here is the primary fork in the road:

[Slide]: They rely on their dreams.

a. Does God give people vision? I believe He does! Does God give dreams? I believe He does! But we had better not rely on them. We rely on the Word of God, because the heart is deceitful above all else. Even our regenerate heart is prone to wander if we do not base our actions on the inerrant Word of God. When something departs from the testimony of Scripture, we better stop in our tracks.

2. Lastly, we contend for the faith, but we leave the judgement up to God. We should hold our leaders accountable. I am so thankful for our elder team that I am held accountable to, and praise God we have plurality of leadership to guard against error. We have a responsibility to contend for the faith, but judgement is in the realm of the Lord. Jude evokes the apocryphal work "The Assumption of Moses" which was a 1st Century contemporary work to the New Testament. I don't want to go too far down this trail, but the apocryphal works aren't the Word of God. They're not in Scripture for a reason, but I've read them, and they do give some good context for the 1st Century world. In that regard I think Jude was using a story familiar to his contemporaries to prove a point. The point is even Michael the archangel doesn't feel like it is his place to judge Satan. We need a whole other series on judgement, but casting judgment is different from vocalizing our disagreement over something. Or even taking a stand against something. It's not our responsibility for making sure someone gets the just penalty for their actions. God will take that responsibility on Himself. That means that someone who is rejecting, usurping, or manipulating authority will one day find themselves enslaved to the very desires they seek.

E. God will preserve and protect His people in the here and now, and one day He will bring judgment on those who would seek to dilute the faith delivered to the saints once and for all.