

On the Line: Tough Love in High Stakes

Week 3: Clear and Present Danger

I. The past few weeks we've been in a series of messages through the letter of Jude. It's a small letter toward the tail end of the New Testament but just because it's small don't think it doesn't pack a powerful punch. It absolutely does! The big idea of Jude's letter is:

[Slide]: Contend for the faith!

A. The faithful testimony of Jesus Christ has been delivered once and for all to the saints. Everything we need to know about reconciliation with God and living a godly life has been demonstrated to us in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit working through the apostles imparted God's Word in the form of inerrant Scripture and that is our foundation of truth.

1. In the letter of Jude, he is writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit a letter of exhortation to a group of early Christ followers to contend for the faith in the face of direct opposition coming from false teachers who had infiltrated their community. This series of messages is another example of God's faithful guidance over Tab Church. I did not connect these two dots in exploring Jude but in our culture today one of the most vital topics to discuss is that of false teachers. Why? Because we live in such a transparent world. That's not all bad. It's a great thing to be able to access information easily and affordably, but the opposite is also true. We live in a world where we can access all kinds of information and typically Satan doesn't throw us like a frog in a boiling pot of water. He's much better and satisfied at playing the long game. He exposes us to half-truths and false teaching in a more subtle form.

II. Jude is a great reminder for us that it is a very important decision to make when it comes to what teaching we expose ourselves to. And knowing what's true or false can get convoluted because a false teacher can say things that sound pretty good but don't be mistaken there is a:

[Slide]: Clear and present danger!

A. And sometimes we can't see the danger until we run the ship into the reef. Can we avoid the shipwreck? Jude says that we can. Remember the context of false teachers. Jude says that we might not all be farmers but we all better be fruit inspectors. The theme of Jude 11-16 can be described as such:

[Slide]: A commitment to the faith is expressed through the fruit!

1. Can't fake fruit. It's out of the overflow of the heart a person speaks. Do teachers (in Jude's context are those who have spiritual leadership over others) have bad days? Absolutely! Leaders and teachers aren't immune to sin, but humility should be a mark. Apologies aren't a sign of weakness but strength. And when we say fruit, I'm not talking about the scope of a person's influence or the size of their ministry. The Bible doesn't equate fruit in that manner. It's worth taking a look so let's do so:

Galatians 5:22-23 (CSB) [Slide]: 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, and self-control. The law is not against such things.

2. It would be prudent for us to evaluate the fruit in those who teach. One's commitment to the faith is expressed through the fruit! There is no perfect standard apart from Jesus Christ but a teacher within the body of Christ should be progressively increasing in the fruit of the Spirit.

B. Let's jump into Jude!

Jude 11 (CSB) [Slide]: 11 Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain, have plunged into Balaam's error for profit, and have perished in Korah's rebellion.

1. It is so cool to see how well Jude knows the Hebrew Scriptures! The gospel evidence indicates that Jesus's family didn't buy into His Lordship during His earthly ministry. Jude was a half-brother of Jesus along with his full brother James and they have such a great handle on God's story throughout Israel's history. There's no way to know for sure but it sure does seem like Mary and Joseph taught their children the Scriptures in a very intentional way. Church can help and so can Christian School but there is no substitute for teaching God's Word at home. You can do it; we can help!

2. Jude is breaking into a judgement oracle in verse 11. It's important to note that Jude isn't originating the judgement. We talked about last week that judgement is not in the Christian job description. Judgement is only under the authority of God Almighty. Jude is simply declaring God's judgement has come upon the false teachers. And what's really fascinating about this Scripture is that the participles (verbs acting as nouns) and verbs are in their Greek form aorist tense. The aorist tense is a nifty tool for someone writing in Greek. In English our verb tenses are basically past, present, and future, but Greek has 6 verb tenses. The aorist is a way for the writer to pull themselves out of the event or the inner workings of the event from a chronological perspective and to take a snapshot of a completed action. The aorist makes no reference to how it came about rather the emphasis is on the reality that it's a done deal.

a. Why is this important when it comes to judgement?

From God's vantage point He's already dealt judgement upon the false teachers. God doesn't feel He is obligated to share the inner workings of how and what occurs as it relates to judgement. We don't have to put our focus on how God will judge others either. Jude isn't writing to the false teachers but to the community of faith. Jude's focus is on the community of faith and making them aware that there is a clear and present danger. God will be judge and handle the judgement. We can keep our focus on contending for the faith.

3. Again, like last week (and please go back and catch the podcast if you missed it) Jude pulls out lessons from the past to demonstrate what happens when false teachers follow the bad examples of Israel's past.

a. The Cain story is probably familiar but if not go back to Genesis 4 this afternoon and take a look. What got Cain before he murdered his brother was that envy consumed him. When false teachers dilute the faith and manipulate the gospel for personal recognition, envy usually goes hand in hand. Why? Because if a false teacher is comparing themselves to someone else there will always be someone else to compare to. There is no end to the comparison game and when a teacher goes that way people become a means to an end rather than the mission.

b. Secondly, the example of Balaam is given. He's a lesser-known character and a mixed bag kind of guy. Look at Numbers 22 and Deuteronomy 23 to get some of his story. Greed was Balaam's downfall. He was a turncoat in the end because he fell in love with money. Greed isn't about the amount of money one has. One can be poor or rich and be greedy or generous. The question is, has money become our first love and driving motivation? False teachers are typically characterized by a love of money.

c. The last example is Korah's rebellion. We can find this in Numbers 16 which depicts the event of Korah leading a rebellion against the leadership of Moses and Aaron (the leaders of the Exodus). Like the Nephilim, the example here is of one who usurps the authority of God. God had ordained Moses and Aaron as the leaders of Israel and Korah tried to incite rebellion against God's appointed leaders. God caused an earthquake to form a pit that engulfed Korah and his cronies. Jude isn't trying to pit the false teachers against other teachers who remain true. That isn't Jude's intentions. Jude is pitting the false teachers against the authority of Jesus Christ. Teachers aren't compared to other teachers whether those teachers are perceived to be false or true. Teachers and leaders are compared against the standard of the faith as demonstrated through Jesus Christ and delivered once and for all to the saints. I, nor anyone else, sets the standard. Jesus sets the standard, and we all bend our lives to the book! When a false teacher usurps the authority of God by contorting the Word of God to achieve a selfish motive, judgement occurs.

Jude 12-13 (CSB) [Slide]: 12 These people are dangerous reefs at your love feasts as they eat with you without reverence. They are shepherds who only look after themselves. They are waterless clouds carried along by winds; trees in late autumn- fruitless, twice dead and uprooted. 13T hey are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shameful deeds; wandering stars for whom the blackness of darkness is reserved forever.

4. At this point we're probably like, "o.k.! o.k.! I get it! I don't want to succumb to a false teacher." Please give me something practical to work with. Jude gives these early Christ followers and us some very practical queues to be on the lookout for when it comes to false teachers, spiritual leaders, who would dilute the faith. Remember the theme of Jude 11-16 is:

[Slide]: A commitment to the faith is expressed through the fruit!

a. All the examples Jude uses for descriptors of false teachers should cause us a moment of pause and here's why: Jude builds up to the wild waves of the sea and the wandering stars both of which are evident to all. However, the examples first begin with descriptors that require the observant eye. From a distance all is well but upon further examination there's a clear and present danger.

(1) The first example Jude mentions is dangerous reefs. That's the accurate translation, not blemishes per the NIV, but it's an honest mistake and they go hand in hand. The Greek word for reef or a rock close to shore is spilias and the Greek word for blemish is spilos. It's probably a play on words from Jude that means these false teachers are under the radar and it's not until you get close to them that they leave a painful mark. Someone can be charismatic without having a genuine love for people and often these are false teachers that do a lot of damage. Jude says that we can be aware of false teachers or leaders who are like an impending reef because they will lack reverence for God. There will be a lack of fear or humility which will furthermore be expressed as a shepherd who turns a position of selflessness into a position for selfishness. It's the attitude that says this flock (group of people) isn't here for me to pour and invest my life into but is here to support and serve me. If a shepherd over a flock had that attitude, he wouldn't have a flock for very long. Even a dumb sheep knows better than to stick around a shepherd like that.

(2) The next example is that of a waterless cloud. In many cultures around the world rain is a vital part of survival. I think about the Gift for Christ that you all generously gave to this year. \$58,000 that has gone from Norfolk to the nations and some of that money went to Papua New Guinea to build a facility to translate the Bible and provide large water tanks that will capture rainwater. It's difficult for us to appreciate this metaphor but Jude is saying false teachers are like a promising looking cloud that produces no rain. People are looking at the cloud with hope it will provide sustenance and from a distance that cloud looks really good. But the closer it gets the more evident it becomes that the cloud contains no rain. God, would You make it rain!! It's so easy in our culture with the financial resources and training we have to make it look so promising from a distance. It's easy to put on a good show but sustenance only comes through God's Word. Jesus alone is the Bread of Life! Just like fruit can't be faked, a waterless cloud can look good but once it passes over it brings no rain. Truth and life coincide which is why false teaching at the end of the day still leaves people wanting.

(3) The last example is a fruitless tree in autumn. All through the spring and summer the tree's been looking great! Then in autumn, the time when a tree is supposed to produce fruit, there's no fruit evident. A commitment to the faith is expressed through the fruit. Again, a false teacher or leader can fake it for a season but eventually the fruit or the lack thereof is going to be demonstrated.

(4) All these examples come to the apex for Jude when he describes the foam tip of a wave and wandering stars. At first what's easy to overlook or not notice below the surface starts to bubble up to the top. Jude concludes with a wandering star which in the ancient world caused some major problems. Stars were supposed to be fixed points and the GPS system of the ancient world. Some "stars" wouldn't stay put and those were stars you didn't want to follow. We know those "stars" to be planets but in the ancient world they could cause real trouble from misleading people. False teachers are like wandering stars and the sad thing is that people are following them. They think they're heading toward a secure location but they're not. Wanderers following wanderers is the warning Jude would give against these false teachers and leaders.

5. Jude declares God's judgement on these false teachers and reminds us that there is a literal hell. Just like God will guard or preserve those in Christ, God has guarded or reserved these false teachers for hell. This should make us shudder and urge us to contend earnestly for the faith.

Jude 14-16 (CSB) [Slide]: 14 It was about these that Enoch, in the seventh generation from Adam, prophesied: "Look! The Lord comes with tens of thousands of his holy ones 15 to execute judgment on all and to convict all the ungodly concerning all the ungodly acts that they have done in an ungodly way, and concerning all the harsh things ungodly sinners have said against him." 16 These people are discontented grumblers, living according to their desires; their mouths utter arrogant words, flattering people for their own advantage.

- a. Jude is utilizing the book of 1 Enoch an apocryphal work as his baseline for describing God's judgement. Again, the apocryphal works are extra biblical material that is contemporary to Scripture but not equivalent to inerrant Scripture like the 66 books of the Bible. But Jude takes 1 Enoch and adjusts it some for his purpose in the letter. We need to pay attention. This is where the aorist tense comes to play in Jude looking ahead at the judgement brought forth from Jesus Christ as though the event were already completed. God will judge. Our task is to contend for the faith.
- b. Judgement will be executed on all, but the ungodly (in Jude's context the false teachers) will be convicted, i.e., found guilty. God has extended grace to all in the work of Jesus Christ. For those in Christ we'll be judged not on our merit but on that of Christ. That's really good news and I pray everyone thinks deeply about that today. Today is the day of salvation and it can happen for you simply by acknowledging your need as a sinner and accepting Jesus as Savior and Lord.
- (1) The other alternative isn't that God is unfair, He will judge those apart from Christ on their own merit. It will be a fair judgment, but that judgement will result in eternal separation from God in hell. Even beyond that, false teachers have a judgement so severe that Jude jumps forward to the judgement as if it were completed. Some things we just can't handle. These false teachers and leaders will not only be judged on their ungodly actions but on the words that were spoken against Christ Jesus. They will be judged not only on their actions but their complicity in leading others into hell with them. These are heavy matters that should cause us deep sorrow.
- c. Jude concludes with a few more characteristics of false teachers
- (1) such as grumblers or complainers. They're slick about it because people are attracted to them. I don't think they grumble and complain as in being negative all the time. False teachers or spiritual leaders are often marked with an aversion toward self-assessment and taking responsibility for their actions. Everyone makes mistakes but if you're following a person who never owns up to a mistake. It's always someone else's fault. That attitude is one to be on guard against.
- (2) Lastly, a false teacher who is chasing after their own desire is often a person who will tell everyone what they want to hear. Someone who is a chameleon and one who tells a person exactly what they want to hear to get out of them what they want to get is another characteristic that is portrayed by a false teacher.

III. Next week, we'll finish the letter of Jude and he'll turn his attention toward encouraging this group of Christ followers. His letter has been tough love up to this point and kind of a downer. But it's a necessary letter to challenge these believers and us to contend for the faith. That's our task. Not to focus on the false teachers but to aim our focus on contending for the faith. Jude's not writing to chide this group of believers; he's writing to remind them that God will judge false teachers. God will protect and preserve the purity of the faith and the community of believers. God goes to bat for His children and that should encourage us today because God cares about each of us. If He didn't care God would be hands off and just let it go, but for those in Christ, God purchased us and redeemed us through the blood of His Son! He's got too much invested in you and me to just let it go! God goes to bat for His family; it's our task to contend for the purity of the faith.