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JUDE

A Restoration Movement Commentary



By Joshua Stucki

“¹⁷ But you, beloved, ought to remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ” – Jude 17 (NASB)

Restoration Movement Literature

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“Win: Contending for the Faith” – Jude 1-4

To set the tone for our study, let us begin with Jude 3:

“³ Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God’s holy people.”

The parables, by their very nature, teach us about salvation and the Kingdom of God, His church, that we get to otherwise participate in as a result. However, like Jude, there comes a time to discuss how to “contend” for that faith, and why, which is what Jude covers so powerfully in just a single-chapter, 25-verse book. The distinction that Jude makes however, is that we are not contending against the world, or whatever it is doing (which is always changing), but rather against the devil, the evil forces in dark realms, against the powers, authorities, and rules in celestial places, that are literally at war over every soul, every man, woman, and child ever born. Sometimes these things become manifest in the world but sometimes, it is a battle we fight within.

We wage spiritual warfare, and always have. We CAN be readily prepared for the blows to be landed, and so we will be, by seeing what Jude has to say about “contending for the faith.”

Read Jude 1:1-4 now, so we can get a more complete picture of what God through His servant Jude is going to teach us today:

The greetings of the various letters of the New Testament are often skipped over, but they contain inspired, unique information often ignored:

First, Jude posits himself the author (which is universally accepted) and calls himself, “a servant of Jesus Christ.” This is the same word for “minister” used throughout the New Testament. Jude was a servant of Jesus Christ, and a minister in His church.

Today, most churches have adopted the term “pastor” for the preacher or minister. It is interesting that the New Testament never does so, and in fact rarely uses the word “pastor” at all, and when it does, it is always in reference to an elder of a church, not the minister. But the question is begged: does this matter? Is there any functional difference in calling the minister of a local church “the pastor”?

When we consider who an elder is or what an elder does, it is complementary to the work of the minister, but significantly different: an elder primarily oversees while a minister primarily reaches out, an elder primarily shepherds while a minister primarily preaches, and an eldership makes decisions while a minister submits to those decisions. All throughout Scripture the minister (sometimes called the Evangelist) always has a complementary ministry to the eldership, but their position and function are effectively different. Confusing these ideas significantly inhibits the ability of the elders to be elders, and for the minister to be a minister.

For example, my abilities lie hopefully in evangelism, preaching, teaching, visiting, and writing, in that order of importance. Now contrast to this to the work of any elder: management and overseeing (Titus 1:7), shepherd and watchman (Acts 20:28), teacher and administrator (Acts 15:6). There is very little overlap. I am in fact a poor administrator; I could not plan an event or manage personnel any better than I could play a violin! In this understanding, I can personally say that our eldership provides a complementary ministry to what I do, and vice versa. In this way, we attempt to keep to the New Testament standard of church leadership and church ministry.

So if I were to wear the name “pastor”, I would assume the elder’s title, “shepherd.” I would assume his title, his role, his function – all outside my specific ministry or talents. God may choose over time to gift me with those abilities, and in older age make me an elder somewhere, but until that day, I am a minister, an evangelist, with my specific title, office, and duties, and I trust God that is exactly what He wants at this time. And I do not dare abandon his titles, his offices, and thus try to usurp or abandon his plan.

So when a church is looking for a “pastor” instead of an “evangelist”, finding the right man to fill that position is inherently flawed from its inception.

So needless to say Jude does not use the word “pastor” to describe himself – rather he uses servant, or minister, as that is what he is. He does not assume or usurp the role or function of an elder, and the letter is received by its recipients as such. He is a minister of Jesus Christ, as he says, and a servant of Jesus Christ, therefore, submitting to His plan.

Secondly, Jude calls himself “the brother of James”. Without getting caught up too much in the academic question in Jude’s specific relations, tradition identifies Jude

as the brother of Jesus, just as Jesus had a brother named James, as Mark 6:3 and Matthew 13:55 tells us. His brother James also wrote the epistle of James, so it is consistent that Jesus' other brother would be writing this epistle. The better question is, "Why would Jude feel the need to point that he was the brother of James?"

False Gospels, letters, and other writings were circulating all over the early church – and churches initially had difficulty understanding what letters and Gospels were genuine and which were not – especially among the younger congregations (one could say the same thing about many so-called Christian books circulating today!). One way the inspired writers verified their works was through appeal to relation or appeal to office (like when Paul would say he was an Apostle) in order to validate the origin of the letter. Just as a signature serves as a way of validating identity in our times, so the relation or office of an author would validate his writings' authenticity. Genealogies were especially important to the Jews, and even so among many of the Gentiles, so appealing to relation and verifying that fact would not have been difficult.

As well, Jude makes a point at the very beginning of the letter that he felt the need to "contend" for the Gospel as of verse 3. Jude was already well aware of the false Gospels and letters floating around, and felt a need to address these and other falsehoods quite poignantly in his letter, as we will soon see.

Jude continues in verse 1 by saying, "To those who have been called, who are loved in God the Father and kept for^[a] Jesus Christ:"

The idea of a calling is one I have submitted to Scripture to mold my view of what a calling is over time: Romans 11:29 says, "The calling of God is irrevocable." This gives us a very unique insight into Jude's letter: he is specifically writing to those who have received an irrevocable call on their lives from God. He is not referring to simply Christians; this letter was specifically written to Christians who were other ministers, servants, elders, and deacons in churches instructing them as to the issues his letter addresses. In this way, Jude's letter is not the milk of Scripture from the very get go; he says in verse 3, "I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, BUT..." Otherwise, he had some milk yet to give, but the situation demanded meat.

This also means that Jude's letter, as God inspired it, and placed in our New Testament for all now to read, gives us insights to what leaders in the church are expected to know, discover, understand, and even resist. There are many lessons in the

few verses of Jude, each small section a rich segment of understanding God’s wisdom. Now that it is available for all Christians, as it has been since the Bible was completed, all Christians are “called” to hear it, heed it, and practice it. By this we can all grow up in Christ; we can all be aware of what it takes to stand up to win against the rulers, the authorities, and powers of the dark forces in the heavenly realms; what it takes to win the spiritual battles, and ultimately the spiritual war ever-present even in our world.

A great example of this in the Bible is the prophet Jeremiah. In contrast to the prophet Isaiah, where God asked, “Who can we send?” instead, Jeremiah is called by God, and his call was irrevocable (I am now reading from Jeremiah chapter 1):

⁴The word of the LORD came to me, saying,

⁵“Before I formed you in the womb I knew^[a] you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.” ⁹Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, “I have put my words in your mouth. ¹⁷“Get yourself ready! Stand up and say to them whatever I command you. Do not be terrified by them, or I will terrify you before them. ¹⁹They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you,” declares the LORD.

Jeremiah was not wealthy, he was not formerly educated, and when King Nebuchadnezzar came to take Israel captive, he came four different times to Jerusalem to take the people and items of his choosing, and each time he left behind Jeremiah! In fact, Nebuchadnezzar left a small remnant of the nation of Israel back in Judah, considering them too unworthy to take at any cost. It sometimes recorded that Nebuchadnezzar did not even believe dulling a blade in their deaths was worth his time! That is how little Nebuchadnezzar, a type of the world, thought of Jeremiah, a prophet specially formed and called by God!

Yet, God chose Jeremiah! Jeremiah’s story, just like ALL of those who are called of God, reflects perfectly what Paul writes in 1 Corinthians chapter 1:

“²⁶Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called: not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. ²⁷But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. ²⁸God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things to nullify the things that are, ²⁹so that no one may boast before him.

So when Jude refers to those “called” in verse 1 of his letter, in the eyes of the world it is the refuse it has otherwise thrown away and forgotten, but to God they are the very people he intends to accomplish His divine purposes! Otherwise, when people shun the Bible, or Christians, or Christian morality, or anything else divine, they are acting just as God said they would, and therefore God’s plan is coming together just as He always planned! When the world sees our calling as unimportant, or even silly, I have learned to see God’s fingerprints in those terse words. He has something awesome coming right up!

Verse 2 in Jude’s letter is a different twist of a greeting than we are usually treated to in comparison to say Paul’s or Peter’s writings:

Peace is the standard Jewish greeting; Grace, which is not mentioned here, is the standard Gentile greeting. So why does Jude use “mercy” and “love” here in particular?

Other than the obvious fact that Jude is a different author than Paul or Peter or John naturally, Jude is also writing to a different audience: those who are “called”, and then later by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit any Christian who is ready to receive its message. Jude is not a beginner’s book; this is not for the faint of heart, or the beginning believer. Jude is a book for the Christian who is ready to serve God, and in the words of Isaiah equally say, “Here I am Lord, send me.”

In this context, “mercy” means like what it did when Paul in his letters would ask for prayer for his difficulties. The Greek word for “mercy” occurs 27 times in the New Testament, and can mean mercy as we understand it, or sometimes pity. At the root of the word is “compassion”. Otherwise, those who answer the call of God, to mature in His Word, and obey Him, Jude is praying for mercy, for compassion, for them. This is because although grace is free, discipleship is costly. The price for our salvation was Jesus’ life; so when our calling comes, Christ asks for our life in service to Him.

In verse 3, Jude uses a word that does not occur in any form in any other place of the New Testament – the Greek word for “contend” is an absolutely unique word. This word is literally six syllables in the Greek, and each syllable has a meaning. The word “contend” in the Greek carries all of the following: “to be focused on a contest, to struggle to win with commitment and skill, successfully opposing what is in the way.”

When Jude uses the word “contend” he precedes it with, “I was compelled to write and to urge you”. Jude’s language here is as forceful as it is unique; he indicates

the urgency and importance of what he is about to teach. He “urges”, or “compels” his audience to hear what he has to say, and to heed it, for in it is very important information as to how to be a Christian in spiritually-difficult times.

I think it is important to point out that Jude is not reacting to the world; the church was born into hostility, and although hostility towards the church only grew in time, Jude is not concerned in his letter with what the world is doing. The church is not a broadcasting office for the world’s crazy antics from one day to the next. Rather, Jude is concerned with how these outside influences could come into the church, otherwise, how outside influences may affect a church’s ministries, worship, leadership, or else; Jude is asking us to “contend” for the “faith given once for all to the saints.” Jude is asking is asking to appeal to, obey, and preach and teach only the original Gospel – no new angles, no compromises, no syncretism, no mixing of pagan or human philosophies – to go back to God’s Word, and to live out ONLY the “faith given once for all to the saints.” There is only ONE faith; just as Paul writes in Ephesians 4:4-6, “⁴There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”

When well-meaning but misinformed believers say, “We sprinkle; you immerse, it doesn’t matter”, they err. When well-meaning but misinformed believers say, “We accept a degree of the world’s changing standards of morality and you don’t, it doesn’t matter”, they err. When well-meaning but misinformed believers say, “We have different standards for leadership and our worship than the Bible says and you don’t, and it doesn’t matter”, they err! They err not because I say so, but because God in His Word says so! When the Lord has left clear, WRITTEN instructions, it is not up to a debate, a vote, committee, a consensus, or any other human form of decision-making. The decision has been made! The only question is – and it is what Jude asks of us – will we advocate, preach, teach, submit to, and ultimately contend for the faith given once for all the saints?

Verse 4 concludes Jude’s thought for this immediate moment by telling us that the church worldwide is always going to be dealing with people who come in – sometimes with good intentions, but sometimes not – who are going to corrupt in some way this faith once given for all the saints. We must be able to recognize them, and deal with those situations according to Scripture. Ultimately, the church is the

people, and we know also from Scripture that the church is the body of Christ. If a part of the body does not function, the whole body is severely impaired. If one part is sick, the whole body feels sick. If one part is actually rebelling, the whole body – just as the biology God created works – rejects its function.

So in Jude we have already learned such a great deal: that Jude informs us of our call – our call to go deeper in God’s Word, to go wider in outreach in the world, to contend for the faith given once for all the saints – the unmovable, unchangeable, immutable faith given to the 1st century church still valid today. The simple Gospel message has not changed; the plan of salvation has not changed. Just as eight different people or groups of people in the book of Acts all came to Christ the same way, so we do the same as well. We have not altered the plan; the funny thing is, we really could not alter it! Any alteration does not change the plan; it invalidates it entirely! When people add to or subtract from Scripture, they do not change Scripture; instead, they invalidate its saving power upon their lives! We will do no such thing; we as a church will contend for the faith once given for all the saints and offer the same plan that was given on that first church service: from Acts 2:38, “And Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, for the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit.’”

Jude 5-7 – “Lose: Surrender to the World”

In the opening of Jude’s letter, he taught us a great deal even in just four verses. We learned about who and what a minister is (specifically, he is a minister, and not an elder); we learned about how to tell a genuine Gospel or letter in the Bible from the many false ones STILL circulating out there today. We learned about our calling from God, praying for mercy, the completely-unique word “contend” used in Jude 1:3, and why and what we are contending against.

Most importantly, we learned that our faith has been “delivered once for all the saints”, as the verse reads Jude 1:3. There are not many Christian “faiths”, just as there is not many Lord’s or many different baptisms. Ephesians 4:4-6 reinforces this, reminding us specifically that there is one Lord, one faith, and one baptism. Otherwise, we are bound to Scripture for our understanding of faith, and that faith has not changed one iota since it was completed. The old Latin term is “Sola Scriptura”, and that truth still holds up today.

These verses, like last week, are short in length, but definitely deep in material. Jude is not milk, but meat, for believers, who are ready to absorb more than surface words from God:

This made me think of my garden this year. Last year, I had a friend help me plant it, but this year, I decided to try to plant on my own. I decided I wanted more corn and tomatoes and beans than I got last year, so on top of having a larger garden, I decided to plant the seeds a tid bit closer to each other than the packet read. I mean, the corn out in many of the fields has hardly any space at all!

This now-apparent-to-me bad move has meant that although I have a lot of growth in my garden, I have had very little yield. I could blame the rain, which is certainly part of it, but my lack of following the instructions more closely has yielded me a garden full of plants but almost nothing to show for it. Next year, I am going to put a lot more work in being more precise with the seeds that I plant and how I plant them!

My failure in this area is a lot like many believers: there is some effort to do what it says, but not all of it; there is some effort to follow it approximately, but no specific effort is put into following it exactly. Certain parts that modern believers have learned to simply ignore are ignored; often times, no authentic, objective study is done by the average believer to check to see if what their preacher, church, or tradition is teaching them to be true according to the Bible. As a result, the world has a lot of churches like my garden: lots of plants, but little yield.

I have been tempted to mow down my garden, sending Jim Willis an apology card for putting his efforts into tilling my garden in light of my mistakes, and calling it quits for the year. However, I have decided to stick it out and see what I can yet get out of it.

All the same, it must be frustrating for God to have written down His instructions so plainly and then watch many self-professed believers give it a half-baked, half-hearted, approximated effort. He too must feel like “mowing down His garden” sometimes, like He’s done in the past. Yet, He is patient (2 Peter 3:9), hoping yet for a better yield.

The difference of course is that God planted the perfect garden and I did not, and yet, the yield varies from season to season. The difference in His garden is that the

seeds planted have a choice whether to germinate, grow, and yield like God has instructed in His Word, or to deviate from the plan and see if they get away with it. The believers who want milk are like my garden, and the believers who want meat are like God's garden. Both grow a lot of plants, but it isn't numbers or programs or buildings or funds or lighting or music that makes a church; it is whether or not that church accomplishes the purposes of the Kingdom of God according to His Word. THAT is the yield!

So Jude is appealing to the church who wants meat; who wants to consume and process not just the lighter, easier parts of Scripture, but the deeper, harder, against-culture parts of Scripture. Our church strives to stay a New Testament church in times when that is certainly not popular. We strive to obey the commands of God that culture has decided are outmoded or outdated. We strive to believe God over man's assumptions, follow God over man's ever-changing mind, and contend for the faith once given for all the saints over man's rendition of beliefs in philosophy.

Verse 5 describes one of these "meat" Scriptures – Jude states that God delivered Israel from Egypt, but later destroyed those who did not believe. One interesting fact often missed from the Exodus story is that more than the Israelites left Egypt; many Egyptians did too, sometimes called "the mixed multitude" (Exodus 13:38). This mixed multitude would cause problems for the entire first generation of Israelites, as they encouraged complaining, talked about how "good" they once had it in Egypt, and often inserted their previous paganism into their new worship of the one True God.

Now to blame all of this on the mixed multitude is certainly false; the Israelites had choices to make, and they made many poor ones. It was the Israelites who encouraged Aaron to make the golden calf to worship. It was Miriam who tried to usurp authority over Moses. It was Aaron who questioned Moses' leadership directly established by God. So Jude does not say that it was the mixed multitude that God destroyed, but rather all who would not believe.

This word "believe" is the same word used much later in Habakkuk 2:14, which is itself quoted in the New Testament three times – it is the word for "faith", or "faithfulness." Habakkuk says that "the righteous live by faith", and this is true in the Old and New Testaments therefore; "faith" simply means "doing what God says!" This simple to understand concept is often diluted because although understanding God is easy, doing what He says can be difficult, and it is the latter that people reject.

So God destroyed those who left Egypt who were not faithful to Him. How many was that?

It is a Scriptural fact that the entire first generation of Israelites minus a half dozen died in the wilderness because of their complaining, disobedience, and rebellion. Not even Moses, Aaron, or Miriam made it. So Jude says something here that is very profound, similar to what Jesus said in the parable of the Wide and Narrow Gates – that ultimately most people travel the wide, well-traveled path that leads to destruction, while just a few take the path less traveled that leads to eternal life.

So when Jude said in verse 3 that he is urging us to contend for the faith once given for all the saints, he is reminding us through our verses today that is because only God and His way saves. Just like Israel, if we wander from that faith – attempt to change or usurp it – it is not the faith that is changed, or the God who made it, but rather we are changed into something powerless as a result of our faithlessness.

The ironic thing about the wandering from the faith once given for all the saints that is so common today is that it yields nothing. Many preachers who call themselves Christians have dismissed or downplayed hell, thinking this would “broaden the appeal” to those on the fence. All that did was give those “on the fence” no fear to jump right on over into oblivion! Many preachers who call themselves Christians today have surrendered on evolution, even going so far as to blame those of us who still believe what the Bible said to be “chasing away” people from the church because it makes us look anti-intellectual to the world.

That might be alarming if it was not for the fact that the Bible has said all along that what the world views as foolish is actually that which saves! (1 Corinthians 1:18) As well, God said that He always planned to use and still does use the foolish things of this world to shame the wise, and the weak things of this world to shame the strong (1 Corinthians 1:27). As well, God states in Isaiah 55:8, “My thoughts are higher than your thoughts, and my ways higher than your ways.”

So, personally, if the Bible is disagreeing with the world, this should not surprise or alarm us. God told us all along that would happen! Instead, we should be second-guessing ourselves if our habits, theology, understanding or otherwise reflect that of the world. No good has or will come from this!

So from verse 5 of Jude chapter 1 we learn one obvious but hard truth – that we must obey God. It is not a suggestion to obey God, or a license to change His commands, or a societal obligation to make our faith fit the culture we live in. That failed Israel then, and it will fail us today, if that is the course we take!

Verse 6 of Jude chapter 1 speaks of something strange to our modern ears: who were the angels that abandoned their proper dwelling, not keeping their positions of authority? Who did that and when?

To understand this verse, a person has to choose what is going to be their authority for interpreting the verse. What I mean by this is simply are we going to consult the Bible for our answer, or try to imagine or conjecture an answer? I ask because the modern-day answer for this question is just that – imaginary or conjecture – and does not help us what God through Jude is trying to tell us here. The modern answer is either this is an unknown story from an unknown source so the meaning is lost to us or that it only applies to angels, not men (which sure seems pointless).

Both make no sense for the same reason – God did not have Jude write this letter for the whole world to have in Scripture so that it’s meaning would be forever lost to time or that it would never apply to mankind at all. No, instead, there is a story in Scripture that Jude is directly referring to from Genesis 6:1-4, just as verse 7 relates to Genesis chapter 19.

Verse 6 references Genesis 6:1-4 by informing us that God has kept these particular angels in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment. Otherwise, their sin resulted in their fall just like Satan, but their consequence was immediate, because of the particular heinousness of their crime against humanity.

Notice now how verse 7 immediately compares Sodom and Gomorrah to these fallen angels – that in like manner they sought after “strange flesh” (otherwise, flesh not meant for them) and therefore these angels and the immorality of Sodom and Gomorrah are co-equal in their sin and co-equal in their consequence.

The world right now is pushing very hard against the idea that homosexuality is wrong; there was even an article I read this week on a popular Internet newspaper website entitled, “The Bible does not teach homosexuality is a sin.” Of course, they conveniently skip over Jude 1:6+7, most of Romans 1, among other verses, that specifically condemn it. Jude’s condemnation really provides a cover-to-cover

condemnation of this issue; by equating the angels and their pursuit of strange flesh to the sexual immorality of Sodom and Gomorrah, as the verse says, he ends the verse by saying, “They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.”

I entitled this section, “Lose: Surrender to the World”, because that is exactly what happens when we surrender to the world’s wiles and whims on anything Scripture speaks of. While men are born and die, and their countries with them, while nations rise and fall, their subjects with them, what is the one thing that survived all of those countries, nations, and men? **THE WORD OF GOD.**

A preacher early on in my ministry career told me something very wise one time that took years to sink into my brain: what he said was, “Defending the Bible is like defending a lion. Just get out of the way.” I have learned since then that the Bible is greatest defense of Christianity there is: it alone is perfect, unlike people. It alone has withstood the test of time, from being banned to being burned to being bent, twisted, and maligned. Yet, here it stands, right in front of us, without a single wound to be found!

For this reason Jude writes, and for this reason I preach – the faith delivered once for all the saints is the same faith as the 1st century church as it is today. If we avoid the mistakes of Israel as Jude talks about, and the mistakes of the angels who in like manner left their proper dwelling, and the mistakes of Sodom and Gomorrah which are co-equated in sin and penalty, then we can hold onto the saving truths of God for our time as well.

Another Scripture that speaks so poignantly to this fact is the following from 2 Timothy 4:3 –

“For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.”

Boy, if that is not a verse that describes today, I do not know what is! This verse also tells us what a falsehood looks like – people avoid the literal reading of Scripture, and then gather around themselves a majority of teachers (as if numbers somehow determine truth), and then hear what they want to hear in intellectual terms that “sound right”.

Therefore, again, I am not concerned with what the world says, or what twists they attempt to apply to Scripture to make it sound like they want it to say.

However, let me offer you one dead-simple way to determine the likelihood if someone is interpreting Scripture correctly:

Jude says at the end of verse 4 that we covered last week that these same people will always twist Scripture into a license for immorality AND deny Jesus as our only Sovereign Lord. Otherwise, if you are confronted with anyone who tries to take the literal text of Scripture and make it say something different, simply ask in return, “Do you believe Jesus is the only way to get to heaven?” I myself have never met anyone who would twist Scripture as hard as culture is today who would also say that Jesus is the only way to heaven. It is a built-in litmus test Jude gives us that is both useful and accurate.

Why does this test of Jude’s work? Because a person cannot claim Jesus as their only Sovereign and Lord and then not do what He says. It’s simply impossible.

So last week’s message, this week’s message, and all throughout our journey through Jude is going to challenge our intellects, our hearts, our convictions, and even our beliefs and actions. So many, including myself, have religious knowledge in their background that is simply contrary to Scripture, and the process to de-program that and do what God says instead is not only an intellectual exercise, but an exercise of our emotions and our whole being. Again, it is EASY to understand God; it is difficult to do what He says, and that is why the world tries so hard to change what He says!

But do NOT fall for this:

I had an inmate in the jail this past week try to argue with me at every point; the truth is he is smart, has a degree, and was successful before being caught for criminal drug charges. So finally I interrupted him and said, “Man, you are smarter than me. So why am I on this side of the bars?” Literally - I am not making this up - he began to cry. We then talked like the two guys – sinners - that we are, and I explained to him how his anti-religion views obviously was not doing him any good when God loves him, and the system does not, and never will. He said he would consider it and take a Bible and a few books. He has a long way to go, but I think for the first time in his 40-year-plus life, he finally “gets” that God was not against him after all.

And his story is true for all of us – we are all sinners. The world, for all its talk of loving the unlovable and tolerating the unnatural, is really just helping those who follow it lose any hope for certainty against uncertainty and of course, death. Instead, we are invited through Scripture to become more than conquerors: Romans 8:37-39 says,

“In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons,[b] neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

So will we lose by surrendering to the world? Or conquer, overcome, and succeed by the very saving power of God? I hope any here who has not accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior will see the world’s solutions for the losing solutions that they are versus the power unto salvation that only our Lord offers. Acts 4:12 says succinctly, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”

“Line in the Sand: Follow God or Man” Jude 8-10

At the time of this writing, Harley got sick this week, twice – she went to the ER, and then two days later to the urgent care. Just yesterday she started to feel better. Her first symptoms guided us to take her to the ER first, and then two days later, when other symptoms emerged, to take her to the urgent care.

In verses 8 through 10 of Jude chapter 1, the specific symptoms of the behavior of those who reject God are spelled out. In a way, most of Jude’s book is a litmus test for any human being: he spells out what Christians do, and what non-Christians do, and in the spirit of Jesus, we can therefore understand what is by what fruit is being produced.

Jude begins this section of his letter about three things that people do who reject God and why: first, they pollute their own bodies; second, they reject authority, and third, they heap abuse on celestial beings. Finally, he tells that they do these things based “on the strength of their dreams.”

First, what is polluting our own body? The word for pollute used in this verse is the Greek word, “miaino”, which means, “to corrupt, to defile, or to stain, like with a

dye.” It is used five other times in the New Testament, each time to mean something that which was good that has then become bad.

This verse helps us understand a distinction about sin that is often ignored or missed: that Scripture tells us about sins outside the body, but specially classifies sins against the body being against the temple of God Himself. Let me read here from 1 Corinthians 6:18-20 –

“¹⁸ Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. ¹⁹ Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰ you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.”

This same language in Jude informs us that we can always tell when culture has jumped off the deep end when they start not only tolerating – but endorsing – sexual immorality. Sins against the body, again – according to Scripture – are against the temple of the Holy Spirit, or God, Himself. These verses tell us that our bodies are NOT our own; just like the money we have, or the things we possess, or anything else, we are STEWARDS of God’s property, no less. What an honor – a privilege – to be a temple of the living God! Therefore, we should take care to honor our body by not polluting it as the world recommends.

To give out an idea of how the world tolerates and promotes sexual immorality, there is a worldwide, for-profit business called, “Ashley Madison”, and their corporate slogan is, “Life is short. Have an affair.” They were in the news these past couple of weeks because hackers were claiming they were going to expose its 37 million members if the business did not pay a ransom. As wrong as extortion is, it is quite hard to feel sorry for a business and its clients that is designed from the ground up to destroy families.

You see, when man was created, we were perfectly created: we were designed to live forever, not to decay, not to age, not to lose strength, eyesight, hearing, or feeling. We were made in the image of God, immortal, without blemish, without sin, designed to be in free companionship with God for all eternity:

One day, those who have followed God’s terms of pardon will return to that state. The tree of life has been preserved for us (Revelation 2:7; 22:2, 14, and 19), the

streets of gold paved for us, the dwellings Christ has been preparing for us will be ready, and there will be no more crying, worry, death, or pain, for the old order of things will have passed away!

Until then though, we have to deal with this reality wherein which things have become very polluted from God's original design. Romans 8:19-22 explains how this pollution – or sin's effects upon the world – has affected all of creation:

Everything from moving tectonic plates, to hurricanes, to tornadoes, to droughts to floods to any other kind of natural disaster; all has their root in sin's corruption.

So this is what that passage from Romans 8 says on the subject: “For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope²¹ that^[h] the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. ²² We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.”

In many evangelical visits, it has always seemed strange to me that life is so delicate and yet so many people simply assume that their life is not delicate. Think about it: all of the effort that is put into careers and jobs, retirement and personal pursuits, but so little of the world puts any effort into trying to understand the one experience absolutely everyone faces: physical death.

That may sound macabre, but it is not my attempt to be pessimistic; rather, to simply be honest. Yet, the very ironic thing about death is that it does NOT have to be the end to anything; in fact, Christ promises life after physical death that exceeds any possible pursuit, retirement, job, or pleasure here on this earth! In fact, when we understand heaven, all of the other things seem a lot less worrisome:

Paul writes in Romans 8:18 – “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”

So unto what end, if we follow the world, does the pollution of our own bodies get us? The loss of heaven, the loss of immortality in bliss, the loss of joy and peace and hope and love everlasting! It is not a price worth paying – for anyone.

One last thought on this idea from Jude about “polluting” our bodies – this is the same word where the Bible speaks of sin staining our souls, and only God in Christ can clean it up. A grape juice stain, or a grease stain, or any other stubborn stain – even with

all the modern cleaners and chemicals and science out there – cannot be entirely removed.

Science in fact can be cruel like this – often times doctors can diagnose a disease, but cannot stop it; a scientist can discover a new virus, but has no cure; a field medic can stop the bleeding, but sometimes not until it is too late. Yet, our God never fails! Jesus’ cure is complete and unstoppable! The forgiveness of sins is complete in Christ, and only He can wash us white as snow! Why would we ever put trust in this world when God provides complete assurance for everlasting life?

I had two people tell me stories this week where they prayed and God answered their prayer within moments of their asking. One is considering becoming a Christian and has been earnestly seeking the Lord in His Word. Another just recently became a Christian. I cannot and could not verify their stories, but honestly, I do not have to. What they told me did not contradict Scripture, so why would I doubt answered prayer? Why would I whatsoever question that God is working in this world? Why would I doubt that He is the giver of all good gifts? Instead, all of us are grateful for those faith-boosting moments!!

Jude then brings up in verse 8 about rejecting authority. Peter uses the exact same language in 2 Peter 2:10, even with regards to heaping abuse on celestial beings. Otherwise, these two concepts are closely tied together:

The word “authority” that Jude uses here is not speaking of the authority of man; Paul and Peter both cover obeying that kind of authority in other parts of Scripture. Instead, this word for “authority” that Jude and Peter have used is uniquely speaking of spiritual or divine authority.

In the Declaration of Independence, divine authority was appealed to with regards to the equality of all men, and I quote, “men are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights.” As our culture has become more and more secular, “divine authority” has been rejected (just as Jude and Peter said) and replaced with man’s authority. This is not just a weak substitute, but an altogether insufficient one. Hence why our Constitution is now treated as a secular document it was never meant to be.

All the same, now that our laws no longer appeal to any kind of divine authority, this is why babies can be slaughtered just because they have not grown to a certain size in their mother’s womb, or unnatural unions can redefine our very language and societal structure, and why abuse of all kinds can be heaped (again, just as Jude and Peter said) on God, Christ, and His church.

In my research for writing, I often read opposing viewpoints so I am not answering straw man questions, but rather the real questions of real people in the opposing position. One such author was describing Jesus as a zombie, because He rose from the dead. Another described Jesus as a failed carpenter who then decided it would be a fast track to fame and fortune to declare to be the promised Messiah and deceive people by becoming a fraudulent “magician” (that is how he put it). Finally, it has been argued that Jesus was made up – a figment of the imagination – and anybody who believes Jesus was real is akin to believing in gnomes and goblins.

All the same, TV shows regularly take potshots at Christianity, Christians, and Jesus Himself. A new show recently pointed out to me is “Impastor”, where – and I quote – “a slacker on the run from a loan shark, steals a man's identity and ends up posing as a small town's new gay pastor.”

This kind of twisting of Scripture and ignorance of facts is the abuse that Jude and Peter write about. It is a SYMPTOM of denying Jesus as Lord, and turning the grace of God into a license for immorality (Jude 1:4). If you remember Jude’s litmus test from that verse last week, if someone attempts to change the literal reading of Scripture into something entirely different, the Scriptural test is to simply ask, “Do you believe Jesus is the only way to heaven?” The answer will be a universal “no” from anybody who tries to turn the Scriptures into a license for immorality. All the same, those who heap abuse on God, Christ, the Bible, and His church will not be able to answer the above question in the positive – the two are simply not compatible ideas.

My wife told me this week about a well-known church in her hometown whose long-time preacher has suddenly changed his long-held conservative views and has embraced the idea that hell is not real, all belief systems lead to God, and that in his view, nature itself is God. As my wife asked me, “Why would people want to listen to that?” Paul answers this for us in 2 Timothy 4:3, “For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.”

Jude also writes, “on the strength of their dreams”, in this verse, to describe those who reject God and accept man’s way as their sole substitute. The word “dreams” here is not a bad word; it is the same one used in Acts chapter 2, quoting Joel chapter 2, wherein people did have visions from God before the Bible was completed for the sake of confirming His Word.

No, the problem is in the word “strength”, as in, they rely solely on their own imaginations and divinations and philosophy to build their life on. Even believers can

be guilty of this: this approach to Scripture can be just as dangerous as the worldly man who “heaps abuse” on godly things; so no matter, we should not base our lives on man’s philosophy, “the strength of our dreams”, or anything other than the solid rock of Christ!

Verse 9 of Jude chapter 1 tells a story unlike anything else in all of Scripture; Jude here speaks of a story where the archangel Michael and Satan were arguing over the body of Moses, and Michael refused to condemn Satan himself, but rather said, “The Lord rebuke you!” Keep in mind, in the book of Revelation, Satan and his angels fight Michael and his angels but they lose (Revelation 12:7-9). So clearly, Michael had an edge in both strength and position, but instead recognized that it was God’s place to judge Satan, not him.

Many sources, including many Bibles (including the one I’m looking at) say that Jude is quoting from a Jewish source called, “The Testament of Moses.” I reject this view; if this story is in Scripture, and it is, then Jude (and his audience) both knew it was a true story revealed by God, and instead the “Testament of Moses” book plagiarized the story. Always keep in mind that books come from stories, not the other way around. Just because the “Testament of Moses” is right in this story, does not give it legitimacy otherwise.

This is also the only verse where Michael is mentioned as an archangel. In fact, Michael is the only named archangel in Scripture, although 1 Thessalonians 4:16 mentions an unnamed other archangel. There is a book on the literature table in the back called “Angels” if you want to know more about this. The book was inspired from this series on Jude we are going through.

Finally, Jude ends this section of his letter with one more symptom of rejecting God. As the first symptoms were those who pollute or stain their own bodies with sexual sin in particular, reject divine authority, and then heap abuse on that divine authority, this final symptom listed here is slandering what they do not understand while all along following destructive instincts, with Jude even going so far as to say that animals themselves sometimes make the same mistakes.

Again, Jude specifically says, “they slander what they do not understand.” What is so sorry in our culture is that the very public school system that was originally born in this country to teach all people to read so they could understand the Bible for themselves is the very same culture, generations later, that bans such instruction! What began was divine authority giving divine instruction has become man’s authority giving temporary, ultimately destructive instruction!

Sometimes Christians are accused of trying to “scare” people into faith. Words like “destroy”, “hell”, and “judgment” have become words that society uses to try to paint Christianity as harsh, unforgiving, and judgmental. The ironic thing about society’s interpretation of these words is that it is these very things Christ is trying to save us from! 2 Peter 3:9 says God is patient BECAUSE He wants people to repent to avoid destruction, hell, and judgment! This is precisely why Christ came and died!

Romans 5:8 says, “God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Just as John says, “No man knows greater love than this that a man lay down his life for his friends.” And finally Jesus Himself says, “I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.”

So for all the world’s abuse, pollution, sin and corruption, God reaches out to this broken-up, war-torn, and blood-stained people and says, ““Come now, let us settle the matter,” says the LORD. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.” (Isaiah 1:18)

So as the world calls out for us to follow our flesh’s instincts, God calls out for us to follow reason. While the world encourages corruption of the body, God wants to wash it white as snow. While the world stains our eyes, ears, and hands with sinful scarlet, God can make us white as wool. The offer from God is not one of judgment, but avoiding it! The offer from God is not about hell, but salvation from it! The offer from God is not about harshness, or meanness, or cruelty, but exposing the enemy who is all those things to all of us, and giving us a way out that is secure, eternal, and sure!

Let me put into perspective how honestly stupid the world’s approach to God’s plea for their repentance is:

Let’s say a meteorologist on TV urgently reported a coming tornado in our area; that if we did not stop what we were doing, and head for appropriate cover, we would certainly be destroyed. Then another person shoved the meteorologist off the screen and said, “That meteorologist is so mean, telling us we might die from the tornado! What tornado has ever harmed you?” And people actually thinking to themselves, “Huh! That’s true, I have never been harmed by a tornado before?” And despite the meteorologist yelling from the background, being taken away from the new host’s guards, “Save yourselves! Tornadoes have killed others, and it is coming after you!”

By the world ignoring the tornado that is judgment, sin, and hell, they are like the people who claim, “Huh, a tornado has never hurt us, so...” Punishing the

meteorologist for trying to warn us of impending doom is exactly like when the world nailed the Son of God to a dirty, wooden cross.

Friends, our God has defeated death, seen through sin, exposed the lies, and offered the sacrifice necessary to win over all of it. From the very beginning, God has set into motion those things that were necessary so that man could have His reunion with God restored. He worked for millennia, and planned before that, in what it would take to make man, redeem man, and save man. He has done all those things. And with great patience He has endured and continues to endure the rejection of mankind, but not forever. The perfect mercy of God must be met with the perfect justice of God, and on that day, all will be reconciled. And when that day comes – when the sheep are separated from the goats – the wheat from the chaff – on what side of His throne will you be standing? What part of the threshing floor will you end up on? To what door will you enter, never to return to the other side?

“The Way of Cain” – Jude 11a

For the past couple of lessons we have discussed symptoms (and consequences) of living the way the world says to live. Now, Jude gives us three examples of people in Scripture that represent the world’s symptoms we had just discussed: Cain, Balaam, and Korah. This time, we are going to discuss Cain.

Frankly, and this may sound funny, but I have been personally excited to prepare and preach this sermon. Cain is one of the first, and most interesting characters in Scripture, and Jude leaves it open for us to discover what “the way of Cain” was and is that led to Cain’s perdition (and to the perdition of those who do what Cain did today).

Of course, Cain is most infamous for killing his brother Abel; that unfortunate story is well known. It was also that murderous act that had Cain cursed and banished. However, there is a rich history to the character of Cain that is largely unknown, and yet the Scriptures still speaks about, and that is what we will be looking into today. Cain is the poster child for “what not to do”.

I. Cain’s problems really began at his birth, particularly with his parents. Cain was Adam and Eve’s first son, and thus the first child specifically born on earth (It is important to note that Adam and Eve were created with age, not “born” as a baby like Cain was).

Cain's name tells us the mentality that Adam and Eve were in when he was born. Cain is the Hebrew word "Qayin", a proper noun version of a word spelled the same way that means, "striker", or "he who strikes with a lance or spear." So, when a Hebrew heard the name "Cain", they did not think "Cain" like we do, but rather, literally, "striker". You see, Adam and Even thought Cain was the striker God predicted would strike Satan's head for deceiving them in the garden:

Genesis 3:15 says, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring^[a] and hers; you will strike^[b] his head, and he will strike your heel."^{'''}

This was the first promise of the coming Messiah God had said would come and literally give Satan a death blow. In the garden, God talked to and cursed Satan first, not Adam and Eve, because God wanted to make it clear that Satan had picked on his kids – and therefore the first and worst curse was for him.

This threat to Satan was taken by Adam and Eve to mean that from their seed would come the Messiah. This was true, but not their first seed, Cain, although they thought he was, because they named him, "Striker", as in, "Our striker is going to take out Satan just like God said!" This was the first misunderstanding of Scripture, another theme that continues on to this day!

A little later on, in that same verse in Genesis 4, it says that later Eve gave birth to their second son, and he was named "Abel". Abel literally translates to "vanity" or "useless". Otherwise, "Why do we need this kid? We already have Striker!" Scripture never says Adam and Eve were good parents; in fact, it never specifies they were penitent after the Garden at all; we are not told from Scripture how they fared other than they continued to have many children and lived for several hundred more years.

So Cain grew up basically being named the Messiah by his parents and likely considered himself predestined to this role. When you think you are God's gift to mankind, literally, and you think that your name predestines you to greatness, what kind of person does that typically become? An absolutely rotten one! You see, Satan knew that Adam and Eve would eventually bear the seed of Messiah but just like Adam and Eve, he had no idea which seed or when, so when Cain was born, especially with that name meant to smite him, he immediately went to work corrupting Cain...

Although we cannot know for sure, Hebrew tradition dating back millennia and some possible interpretations of Hebrew research tells us that it was possibly 140 years before Cain and Abel had their spat. By the time we read about their conflict, the boys had already been regularly involved in the sacrificial system, giving their offerings at the family altar, as they also did that day when Abel was killed. Essentially, Cain killed Abel after “church!”

How and when did the boys learn about the sacrificial system? Scripture does not give us direct information, but their parents learned about it when God gave them clothes made of animal skin from the very first sacrificed animal. One of the animals that Adam and Eve had named and known had to die to cover their shame as Genesis 3:21 says. The price for sin was spelled out that day, and the price was life itself, because life is in the blood (Leviticus 17:11+14; John 6:53-56). Of course, this would begin to foreshadow the sacrifice of Christ’s life that would have to be given to cover the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2, 4:10).

Therefore, the boys likely learned about the sacrificial system from their parents and so by the time we see them both in Genesis chapter 4, they are engaged in their regular worship. The difference is that day Cain brought something different; he did not bring an animal, or blood, sacrifice that was had always been required. No, he brought his own produce because he was toiled the fields and did not think his produce should be viewed as less valuable than Abel’s [or Mr. Useless’] flocks. Otherwise, just like many churches today, Cain wanted to substitute God’s standard for worship with his own.

The truth is that Cain’s produce was not less valuable than Abel’s flocks. Value was not the point. When we give our offerings to God, it is not the fact that we bring money, or coin, or check to God that matters; the only thing that matters is did we bring what He asked in that manner in which He has asked? Cain did not; the point of animal sacrifice was not because animals were intrinsically more valuable than the fruits of the soil that Cain brought. No, the point of animal sacrifice was that sin could only be atoned for with blood, again, because life is in the blood, and life lost (or, death), is the price of sin.

So it is quite likely that Cain and Abel had been participating in the animal sacrifice system for decades before their spat. Cain’s descent into sin did not happen overnight. He was taught by his parents to sacrifice animals, but eventually in his own pride, and in his own mind, likely considering himself the predestined Messianic

“striker”, that he could bring whatever he wanted to “church” that day because what was God going to do to his precious, Satan-killing offspring?

II. Cain, unfortunately, had to learn the hard way, and Abel had to pay the ultimate price for Cain to learn. The terrible tragedy in this story, however, is not just that Abel died at the hands of his brother, but Cain did not actually learn anything. He still thought himself important; he still thought himself immune; he still thought himself beyond correction. So not having a penitent heart, God cursed and banished him away, so that it would be certainly known by all that Cain was not the “striker”, or the “Messiah”, that he and his parents thought he was.

So on that fateful day when God called out to Cain and told him that his sacrifice was not favored, God gave him another chance by saying in Genesis 3:6+7, “⁶Then the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast?⁷ If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.””

God’s other chance was a very kind offer: not only was God willing to let Cain try again after deliberately disobeying him, the Hebrew word for “sin” in this verse could be translated, “sin sacrifice”, or very possibly God gave him an animal right there and then to do what he was supposed to do.

Regardless, Cain disobeyed God, and then ignored God, and then asked Abel to come out to the field with him. Some wonder why Abel went; it is quite likely because Cain regularly purchased from Abel an animal for sacrifice, so Abel did not think anything of it. It is quite likely in fact, that Abel overheard the conversation between God and Cain, and was anxious to help his brother do right. Jesus speaks very highly of Abel in Luke 11:50 and following, calling him the first prophet and a righteous man. Abel is mentioned in Matthew and the book of Hebrews twice as examples of a righteous man.

I know of many stories in this congregation and from without of people who try to help family but are burned in the process. Abel received the ultimate burn from Cain; while Abel went out to the field to help Cain procure the proper animal for worship, Cain killed him right there in the field out of vengeance and jealousy. Cain did not care for the rules of God, or the requirement of blood sacrifice, or that blood was necessary

to atone for sin. All Cain cared about was his own pride and that the work of his own hands, or his own definition of worship, “should” have been as good as Abel’s.

The world, unfortunately, is full of Cain’s. I am not speaking of the murdering aspect of Cain persay, but the jealousy, pride, and false belief that what we produce with our hands is “good enough” to be in favor with God and receive forgiveness on the great Day of Judgment. The truth is that nothing we can do is good enough for that. Without Christ’s sacrifice, nothing we do, nothing we are, can get us into heaven and out of judgment. However, with Christ’s sacrifice, foreshadowed so long before that in those sacrifices offered by the patriarchs, we CAN receive forgiveness of sins and escape from judgment, sin, and hell. The lie of Cain goes on, and this world is swallowing it hook, line, and sinker.

This is why Jude says in verse 11, “Woe to them! They follow the way of Cain...” The way of Cain is a person who deceives himself by believing that by merely producing and offering the works of his own hands that he has done what is “good enough” in the eyes of God, although it is not.

The story of Cain does not actually end here though. After he kills Abel, God appears to Cain yet again and asks a testing question in Genesis 4:9, “Where is your brother Abel?” Of course, God already knew the answer; He was giving Cain was one last chance to be honest and repent. Cain failed to offer the right sacrifice; He failed to offer it again. Now he kills his brother, and God is yet kind enough to give him yet another opportunity to come clean and repent. But Cain’s response is just like the world’s, “I don’t know. Am I my brother’s keeper?”

All the same, the world claims not to know us when we do not follow its rules. The world throws us away when we do not agree with it, comply with it, or repeat what it says like a bad tape recorder. The modern world with its political correctness, micro aggressions, and “accept and celebrate us or be fired or lose your business” mentality is Cain incarnate. There is no penitent spirit; there is no desire to cooperate or tolerate or learn. There is a demand, and when we fail to comply, the world says responds to God’s plea with, “I don’t know. Am I my brother’s keeper?”

After this response, God casts judgment on Cain: 1) the ground would no longer yield crops for him, 2) he would wander the earth as a restless nomad, 3) and he would

be marked with that curse. That curse carried one benefit: unlike Abel who died at the hands of Cain, God would keep Cain from similar harm.

So Cain, for turning down the offer to repent four different times, and for the murder of his brother Abel, lost his job, lost his supposed place and purpose, and literally moved away from the presence of God. Some question if that is actually possible; if God is omnipresent, then is not God everywhere? Omnipresence means the ability to be anywhere at any time; but because God is also omnipotent, this means He can also choose not to be somewhere if He so chooses. For example, God is most certainly not in hell. Although He could be present anywhere, He obviously chooses and can choose where not to be as well, upon His will alone. That is true power!

Cain views God's curse as unfair: he exaggerates God's punishment by saying that anyone who finds him will kill him. This is immediately countered by God giving him the mark to protect him from mortal harm. However, it is interesting to note that who could have killed Cain? Only a sibling! So Cain's arrogance and pride and jealousy had obviously not made any friends, even with his own family. He fears for his life, like a coward, after taking the life of another! Is it not true that there is no honor among thieves?

III. The way of Cain is not yet over, however. Scripture continues to tell us about Cain and his descendants. Cain headed east for a place called Nod, which translates to "wandering". He took his wife, obviously a sister, with him, and they settled there. He built a city, and had children. His children had children, and the first pagan society was born. Interestingly, Genesis 4:20-22 record the material successes Cain's descendants had: flocks and herds, musical instruments, and tools made with bronze and iron. We know from history that all these things originated in the Middle East at this time. It should not be surprising to us, however, that people who put their life's work into this world would succeed in some of the world's pursuits. Cain's descendants are never said to have repented, but they were able to fiddle and forge. This reminds me of Jesus' commentary on worldly people who find success in the world but not the Word: Jesus said in Mark 8:36, "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world but lose his soul?"

The way of Cain is arrogance, pride, hate, genuine intolerance, cowardliness, blame, and worldly pursuit. All, or even one of these things, can literally be killer. In the

story of Cain, there is so many wrong turns but Jude’s warning is simple: do not follow the way of Cain!

At this point, Cain was obviously not going to fulfill any given Messianic purpose, and with Abel dead, who was going to be the seed born of Eve to strike Satan’s head as God promised in Genesis 3:15?

Genesis chapter 4 ends with Eve giving birth to another son, and she named him, “Seth”, which literally means “substitute”. Notice how Eve says in verse 25 that she viewed Seth as a replacement for Abel, not Cain, although Cain was her “striker”. Eve had learned that Cain was not the Messiah and that Abel was in fact not useless, and God had been kind as to give her another son in place of him. Sometimes, the people we view as useless by the world’s standards are the very people God had in mind to use. Abel is a perfect example.

The Apostle John gives us the last Biblical look at Cain in his first letter: in 1 John 3:12, he writes, “Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother’s were righteous.”

Cain was supposedly raised up to crush Satan but ended up belonging to him! Cain’s offering was given by his own hands considered by his own standards to be righteous, but in fact it was evil! Whenever man decides to be his own judge, not only is he lying to himself, but he will find out in the end just how wrong he has been.

“The Error of Balaam, Part 1” – Jude 11b

Last lesson we looked at Cain through Jude’s eyes, seeing how following in the way of Cain is a mistake past, present, or future: first, Cain tried to change the worship God prescribed to something he wanted to do, then Cain ignored God, then Cain killed his brother out of jealousy, and then Cain would not even admit or especially repent of all the above!

Now, let’s keep in mind – Cain went to “church” regularly. He even gave to the “offering”. Yet, none of that mattered in the face of trying to change the worship God prescribed, or ignoring God, or disobeying him, or refusing to turn from sin. Just routinely doing some “religious things” did not help Cain at all. The “heart” of Cain was not right, and it is the heart that God looks at (1 Samuel 16:7).

Yet, there are many people today who act similarly – they go to church “sometimes” – they drop a few bucks in the plate when they are there – and then they go out and live life however they want. That is the very essence of the “way of Cain” that Jude 11a warns about; replacing God’s daily worship with occasional lip service and an offering given out of compulsion instead of heart-felt gratitude is condemning. And a similar fate to Cain’s awaits, because he lived and “worshipped” the way he thought best – instead of following God’s way as prescribed in God’s Word.

Today, we have another character Jude warns about – Balaam. Balaam’s story is largely recorded in Numbers chapters 22 through 24, and it really is a tragedy – because unlike Cain – Balaam started out good! Balaam was an appointed prophet of God, had a successful ministry, and was basically in peaceful retirement in Canaan when the King of Balak contacted him with an offer...

It is interesting to note that Balaam was a Gentile – not a Jew – and yet God had called him to be a prophet of God. God knew about the goodness of Balaam and had witnessed it first-hand many times. So even in the Old Testament, God was consistently working with Jew and Gentile alike, to prepare all to receive Jesus when He came.

However, it is hard to read and consider the story of Balaam without addressing a serious theological issue present in many churches today. Let us recount again that Balaam was called of God, an appointed prophet, had a long, successful, fruitful ministry, and was basically enjoying a peaceful retirement as a reward for his service before he turned faithless, disobedient, and scheming against God’s plans.

Many churches today teach that once you’re saved, you’re set – that once God changes your will and regenerates your spirit – you are not only saved, but inclined to obey Him consistently (though not perfectly) for the rest of your life. This doctrine has many names – Perseverance of the Saints, once saved, always saved, etc. but truly the story of Balaam (as well as Simon the Sorcerer, Demas, among others) shows us a very different truth: that man can choose God, and therefore man can also choose evil, upon his own will, at any time. God does not change our free will or the nature of it; no, He created our free will, and respects it, believer or not.

It is ultimately smug, ignorant, and in some cases even arrogant to assume that if any of us have accepted Christ, believed on Him, repented, confessed, and have been baptized, that we are “automatically good for life.”

I have many evangelical opportunities (many in just the last week in fact) where I keep getting told by people, “Well, he or she was baptized.” I was told by a lady in the community that a man she was going to marry had been baptized when he was 8, although he had not attended church or served in any capacity since his teens, but since he was baptized, “He was a Christian.” As an evangelist, even just as a Christian, when all I am told is that someone was baptized, all that tells me, personally, is that someone got wet. The real question is, “Where is the fruit?” “Where is the service?” “Where is the love of God, and love for the things of God?”

I was at a funeral awhile back where the preacher asked a very good question – “Perhaps we should not ask people if they love God; we would more quickly get to the heart of the matter if we asked if they loved the things of God – His services, His work, His Word – and not just the concept of God itself. That would separate the wheat from the chaff in our minds, possibly to the saving of some souls.” It was bold for a funeral, but frankly, it was a bold statement period!

So it is a sincere warning of Scripture, not anything I made up, that we must not only obey God unto salvation, but we must obey God in keeping with the free gift of salvation that we have received. Balaam failed to do this. Simon the Sorcerer failed to do this. Demas failed to do this. And the sad truth is, if we so choose, so too can we fail.

A while back I wrote a booklet in the back called, “Can a Christian Lose Their Salvation?” Losing Salvation is naturally a pessimistic subject, and I am not here to dwell on the negative, but if Scripture says it, we must discuss and understand it. Always remember that in the same book of Hebrews where there are five warnings about falling away, the author ends that entire discussion in chapter 12 telling us why God warns and disciplines His children – to restore them! It is a major mistake to view anything negative in Scripture outside of God’s immediate purpose in any kind of discipline – and that is to save those who are lost!

So in looking at the story of Balaam, it is very important to keep in mind that the story is told in the Old Testament, and repeated throughout the New Testament in three different books for one purpose – to warn us, to aid us, to get us back to where we need to be – in faithful service to God!

Another element to the story of Balaam you will notice is that there are a lot of spiritual elements involved even in his evil scheming – prayer, “seeking the Lord’s will”, prophesy, preaching, even mixing completely solid truths in with his lies. Balaam was the ultimate wolf in sheep’s clothing with his religiosity covering over his shame.

Sometimes I get flack because I say honestly, although I try to be as peaceful as possible about it, that some preachers, authors, and scholars are or have become white-washed tombs full of dead men’s bones, just like Balaam above. Rob Bell, of the Emergent Church Movement, particularly sticks out because he went from preaching at least some true things to completely denying the Bible’s authority, sufficiency, and accuracy. He refers to the New Testament as “a collection of 2,000 year old letters not particularly relevant to 21st century life.” He now endorses virtually every immoral issue present culture embraces.

One quick test for any of us: if we find ourselves agreeing with culture, or changing Biblical beliefs or Biblical actions to suit culture’s whims, we are in the wrong, and we must ourselves repent!

So Balaam receives into his own home visitors with an offer – “King Balak will pay you to curse the Israelites.” Balaam, who is retired from full-time ministry, living peacefully, had a temptation thrust before him – have MORE money than God had allotted him, be MORE famous and well-known than what God has already given him – in exchange for fulfilling a quick service to a pagan king.

You might remember me mentioning a few months back that I have been convicted that I should not desire for money than God has allotted me, but simply pray that He provides for our needs? Balaam is a great example; God had not allotted Balaam to be wealthy, merely content, but Balaam wanted wealth. That old verse rings true thousands of years later – “the love of money is the root of all evil.” Satan knew exactly where to get Balaam – in the pursuit of greed.

It is worth asking ourselves at this point in the story – “What is our favorite sin?” What constantly tempts us, and what do we therefore constantly fall for? And then, we must ask – like Balaam should have – “Have I actually put myself in a position where falling for that temptation is easier than it could be?”

How many men (and women) have unfiltered Internet connections at home with no accountability whatsoever who struggle with pornography? How many people

struggle with overeating but have their cabinets stuffed with their favorite junk foods? (One reason I started buying peanut-butter filled snacks and cookies months ago; this way I am not tempted!) How many struggle with wasting hours a day in front of a TV but still pay for the premium cable package? How many struggle with greed but refuse to seek financial counseling of any kind because they know it will require them to reduce their spending?

Balaam, all the same, was thrust with his “favorite sin” – and because he had no guard against it and no Scripture memorized to oppose it, he fell for it. Jesus and others quoted Scripture to fight temptation – do we have some Scriptures in our head to help us fight temptation? This seems to be a primary use of memorized Scripture in the Bible, second only to witnessing.

Some credit Balaam with at least trying to seek God’s will before giving into his temptation. The more I read and study Balaam’s story, I do not see sincerity in Balaam’s prayers. How could it – on any level – make sense to pray that God smite the Israelites for personal gain?

This is why God actually approaches Balaam in Numbers chapter 22 verses 9 and 12 and does not wait for Balaam to approach him. The truth is, Balaam knew what he was thinking about doing was wrong, and so likely the last person Balaam wanted to talk with it about it was God. Just like Jonah, Balaam knew the Word of the Lord, but wanted to do the opposite thing anyway.

I appreciate God’s pro-activeness here: God is not content to just let His prophet – His previously faithful servant – just to wander into destruction. God questions him, warns him, and later on, even impedes his progress.

Although it is true that God honored Balaam’s free will and our own, He does not take to His children wandering into sin lightly. God will try to stop us every step of the way! When things are getting hard, it is worth taking a spiritual inventory and asking two questions:

1) Are things hard because we are doing what is right, so Satan is opposing us?

Or

2) Are things hard because we are doing wrong, and God is trying to save us?

Balaam does not ask for either of these things – he is simply inebriated with greed – and nothing will ultimately stop him in his pursuit of greed, which ultimately only brings his destruction.

Balaam initially refuses to go with the men – which is good – but his words in verse 13 do not imply a desire to obey God – but only a regret that God would not let him go. This is a Judas-like situation here; when Judas was “sorry” for what he had done to Jesus in trying to return the 30 pieces of silver to the teachers of the Law, it is not the Greek word for “regret” but the Greek word for “sorry for being caught.” Otherwise, like Judas, Balaam does not care for God’s agenda, only sorry that his own is not being aided by the Lord.

The men come again, and Balaam again tries to scheme about how to actually go to Balak. God can see that Balaam is determined to go, and God never denies a man his free will. So God reluctantly permits (although does NOT condone) Balaam going, but warns Balaam only to say what God tells him to say.

God’s wrath had not gone down one iota though. Notice that although God did not deny Balaam’s free will in allowing him to go, his anger was very great with Balaam in verse 22. God tried to stop Balaam’s travel with the use of a warrior angel that scared the daylights out of Balaam’s donkey, but Balaam was blinded to. When our pursuit of temptation is given the green light by our own free will, our focus will narrow, our demeanor will devolve, and we will become a slave to our flesh.

Balaam even beats his donkey for trying to avoid slaughter! God then enables the donkey to speak to Balaam who says, “Have I not always served you faithfully? Why do you beat me now?” (verse 30) Balaam even recognizes his sin at this point but will not repent of it! (verse 34)

Friends, what are our favorite sins? What are the things that are always dragging us away from not only God, but the things of God? What inhibits us from faithful attendance, faithful service, and faithful living? What keeps us from gathering around the Lord’s table weekly, with a clean conscience, ready to receive it joyfully, instead of merely routinely or perhaps even unworthily?

We will continue Balaam’s story next lesson because I was convicted it was not worth cutting out 2/3’s of Jude’s warning to us because of time. So I hope you will return to read the rest of it – not for the sake of hearing me preach or to merely fulfill a

religious duty (remember, Cain did that much) – but out of a desire to know more, learn more, and be inspired to obey God more in daily life.

Our ending thought in this lesson is one of again knowing who not to follow: in this example, the error of Balaam. Have we been called of God and then abandoned our call? Have we been baptized but then backslidden? Did we once taste from the river of the waters of life in our salvation but now drink from the bitter waters of this world? Do we want to come home, or continue to wallow in the muck and mire and mud of our sins?

Jude’s warning is clear: following Cain’s or Balaam’s example is common but deadly. When Christ returns, we cannot claim to be religious like Cain, or called like Balaam – we actually have to be faithful to that which we were given grace in Christ Jesus. The argument on Judgment Day of “I got wet” is not going to do it; the argument of “I went to church” is not going to do it; the argument of “I gave to the offering” or that “I pray” is not going to do it. Cain and Balaam did all of those things in one form or another. The only thing that is going to matter is were we faithful to Jesus Christ, our LORD and Savior, to whom we must give an account?

Paul tells us that Jesus Himself will be our Judge in 2 Timothy 4:1 – make sure today He is also your Savior. Today, if you have backslidden, drawn back, denied the calling of God on your life, or never received His grace at all, that is what repentance is all about. And repentance is not just before one is baptized, either! It’s a life-long practice.

“The Error of Balaam: Part 2” – Jude 11b

Last lesson we discussed the beginning of Balaam’s fall from faithfulness to faithlessness, from obedience to disobedience, and from fulfilling God’s purposes as a called prophet to sadly becoming a slave to his own flesh unto his own destruction.

This lesson we will continue Balaam’s story as told in Numbers chapters 22 through 24. Jude tells us in verse 11b of his book not to follow “the error of Balaam.” Along with Cain from two weeks ago, we finish telling Balaam’s story as another Biblical example of who NOT to follow!

I. We left off with Balaam on his way to the King of Moab named Balak in Numbers chapter 22. God had first told him not to go, but He knew Balaam was

determined to go anyway, so God impeded his progress with a warrior angel standing in his way, even going so far as to have Balaam's donkey speak to Balaam and warn him about the wrath he was bringing on himself! Nonetheless, Balaam did not learn even from this divine interference.

Many people today say that if God would just speak to them directly, then they would believe on Him and do what He says. However, every testimony in Scripture says differently:

A) Cain talked to God directly multiple times, and yet Cain did what Cain wanted, to his own destruction.

B) Nimrod had Noah as his great grandfather (who was probably still alive at the time of Nimrod's ascension), but this did not stop Nimrod from setting himself up as a god with his own worship.

C) Korah saw the 10 plagues of Egypt himself, participated in the Israelites' miraculous escape, and witnessed the giving of the Law with the glory of the Lord shown all around the camp. Yet, he rallied a mutiny and tried to replace the leadership of Moses with his own – again – resulting in his own destruction.

The truth is, there is no indication in Scripture or human history besides that people will do anything different regardless if God talks to them directly. Now, ironically, God has spoken each of us directly – in His Word. The only question is, will we shun the bad examples of Cain and Balaam, and do what He has written down?

Even Jesus, in telling the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31, has Abraham tell the Rich Man who was in torment, "If your brothers would not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not listen to me either."

No, God has given us one revelation – one Book – one final Word – to whom we must all answer! There is no need, no purpose, and nothing to be gained (and a lot of confusion to be had) if God spoke to every person on the planet individually. That would be a confused mess beyond anything we have even managed to do so far! The truth is, God has unity in Scripture – and if we gather around it – and it alone – we can have unity in truth as well.

So Balaam did not learn from God's direct intervention. Instead, he proceeded directly to Moab, to meet with the King of Balak. The King of Balak wanted Balaam to curse Israel, but Balaam does offer a fair warning to King Balak from Numbers 22:38 – "I cannot prophesy but that which the Lord allows."

Nonetheless, Balak urges Balaam to prophesy against Israel starting in Numbers chapter 23. Three times Balaam tried to curse Israel, but God only put blessings for Israel in Balaam's mouth! This of course made Balak very angry, and told Balaam, "Better not to curse them at all then to bless them!"

Balaam's greed was so great, however, that even with God's warnings, interventions, and now altering the words coming out of Balaam's mouth, Balaam was still not willing to repent. Instead, Balaam had Balak change locations of where he would prophesy, and offer random sacrifices, and offer prayers – all trying to get God to change His mind!

How many people today think if they worship in one place versus another, that it makes any difference in worship? How many churches assign specific prayers, thinking that just different words on a page will make a divine difference? Or how about if they give money to a specific so-called ministry, that God will somehow automatically bless them richly?

All of the above were mistakes that originated with Balaam. Balaam falsely assumed that it was the location of worship or the words of the prayers offered, or the sacrifice or offering given, that mattered to God. As a chosen prophet of God, Balaam knew better, but he let his sin blind him into denial!

Balaam denied his own greed; he denied himself repentance, confession, and healing. He decided himself contentment, peace, and grace. He brought about his own destruction because he desired money more than God, fame more than being known by God, and the presence of a pagan king more than the calling to which he had previously been faithful.

Balaam's greed then grew into arrogance – in Numbers 23:10 – Balaam actually prayed to God, "Let me die the death of a righteous man!" Balaam wanted God's blessing regardless of the real state of his spiritual well being. Balaam's denial, arrogance, and soon evil scheming would bring his sin full circle – he would go from

being a fallen prophet to a child of Satan himself by actually plotting to deceive Israel into sin and judgment for his own gain.

Sin is often like that – at first – we think it is not hurting anyone but us. That is the stage of denial. Then, we convince ourselves that what we previously thought as sin does not affect us – this is arrogance. Finally, we start trying to convince and corrupt others into accepting – even celebrating – our sin. If this sounds familiar, it is because culture is following in the error of Balaam right now!

Well, we would think Balaam would be done trying to work against God. He was a prophet – a fallen one now – who could not curse Israel for money like he had hoped. He could have taken his multiple warnings and interventions and repented but instead, he upped his game and went to evil scheming against Israel.

Since he could not curse Israel with words, he would deceive them into judgment by tempting them to intermix with the pagan worship and people of Moab, which promised them free food and illicit relations. Balaam succeeded in his deception, and Numbers 25 records the judgment that occurred to Israel that Balak, King of Moab, was wanting all along.

How much lower could Balaam go? We will never know, because in Joshua 13:22, Balaam's death at the hands of Joshua's army is recorded. Yes, Israel was judged for her sin, but Balaam was not spared his judgment either. He desired to die the death of a righteous man – instead he was slain as a pagan traitor, described as such. He desired to be wealthy by abusing the gifts God had given him; instead he died being labeled “a pagan diviner”. He desired fame with pagan kings, and instead he now serves as an infamous example of exactly what not to do!

It would be reassuring if situations like Balaam's were uncommon but unfortunately culture – and even the church – is rife with them:

- A) Churches that exist mainly as fundraisers for their false teachers
- B) Preachers who have abandoned faithful callings to please the flesh and encourage others to do the same
- C) People who ignore God's message repeatedly until it is too late

Some of the world's most prominent opponents to Christ and His church were actually born under false teachers under a pretense of Christianity:

Dan Barker, Founder and President of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, was at one time a minister in the hyper-charismatic movement led by Kathryn Kuhlman. Kathryn Kuhlman was one of the early "faith healer" false teachers back in the 1940'-70's, who deceived many by orchestrated, pre-arranged responses to her messages, which would result in great masses of people persuaded by nothing more than sleight of hand and "diseases healed" that could never be verified to have existed to begin with (it is handy all "healings" in these situations are always things cannot be seen or verified).

Mr. Dan Barker was a first-hand witness of her deception and if there is anything he says today that is correct, it is that she was a fraud. However, her deception and false teaching drove a very intelligent man into the complete darkness of faithlessness and actually opposing Christ and His Kingdom completely and openly. There is hardly a Christian symbol or part of our culture Mr. Barker's foundation has not attacked because of Satan's hand through using Kathryn Kuhlman to bring down Dan Barker. This is what false teachers do, and frankly, why they are so dangerous.

Now, can God heal? Absolutely! However, here is the KEY difference – God may heal – but he no longer "heals" through men. The gift of healing as a supernatural gift able to be used by the will of man himself obviously does not exist anymore, or we could simply – at will – easily take one of these men (or women) and heal anyone we wanted to and simply prove it to be true. No, obviously no such people exist anymore. The gift of healing as possessed and operated by the will of man has passed. Instead, healing by the hands and will of God alone is what exists today.

Still, does this kind of healing occur? Does God still heal people today?

We have seen it in our own congregation – in the past year – one of our very own around the New Year was expected not to survive (I was there as well as many of you), but made a full recovery faster than anyone anticipated!

As well, we have seen cancers that were supposed to kill that instead were eliminated, and illnesses that were supposed to be debilitating beaten back. This does not happen every time; in fact, there are times it seems that God does not heal like He does at other times. Why, how, or whenever healing happens is solely up to God, and

the difference for the Christian is that he or she has faith that God knows what He is doing, because He does.

Some say this is “silly talk” – many secularists, atheists, and agnostics deny that anything miraculous can take place. Yet, a nationwide scientific survey conducted by a secular organization in 2004 (the latest one I could personally find) showed that 73% of medical doctors believe in miracles. Either way, tell me - would you prefer a medical doctor or an atheist’s opinion of the potential prognosis and hope?

As well, modern consensus among biologists today overwhelmingly supports evolution. Yet, even after generations of exclusive indoctrination, less than 40% of the general population firmly agrees. Also, there are over a thousand verified non-theological doctorates in the United States alone that reject evolution. Simply Google a website called Dissent of Darwin.

Frankly, I am not concerned with culture’s opinion on the Word of God, the Will of God, or the Work of God in this world. He always has, is, and will say, do, and act anyway He sees fit, because He alone understands it all, as He created it all, and is all in all.

Balaam’s fall began with a simple temptation, his weak spot, specifically targeted by Satan: his greed. Now, Balaam’s temptation was not his sin. We are all tempted – even Jesus was tempted. No, temptation itself is not sin, and we are not guilty for being tempted. Instead, we are guilty when we give into sin; our guilt builds if we indulge in it further, and it begins its fatal descent into destruction if we begin to celebrate and propagate it. Yet, this is where our culture presently is and what ultimately led to Balaam’s destruction.

How are we to learn how to deal with temptation then? First, there is a lot of false information, so I am going to lay out these facts:

1) Scripture never says anywhere that anyone can “pray away” any temptation:

a) By comparison, when Paul prayed that his thorn would be removed from him, Christ instead gave him the strength to endure it.

b) When Joseph was tempted by Potiphar’s wife, his response was to run away. He faced consequences not of any sin, but of false accusations.

c) When Scripture specifically addresses temptation, it says that God will give us the ability to successfully overcome our temptations (1 Corinthians 10:13), but He does not necessarily remove them.

d) We would do well to inform Christians and non-Christians alike that God never promised to remove temptation from anyone. Temptation of the flesh, regardless of what it is, does not validate opposing God's Word on any matter.

2) Every major Bible character endured temptation. None were spared temptation. Temptation is part of living in a fallen world; our goal is not to eradicate the temptation itself (although we can and should reduce its grip with careful planning), but to develop the discipleship necessary to consistently resist evil.

3) Some fallen Bible characters, like Balaam, tried to abuse prayer and other elements of worship to try to justify his sin. We must realize that no matter how "religious" we are, or how much we pray, or what we pray about, we are still obligated all the same to honor God's Word just as it is written.

Jude's warning to avoid following in the error of Balaam has given us opportunity to look at the tragedy of Balaam. A called prophet of God, with a fruitful past ministry, allowed his greatest temptation to overshadow his better judgment. He ignored God's opposition to his plan, shunned repentance and healing, and now is recorded for all of history as an example of exactly "what not to do."

Our lives, both someday and now, serve as examples to others. Especially if we claim and wear the title Christian, our faithful (or faithless) lives glorify or dilute the power of God in the world we live in. Our example – good or bad – or good, then bad, like Balaam – will affect both our own lives and the lives of others. Whether we can see it, or believe it, who we are and what we do has tremendous effect on both our eternal destinations but also the eternal destinations of others.

C.S. Lewis, in his sermon "The Weight of Glory", put it well that every day we help ourselves and others to one eternal destination or another – either to become everlasting splendors too great to describe or to become immortal horrors beyond comprehension.

Today is the day, and now is time, to respond to the Gospel – to become an everlasting splendor, and leave Satan and his immortal horrors behind. Today is the day

to stop following in the world's continuing footsteps of the many errors of Balaam, and come home to the Lord who wants to prepare the fatted calf, have his angels celebrate, put sandals on your feet, a ring on your finger, and call you the Son or Daughter of God you were born to be.

As well, today may be the day to remember the glory from which we can find ourselves distant from. Our lives can drift, slowly away, from the mission, purpose, and joy and peace and contentment God has given us. A temptation here, a sin there, an indulgence unchecked, and before we know it, we are distant from He who is Joy Incarnate. Perhaps today is the day, therefore, to rededicate your faith and service to the Lord.

Whatever your reason, now is the time to respond, and not to delay. Our Lord will return soon, and when He does, the time for decisions is done, and the time for judgment will be nigh. Be ready, be anxious, be excited to show your Lord the work of your hands! You can only do that if you obey Him.

“The Rebellion of Korah” – Jude 11c

Jude finishes verse 11 of the only chapter of his letter with the following warning: “Woe to them... who follow in the rebellion of Korah.”

Korah, like Cain and Balaam mentioned earlier in the same verse, is Jude's final example here of who NOT to follow. Korah is also an Old Testament character, like Cain and Balaam. Jude's point in using Old Testament characters is to demonstrate a single fact that has been true since time began – that men must obey God. In those eras, it was the worship the patriarchs had been given, starting with Adam and Eve, or the Law of Moses, like in the era of Balaam and now Korah. But whatever era, dispensation, time, place, culture, or people, there is one fact that reigns above all – we must obey God!

Korah's story is largely told in Numbers chapter 16. We are really going to dissect this chapter today, because we must understand the multiple lessons taught in this passage if we are going to avoid the error of Korah in the church today. Notice again that Jude pulls an Old Testament example to make a New Testament point – and that point is that we must obey God. And in Korah's specific example, we must learn to obey the authorities God has put into place in our time, just as there were authorities

put into place at the time of Korah that he had to obey (but he chose not to, to his destruction).

There are a few facts from this passage worth immediately repeating:

1) Three men of Israel – one from the tribe of Levi (the priestly tribe) and one from the tribe of Reuben (the first tribe) – challenged Moses’ right to exercise authority over the Israelites as a whole.

2) 250 other men joined them – they were “well-known community leaders”. This was basically a large mass of local politicians.

3) Verse 3 is the CRUX of the whole story – Korah and his group take a true fact that all of Israel was “holy”, or “set apart” by God – and then use that true fact to draw a false conclusion – that therefore they were just as qualified and had the same function as anyone in authority.

If this sounds familiar, there are multiple modern examples of similar faulty thinking today:

1) Modern social movements take true, Scriptural, factual verses like Galatians 3:28 and false draw the conclusion that because everyone is equal with regards to salvation in Christ, that they are also equal with regards to authority or some functions in the church. This is equally incorrect thinking in line with Korah’s rebellion.

2) Many churches today practice a modern form of church government called “congregational rule” where every month “business meetings” are held that determine the every course of the church by popular vote. This modern concept effectively makes any “elders” or any other titular group an authority by name only. Needless to say, mob rule and popularity contests a united church does not make. This is equally incorrect thinking in line with Korah’s rebellion.

3) Modern family structures now often reduce or eliminate the need for one spouse or the other, effectively eliminating God’s blessing as to the the authority, function, and purpose of the family structure. This is equally incorrect thinking in line with Korah’s rebellion.

But before we move on to the rest of the chapter, let us point out a couple of other facts: Moses had not appointed himself, or been elected by the people, or rose to

leadership by any method except that God had put him there. This was also true of Aaron, who was given the authority and function and RESPONSIBILITY of the priesthood from God, out of grace, not by Moses' hand or his own hand or popular election. Otherwise, the authority God had put into place is exactly what God had wanted, and that was all that was required. And if you study Moses and Aaron in the Bible, it was NOT leadership they originally sought. It was not a position they envied!

Also consider this: Moses could NOT perform Aaron's job, and Aaron could not perform Moses' job, nor could either assume the other's position. Moses was of the tribe of Levi, but he was not Aaron nor a son of Aaron, so he could not be a priest who served in the tabernacle. Moses' respected this division of authority so much that later on in this same chapter Moses tells Aaron that in order to intercede for the people in a particular situation, Aaron had to be the one to do it. It was not Moses' position or function. We would be wise to respect these divisions of authority and function in the church all the same, as Jude points in Jude 1:11 for our understanding today.

Let us continue reading in Numbers 16, verses 4 through 11:

Moses' countenance is downcast. He is devastated that Korah, Dathan, and Abiram have made up this false argument from true fact and rose up this mutiny of local leaders. Moses knows this will not and cannot end well unless he can talk them out of their usurpation, so he pleads with them!

First, Moses responds directly to his accusers. He tells them how God will sort this out and what everyone was to do in order for God to make his will clear to all who was present.

Second, Moses tries to talk them out of this nonsense in advance. Moses knows that if they follow the instructions given, they will fail the test, and suffer accordingly. There is no winning for Korah, Dathan, and Abiram here; there is no means or way this rebellion, mutiny, or insurgence is going to have a positive ending.

One major reason why churches fail or split in modern times is the deterioration of New Testament church government. When people assume authority they have not been given by God, when people believe in something (regardless if that belief is true or not!) but do not go through God's established authority for approval or critique, they disobey God, and there is no good end to that approach. The end does not justify the means! Even if our cause is just, even if our conclusion is right, and even if the results

are good, if the means we used to accomplish such ends was disobedient to God's established authority, God's hand is not in it, and any success is temporary at best.

So if or when a church uses an arbitrary popular vote system to defy the collective, unanimous will of the local eldership, they err, regardless if the vote was the right choice or not. Why? Because God has specifically said that those elders will answer to him for the direction of the church, not us. God has placed in their hands the responsibility, the weight, and the burden of authority and the church's success in all things Biblical. If they fail to do their job, that is on them and God will judge them. It is not our place to take God's judgment into our hands. However, if the church supersedes that authority through non-Biblical means, those who defied God's authority will likewise answer for their usurpation, just as Korah did.

Because this problem is an issue in so many churches, it is useful to also look at similar examples in the New Testament to confirm the above conclusions:

In Acts chapter 6, the Apostles gave the people the right to choose those who would distribute food to them. They chose by casting lots: I say this confidently because there are 25 references in the Bible – Old and New Testament – that show that when Jews or Romans decided issues in groups, they did so by casting lots. To assume they did so by another means is pure speculation, out of context, out of the time period, and out of the cultures present.

Then, the people presented their choices to the Apostles, "approving" the Apostles' approach. The word "approving" is the Greek Word "aresko", meaning "to please or to confirm with service, in submission". Otherwise, the approach the people took was not to assume authority from the Apostles whatsoever; the people listened and obeyed God's authority, "approving", or "confirming", it all afterwards as a recognition of their service completed under the Apostle's command. The word "confirm" means "to get behind, to approve, or to submit." It cannot mean the opposite!

All of the above resulted in a united church in Jerusalem where what was needing done was being done, both physically and spiritually, under the authority of the Apostles at that time.

The other New Testament example of similar behavior is in Acts chapter 15. By this time, the church at Jerusalem had elders, and notice in Acts 15 verse 2, verse 4,

verse 6, and verse 22 how the Apostles were always working with and co-equal with the local elders established in the church by that time. Elders did not exist yet at Acts chapter 6, because one of the qualifications of an elder is not to be a recent convert (1 Timothy 3:6). However, by Acts chapter 15, elders had been appointed, and were serving, and from this point on in New Testament history the Apostles never assumed their authority above the local eldership – they always worked with them.

Further evidence for this is in 1 Peter 5:1, where Peter, an Apostle, becomes a local church elder before assuming authority in that local church. If the Apostles felt the need to honor the position, authority, function, and responsibility of eldership, so should we!

As well, notice that it was the people who deferred to the Apostles and elders in matters of church policy in verse 2. In verse 6, it is precisely the Apostles and elders who looked into this matter. The congregation is mentioned elsewhere in the passage, but not here. This was not a congregational decision or vote. This was not to be decided by mob rule or a popularity contest. This issue was to be determined by the authorities God had established just as for all matters of church policy.

Notice too, in verse 7, that there was much debate among the Apostles and elders. If you think elders' meetings are unanimous, easy, no-questions-asked affairs, you are wrong! However, when it came time to address the congregation again in verses 12, 22, and 30, they were united in their message, and the congregation each time got behind them. Can the congregation or a group therein, question a decision? Sure! Can a congregation or a group therein, disagree with a decision? Absolutely. Job questioned God, and he was not considered sinful for it (though he did receive quite the lecture by God!). However, does the congregation have the right to usurp the established authority and disobey it? Absolutely not! Sometimes we disagree and obey under protest. So be it. There is nothing inherently wrong with that. The time when it stretches into sin and judgment is when, like Korah, a congregation actually disobeys the authority God has established. At that point, there is no recourse.

The 1st century Greek word for “vote”, or “psheos”, that exists in many writings outside the Bible at the time but does not occur in the Bible even one time. The truth is that mob rule, popularity contests, or any other kind of mass vote of a group of people that has been given the actual authority to override the elders' collective decision is not only non-Biblical, but anti-Biblical, and destructive. It tells God he was wrong for not

including it in His prescribed plan of authority for the local church. I do not think in any way that is a good idea!

Each time in the New Testament, the congregation confirmed, approved, or served with submission to decisions made by the local eldership. The letters of the various writers of the New Testament show such decisions were sometimes not received joyfully, and sometimes not obeyed. Obeying under protest was tolerated and discussed, but disobedience was always, universally condemned, no exceptions.

Many in our modern culture shun such a social structure. There are many movements to turn everything into a vote, or decide everything via mass rule. The more our country heads in this direction, do we really find it coincidental that the masses vote in for themselves massive tax breaks, cash subsidies, and other gifts from the common treasury? Do we really find it accidental that current generations have stolen from future generations at no expense to themselves, because they can merely “vote” for themselves access to someone else’s money, even those who are not even born yet?

If the church is run this way, will it be any accident that people will “vote” to give themselves more power, more authority, less responsibility, and less of a burden and service than what God has prescribed?

Hence, these are all the errors of Korah. And Jude warns us emphatically against them in verse 11 of his letter.

Returning to the story of Korah, we see Moses pleading with Korah, Dathan, and Abiram to abandon their futile and destructive cause. Moses makes three arguments against their position, mainly to Korah:

1) Korah was discontent along with the Levites who had joined him. They did not want to merely serve the priesthood, they wanted to be priests themselves, but that authority and function was reserved for Aaron’s sons alone.

2) Dathan and Abiram were not Levites at all, and so their position and function was completely outside the priesthood or its service.

3) Moses again affirms that Aaron was not chosen out of goodness (for Aaron was a sinner – remember the Golden Calf in Exodus chapter 32?). Instead, God had appointed Aaron, only out of grace, to the priesthood. Aaron’s appointment was not

from merit, but to demonstrate that even the authorities GOD had established were still men, and men capable of sin at that.

A good question but one that has a good answer is a similar dilemma – “What if there are times the elders in a local church make suboptimal decisions? What if they have not considered all the facts, or heard all the arguments, and ultimately make a poor or dysfunctional decision? Is there justifiable disobedience then?”

The answer to that question is the same one Moses gives: no. Elders, just like Moses and Aaron and his sons, are men, imperfect, prone to error. No human being escapes the traps of sin, logical miscalculations, and sometimes just plain poor judgment. Moses, Aaron, and every other authority ever established – even the Apostles – would make mistakes, lose people, and sometimes cause problems all on their own. But in no case did they lose their authority or position or function because of a wrong decision. The only exception is disobedience to Scripture, which 1 Timothy 5:19+20 provides the procedure of protesting an elder’s actions for.

The point is that even if Korah was “right” – even if Moses and Aaron had been leading poorly - that did not mean their authority had been taken away. In fact, as amazing as it is, God allowed the priesthood to continue as He originally assigned it even when priests of very poor character and action possessed the office. The sons of Aaron were not judged until Leviticus 10 for their offering of strange fire. The sons of Samuel were rotten. Eli, Samuel’s mentor and predecessor, was known for his gluttony and his poor parenting. Eli’s sons ran amuck. Yet, the requirement that the descendants of the sons of Aaron had to be the priests who served in the tabernacle was never changed by God until the Law of Moses was abrogated by Christ 1500 years later.

Sometimes God did remove poor leaders from Israel’s history; God did the same in the New Testament (think of Judas’ removal, or Demas in 2 Timothy 4:10). Sometimes leaders were called, but repented, like Paul with Peter in Galatians chapter 2. However, this did not remove Peter’s position as an Apostle or disqualify him for the eldership later on in 2 Peter 5.

Paul actually gives specific instructions to bringing a charge against an elder in 1 Timothy 5:19+20. That is how the qualifications or actions of an elder may be handled, no other. All the same, Korah had no right or even a proper charge to bring against Moses or Aaron. Korah took a Scriptural truth and ripped it out of context to make a

false argument and a rebellious munity. Although Korah was a Levite, and up to that point a faithful Israelite, his equality in the sharing of the atonement did not give him equality in authority, position, or function. We would be wise to note and follow these distinctions repeatedly brought up in the Bible, Old and New Testaments.

In verses 12 through 14, Dathan and Abiram, Korah's friends from the tribe of Reuben, try to make similar, but faulty arguments. Moses does not even answer them. Moses had delivered God's terms, presented God's arguments, and the time for talk was done. People will either comply or move on at that point. Endless discussion is not the means or the ends. Obeying God is the only acceptable means and ends.

Needless to say, Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, because they did not repent, were judged. The 250 who rose up with them in rebellion were as well judged. The rebellion of Korah goes down in Biblical history in the book of Numbers, but Jude brings it up again in Jude 1:11, in the second to last book of the New Testament, to make the point that the rebellion of Korah is just as relevant today as it was then, and we should heed his example of what not to do, all the same.

One of the absolute hardest things to do in the whole world – especially in today's world – is to voluntarily submit to an authority, ESPECIALLY if you disagree with that authority. I myself sympathize with that! So did Paul in Romans chapter 13. In the Bible many disagreed with not only God's established human authorities, but God Himself – but it was not their disagreement that they were judged for. Many disagreed under protest, but obeyed. They were spared judgment, and even God said of Job's many questions and protests, "My servant did not sin." Yet, the Bible also tells of those who disagreed, and would not obey, unto their perdition, like Korah. Let us not make that mistake.

This is also, honestly, the hardest part of becoming a Christian if you are not one already – putting yourself under God's authority – specifically the authority He has prescribed in His Word. The world today, especially our culture as it is now, is vehemently opposed to God's Word. They dismiss it, ban it, argue with it, and therefore disobey it. Standing against culture, "rebellious" against the world, is not an easy stance. Christians everywhere are ridiculed, marginalized, and also persecuted for going against the grain, being counter-cultural forces, and not bowing to society's ever-changing positions on just about everything.

But in that obedience to God there is victory over this world! Jesus said, “Take heart! For I have overcome the world!” This world is passing away – is this not evident? Wars, rumors of wars, incredible debt, out of control massacres, natural disasters, a lack of trust, no peace – tell me – is submitting to this world going to buy you one bit of lasting satisfaction, joy, and fellowship – or is submitting to God going to get you those very things? We truly must ask which we will submit to. In the words of Joshua, faithful leader of the second generation of Israelites, “Choose for yourselves this day who YOU will serve... as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”

Today, choose who you will serve – the Lord or yourself. One cannot have two masters!

“How to Spot Trouble” – Jude 12-13

Today’s message is partially inspired by my experiences had at this house we are moving into here in Callao →

- 1) You know that there are many cable television shows that, in about one hour’s time, take a house that is a “fixer-upper” and get it back into shape. I used to watch those shows and think, “That would be fun!” Well, let me tell you, IT’S ALL A LIE! 😊
- 2) Seriously, in the last 10 days, at this house we have been repairing, someone actually got hit square in the nose with a crowbar, two thumbs were damaged, someone fell through the floor, another person fell off a ladder, rot in the floor, walls, and roof has been discovered and replaced, and as many of you will see this afternoon, the house is still a work in progress! For example, there is a large mound of trash in my yard that could easily become a local landmark!

With a house like that, I have had many people ask me, “So did you know what you were buying when you bought this house?” And the honest answer is “no”. Well, spiritually, trouble can be lurking about in the church, in the home, and elsewhere but like a house seen just on the surface of things, the trouble may go undetected unless we apply Scripture to our perspective. Let’s read Jude 1:12-16:

“¹²These are the men who are [h]idden reefs in your love feasts when they feast with you without fear, caring for themselves; clouds without water, carried along by winds; autumn trees without fruit, [m]doubly dead, uprooted; ¹³wild waves of the sea, casting up their own [s]hame like foam; wandering stars, for whom the [o]black darkness has been reserved forever.

I. Vs. 12 – The First Truth is There is Trouble Among Us!

A. There is a lot of focus in the world in “security”:

- 1) To be physically safe
- 2) Fiscally sound
- 3) Medically healthy
- 4) And to help our family and friends do the same

These are all good goals that we should certainly strive for, but Scripture and life itself teaches us that thinking we can ever be totally and permanently secure in this world in any of those areas is a myth.

Instead, we must realize trouble is present, even nearby, and GOD’S WORD has both the detection tools and solutions to trouble.

B. Trouble comes from two primary sources:

1) Personal temptation: the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, or the pride of life

2) Satan

a) Satan can and does tempt us with sin

b) We know from the book of Job as well as from 1 Corinthians 10 that God limits Satan’s afflictions on us

c) Nonetheless, if we are not grounded in Scripture, communing with Christ regularly, and surrounding ourselves with encouragement from the church, failure will occur!

d) In my regular working with people in outreach and evangelism, I have learned and make a point to teach others, “You can’t do this alone.” In fact, the great myth in the world is that if you alone muster up enough gusto, enough angst, enough motivation, that you can do anything on your own. But Scripture teaches us that we need the fellowship of Christ and the church. If we deny ourselves that, one way or the other, we will fail.

e) In fact, I can guarantee you something – if you deny yourself communion with Christ and fellow Christians on the weekly basis God has established (Acts 20:7; Hebrews 10:25), the only “sure companion” you will have is Satan!

II. Vs. 12-13 – Scripture gives us the tools we need to detect trouble

A. The world teaches us to “follow our hearts” or “trust your gut”

1) Although each of us does this to some degree, Scripture teaches us these same things can actually be very deceptive!

Jeremiah 17:9 – “The heart is deceitful above all things; who can trust it?”

2) The problem with trusting your gut – if yours is anything like mine – is what you might be feeling is heartburn, not “a gut instinct!”

B. Using Scripture as our primary guide about how to detect and handle trouble in life is far more effective:

1) We know it is 100% accurate

2) It is based on God’s knowledge of us, which exceeds any of ours

3) It is based on thousands of years of experience in the world besides

4) People really have not changed since the creation of the world – the same basic sins and vices still cause the trouble they always have.

C. Going back to the house analogy → when we bought the house, it was at an auction. All the time we had was during the auction, and the only pairs of eyes we had examining the place was my wife’s and my own.

1) No home inspectors

2) No general contractors

So, without an expert, we could not see the trouble that lay beneath the surface of things.

All the same, if we try to live life without the constant resource of Scripture as our primary guide to how to live, we will not see the trouble beneath until “after the sale”, so to speak!

III. Vs. 12-13 – What Trouble Looks Like

Let’s read Vs. 12 and 13 again:

“¹²These are the men who are hidden reefs in your love feasts when they feast with you without fear, caring for themselves; clouds without water, carried along by winds; autumn trees without fruit, doubly dead, uprooted; ¹³wild waves of the sea, casting up their own shame like foam; wandering stars, for whom the black darkness has been reserved forever.”

A. Real quick – what was or is “a love feast?”

1) When Jesus gave the Lord’s Supper, it was in the context of a meal – specifically – the Passover.

2) When the early church met for the weekly worship, a meal often preceded or was part of the communion service.

3) The “love feast” is an example of an early tradition of the church – not a mandate of Scripture.

4) Nonetheless, Paul uses it as an example of “where to spot trouble.” It’s interesting that he uses an example of the church of where to spot trouble, and not the world!

B. There are characteristics of those who cause trouble:

1) No fear

2) Caring for themselves – implies selfishness, self-centeredness – all conversation and activity revolves around them or the things or people they are associated with

3) “Clouds without water, carried along by winds” – The appearance of Christianity, but no substance; easily tempted, swayed, or convinced by forces outside Scripture

4) “Autumn trees without root, doubly rooted, twice dead” – compare this with John the Baptist when Jesus spoke of him – “And what did you come out to see? A reed shaken by the wind? No, there has not been a man born among woman like the John the Baptist.”

So will we be hollow trees easily changed by the temptations and troubles of this world or solidly rooted and unmoved like John the Baptist?

5) “Wild waves of the sea, casting up their own shame like foam” – Some people are actually proud of their sin. I honestly meet people like this every week in evangelical visits. If you are “proud” to wear, act like, behave like, and associate with destructive things, what do you really think is going to happen?

6) “Wandering stars, for whom the black darkness has been reserved forever” – Stars in Scripture usually refer to either people in authority or people who have the potential to be in leadership but instead squander their lives on the world.

a) God has made each of us for a purpose – will we instead do our own thing?

b) God has made each of us with potential – will we waste it on temporary things in the world?

c) God gave each of us talents- will we waste them on temporary pursuits like the descendants of Cain?

d) God has made many leaders – but how many have wasted that skill on worldly accomplishments instead of the much-needed care of the flock of God?

CONCLUSION:

1) Will we learn and understand Scripture so we can expertly recognize trouble when we see it, and know how Scripture intends for us to respond?

2) Will we fall for the world's advice of following our hearts and listening to our gut and therefore fail to see the trouble beneath the surface of things?

3) Will we remember that trouble exists both in the world AND in the church and we must use Scripture's standards and methods for dealing with both?

4) Are we denying ourselves the potential God has given each of us by instead dedicating ourselves to a variety of worldly pursuits?

“Enoch’s Message” – Jude 14-16

1) Could you imagine knowing Adam, the first man, and Eve, the first woman? A man named Enoch did.

2) Enoch is mentioned in both Genesis chapter 5 and in the book of Jude.

3) What is really interesting about Enoch is that there is information written about him in Jude that is not in the Old Testament account about him. Otherwise, Jude gives us new information about Enoch that was not divinely revealed for nearly 3,100 years after he lived!

4) That may seem academic, but it is actually PROFOUND to proper understanding of the Bible:

a) The New Testament routinely gives us new information about Old Testament things: for example, Stephen tells us more about Moses, Peter tells us more about Lot, Paul tells us more about Adam, and here Jude tells us more about Enoch. There are many other examples.

b) Why does this matter? OFTEN times preachers, scholars, commentators, and others will NOT take into account New Testament information about an Old Testament character but instead consult some outside, contradictory source.

c) Let me give you a really good example of this and WHY this matters:

- In Exodus 3, Moses tells us God that “he is slow of tongue”, one of many excuses Moses gave God in an attempt to get out of what God was calling him too.

- Many modern rabbis assume Moses must have had a speech impediment of some kind, and many “Christian” (using that term loosely) just accept that conclusion hook, line, and sinker.

- But that is NOT what the Bible says!

- Acts 7:22 says, “²² Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians, and he was a man of power in words and deeds.”

- Now, think about the other excuses Moses gave God:

- That he was not good enough (Exodus 3:11)

- That he did not know enough (Exodus 3:13)

- That no one would listen to him (Exodus 4:1)

- Were any of those excuses true? No! Then why would we believe his excuse that he was slow of speech and tongue? Moses not only spoke fine, he was MIGHTY in words and deeds according to Acts 7:22.

- I am going to accept the testimony of Stephen. I suggest as New Testament Christians that we all do.

- And therefore, I hope you can see why it is important that we look at the New Testament for God’s COMPLETE revelation about ALL things Biblical, and not look to man or outside sources when God has already told in His Word all that we need to know.

- So also it is with Enoch then. About 3,400 years before Jude Moses did not know all there was to know about Enoch. After all, Enoch lived 1,600 years before Moses. No, it would take God through divine revelation in the letter from Jude to tell us all there is know about Enoch – and his message is PROFOUND.

II. Enoch’s Message is timeless

A) It was about 600 years after the world was made and Adam stepped foot on the earth was Enoch born. This was about 3400BC.

B) This was before Noah’s flood, the tower of Babel, the time of Abraham, and about 1,900 years before Moses.

C) And yet, Enoch's words echo through time, all of the Old Testament era, right into the book of Jude, and finally right into our ears with an incredibly relevant message:

Jude 1:14-15 – “¹⁴It was also about these men that Enoch, in the seventh generation from Adam, prophesied, saying, “Behold, the Lord came with ¹⁵many thousands of His holy ones, ¹⁵ to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their ungodly deeds which they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.”

D) Jude directly says in verse 14, “It was also about these men that Enoch... prophesied...”

1) So Jude is saying that what Enoch said 3,400 years before his own time was being fulfilled in the church age:

- a) That judgment has come and is coming
- b) That evil has always been around, and still is until Christ comes
- c) That final judgment against evil is coming, and it will be swift and complete, not leaving a trace

2) What we see in the world today in terms of the incredible violence, massive loss of life, and unbelievable hate and destruction can only be described one way – it is evil. It is sinful. It is inherently, absolutely, undeniably, of a supernatural, treacherous origin.

3) There have been 355 shootings in America this year alone. 355! Regardless of either other reason, there is one reason that reigns supreme – dating all the way back to the beginning of time – and that is evil itself.

4) This is precisely what Jude is trying to tell us! See the evil! Recognize the evil! Name the evil! Fight the evil! And hope, watch, and pray for its final judgment. Only then will there be peace!

- a) There will never be peace through any other means.
- b) There will never be hope through any other means.

c) There will never be unity, understanding, genuine tolerance, acceptance, and love through any other means.

d) If this world wants to see peace in its lifetime, there is only one answer – JESUS CHRIST!

e) Especially as we come around this Christmas season, the truly absurd ideas I keep hearing about “all-inclusive holiday parties” that attempt to “make everyone feel welcome” by excluding all religious ideas. I guarantee you, any “holiday party” that excludes the real reason for the holiday is going to exclude me, and I’m sure you, as well!

f) But is that really possible? Can we really expect people to embrace Christ?

III. Enoch’s message matters:

A) The Macon County jail is down to just 7 men presently. All but two of them have been there awhile, and while they have been incarcerated, I have had the opportunity to share Christ with each of them and had the privilege of following up on that from week to week.

B) This past Friday was especially worth telling you about. One of the two new guys was an 18 year old who the previous night had tried to kill himself. Because he was on close observation, he failed.

C) Nonetheless, the five long-term guys in the jail found about it right after, and have since surrounded him, encouraged him, talked with him, introduced Christ to him, and prayed with him.

D) When I came in Friday, they did not know when I was coming. When I arrived, six of them were sitting around the table upstairs, all with their Bibles out, having a Bible study out of Isaiah. I just jumped right in. We, as a group, witnessed to this 18 year old, and at the end of the study, we had a truly powerful prayer time.

E) At the end of that study, the other new guy asked to speak to me privately for a bit. We stopped and talked. He said he was truly touched by the study and prayer time, and he himself was ready to stop fighting God. He told me his story. Without going into a lot of detail, he is 36, done everything wrong in the book, and is finally

ready to admit it. He spilled it all out to me. And my wife who just happened to work that night for just 3 hours, said for the first time since he had been in there, he was civil and kind. The Lord is already working on that man's heart!

F) But the evening did not end there. Later on that night, I got a call from the jail that some people needed someone to talk to. God also opened up that door. Why? This is because what God does! He is in the business of saving men and women, and has been since the beginning! And that is precisely what Enoch is saying – God is real – and his message is still relevant – 5,300 years ago or today – and it all boils down to a choice – will we obey Him unto salvation, or disobey Him unto our own destruction?

IV. Enoch's message is for a reason rooted in the nature of mankind

A) There is truth to the statement that men can only be truly good with God.

B) Jude tells us why, based on Enoch's message in Jude 1:16 –

“These are grumblers, finding fault, following after their own lusts; ⁹they speak arrogantly, flattering people for the sake of gaining an advantage.”

C) There are clear-cut, obvious signs for the warnings Enoch speaks of:

1) People who complain (“grumblers” – a label – a perpetual habit)

2) People who look for faults in others or situations (“always negative”)

3) People who obey their flesh instead of God's Word

4) People who boast about themselves, instead of what God has done in and through them

5) And finally people who manipulate to get their way instead of seeking God's will God's way

V. Enoch's message tells us something profound about God:

A) Habakkuk 2:4 says, “The righteous shall live by faith.” This verse is repeated 3 times in the New Testament, all in the context of faithfulness, or obedience to God.

B) How are we faithful to God? By reading His Word, and doing what IT says:

C) It has been almost every week for the past I have had one or more people ask me a very simple question – “Do I have to...” and then fill in the blank.

D) It ranges with “Do I have to believe Jesus is the only way?” “Do I have to repent of all my sins, or can I keep one or two?” (They never ask this directly, but I get asked a thousand varieties of this same basic idea) Or, “Even though Christ and His Apostles commanded baptism, do I really have to do that?”

E) Let me put it in the word of Jesus in John 9:4 – “We MUST do the works of Him who has called us...”

F) Or in the words of Peter in Acts 10:44 – “Peter COMMANDED they be baptized...”

G) Or in the words of John the Baptist in Matthew 3:2, “Repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand.”

H) Or in any other words from Scripture → the point is that God has commanded it, so we must do it.

And the truth is you MUST ask yourself – “What benefit is there in waiting?” “What possibly benefit is there in uncertainty?” “What is worth the salvation of not only your soul, but all those you presently serve as an example for, right now?”

The truth is we can wait to fulfill God’s commands – but God never guarantees us “later” as that opportunity. What time He has graciously given is NOW. I may not get back to those doors at the final song before the end comes. And when it comes, neither I or anyone else can lead you to salvation – that time will have passed.

“What To Do Anytime” – Jude 17-25

I’ll admit up front these kinds of sermons intimidate me. What can a 34 year old say about “how to live your life” in the coming year?

That’s a legitimate question. But the answer is really not what I can tell you at all; it’s about what the Word of God has to say to all of us.

And God does have a plan, a purpose, a will for us every day!

Then ending of Jude, finishing this series, gives us all what God wants us all to do. Figuring out God's will is not actually difficult: He wrote that down. It is a matter of whether or not we will do it, in 2016 and beyond:

Let us read Jude 1:17-24:

“¹⁷ But you, beloved, ought to remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁸ that they were saying to you, “In the last time there will be mockers, following after their own ungodly lusts.” ¹⁹ These are the ones who cause divisions, ¹⁹ worldly-minded, ¹⁹ devoid of the Spirit. ²⁰ But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, ²¹ keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life. ²² And have mercy on some, who are doubting; ²³ save others, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh.

²⁴ Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, ²⁵ to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and ²⁵ forever. Amen.”

I. This is the end of Jude's letter to the churches and church leaders.

A. There is plenty of instruction and teaching throughout the letter, which we have waded through in detail:

1. Jude began with expressing a need to contend for the faith given once to all the saints.

You will remember that Jude gave us two very important signs of detecting falsehoods: people excusing or giving a license to immorality and denying Jesus as the ONLY way unto salvation.

2. Jude then gives us three examples in three verses of disobedience:

- a. The Israelites who complained and disobeyed after leaving Egypt
- b. The angels who left heaven to follow their own temptations like Satan
- c. Sodom and Gomorrah who likewise followed their own temptations instead of God's warnings and commandments

Jude says all of these serve as reminders that what has always been true is still true and will always be true: obeying God is paramount, and disobeying God leads to inevitable destruction,.

3. In verses 8-13, Jude builds on this reminder of obeying God by giving us further means of detecting falsehoods and trouble:

a. Those who place man's wisdom above God's Word

b. Those who reject authority

c. Those who complain and encourage division

d. The errors of Cain, Balaam, and Korah are all put as examples (just like Jude gave examples above) so we can understand again what not to do, as much as to understand of what to do, which is obey God's Word.

4. Then finally looking back at Jude's reference to Enoch we re-learn a truth that judgment has come and is coming:

a. And that can either be a joyous day beyond reckoning if we have been faithful to Christ or...

b. A day that exceeds all terror if we have listened to the carnal advice of this world instead.

c. Enoch's prophesy is 5,300 years old and yet its truth through God's Word reigns true even today.

.d. It is very important to realize that judgment in the practical sense does NOT wait until Christ's return – it happens upon each of our passing.

B. So before we get the final word from Jude in his letter, I want to review the following:

1. Jude is a short Bible book with only one chapter, but:

- References nine Bible stories and characters

- Ten specific warnings

- Thirty-five characteristics of unfaithfulness

- Eleven direct edicts of God's Will for us
- Twenty times Jude gives God praise
- Thirteen encouragements to the believer
- All in one chapter, just 25 verses, in 461 words!

2. Jude's book is the last before Revelation:

- The endgame of the Bible
- Where the final warnings, encouragements, fears, and hopes appear
- Where the final judgments are pronounced and salvation is described
- Where Eden is restored, Satan is destroyed, and death is no more
- Jude is the prelude to the end; it is the letter before the letter to end all letters.

- Jude's final words for us today are like the battle speech before a great victory: in Revelation, we literally march into the mouth of hell to come out the other side in absolute, total, untarnished victory.

- These words are for everyday life: a battle for the souls of man, by which God Himself has decided to equip us unto these good works.

II. Jude's encouragement in verses 17-25 begin with the command to "remember":

A. And remember what? The words of the Apostles!!

1. Jesus in John 17:20 said, – ²⁰“I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word;”

2. A VERY commonly missed fact is that Jesus ALL ALONG intended for us to learn how to live the Christian life largely THROUGH His Apostles!

a. There is a very unfortunate but common movement in many religious and church circles today – and that is only to focus on the words of Jesus.

b. They treat the Apostles' writings (and writings such as the book of Acts written by Luke) as secondarily important, if not flawed and inaccurate altogether.

c. But ironically, this goes against the very words of Jesus! He said, "who will believe in you through THEIR word!"

d. Do NOT be deceived by religious groups, televangelists, radio preachers, and the like that tell you to treat the "red letters" in your Bible above the rest of Scripture – that is a lie of the enemy – precisely what Jude tells us what to watch out for! All of Scripture is the Word of God!!

B. Jude tells us that remembering the Words of the Apostles is important because it is them who specifically warn us about certain falsehoods:

Vs. 18 – "18 that they were saying to you, "In the last time there will be mockers, following after their own ungodly lusts."

Jude then says in verse 19, "19 These are the ones who cause divisions, [w]orldly-minded, [w]devoid of the Spirit."

1. I want you to notice how Jude wraps up the end of his letter by reiterating one of the first warnings he first gave us: watch out for those who follow after their own lusts.

2. Excusing and granting a license for immorality is a sure sign of falsehood

3. What God has said is right is right and what God has said is wrong is wrong!

4. As the old phrase goes: "God said it, I believe it, that does it!"

5. As Jude says, a license for immorality always leads to divisions, being worldly-minded, and being devoid of the Spirit."

a. Divisions occur when one group of Christians decides they are going to bend a little on immorality – and then over time bend a lot!

b. Worldly-mindedness naturally follows. If we can bend one rule of God, why not others? If we can eventually flat-out ignore one rule of God, why not all of it? Then, after awhile, why not just do what we think is right?

The Israelites did the exact same thing back in Judges:

Judges 17:6 – “In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes.”

And there was nothing but chaos, confusion, poverty, judgment, and destruction. Do we really need any more evidence that man really has no idea what he is doing than just by looking at the world today?

c. Finally, a license for immorality leads to being “devoid of the Spirit.”

- NOW let us really dissect this truth – if you are devoid of the Spirit...

- Then the Spirit you received at your baptism is... gone!

- Then the Spirit you had indwelt is... gone!

- The Spirit who was your seal unto salvation is... gone!

- This is very REAL danger to the Apostles’ warning that Jude quotes!

III. Jude ends his letter by giving us the will of God for us in contrast to all these warnings:

A. Build yourselves up in the faith!

1. The faith that we must contend for is the faith we must build up!

- Deuteronomy 6:5-9 – “⁵You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. ⁶These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. ⁷You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. ⁸You shall bind them as a sign on your

hand and they shall be as [b]frontals [c]on your forehead. ⁹ You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”

B. Praying in the Holy Spirit

1. This is not mysticism, or transcendent, or an “out of body experience”
2. Praying in the Holy Spirit means praying in obedience – not praying hypocritically – and following our Lord’s instructions in prayer.

See Luke 18:1-8, Matthew 6:9-13, John 14:13, James 4:2-3, 1 Cor. 14:16

C. Keep yourselves in the love of God

1. There is so much false teaching out there that you have to do absolutely nothing to stay in God’s favor.

- If that were true, show me one Bible character who did nothing and God said, “Well done, good and faithful servant!”

- If that were true, show me one Bible character who just “believed” and did absolutely nothing else and God said, “Well done, good and faithful servant!”

2. No, every example, every Bible character – Old OR New Testament – who was considered faithful was obedient to God and His Word!

3. If there is any consistent theme from Scripture we should get, it is that we must obey God!

D. Have mercy on some, who are doubting

1. There is very little tolerance for doubt a lot of the time – it’s almost seen as the “cardinal” sin

2. Yet, the Bible’s prescription for doubt is not a beat-down, but mercy!

3. People who are doubting inevitably having SOMETHING the enemy is trying to DISCOURAGE them with. This is no small thing!

4. People who fall into unbelief have story after story (you can Google them all day long) of this or that happened, and “they just couldn’t understand

how God could let that happen”. That is doubt, exactly what Jude is talking about!

5. God knew we could not and would not successfully win people through chastisement in situations of doubt. People in those circumstances UNIVERSALLY need encouragement AND help.

6. James 2:15-16 says, “¹⁵ If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, ^lbe warmed and be filled,” and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?”

7. I have found – as I am sure most of you have noticed – that people tend to do one of two things: help but not share the Gospel, or share the Gospel and not help. Scripturally, we MUST do both!

E. Save others – snatching them out of the fire

1. Fire, in Scripture, is universally a symbol for judgment

2. Sometimes, foolishly, people pray for “a baptism of fire” – that is like praying for God to render judgment on you!

3. What Jude is telling us to do is to the church right outside the mouth of hell snatching people from the fire

4. This means there are people heading for the fire – ranging from the flagrantly disobedient and evil, to the unwise and the foolish.

5. If you are curious what God’s will is for your life – this IS it!

F. On some, have mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh

1. Again, what does God prescribe? Mercy!

2. I have found over and over again in personal evangelism that when I want to share the Gospel with someone, the first thing I need to do is LISTEN.

3. So many people do not have any real friends – and no one has LISTENED to them sometimes for years.

4. It is cathartic – merciful – just to let someone talk and get it all out. Then, once it’s all on the table, it can be sorted – one thing at a time – from there.

5. Yet, we personally do not tolerate sin. Getting out of sin for a new believer is a step-by-step, daily progression – but at no point in time in sharing the Gospel with someone and helping them with their daily progress can we participate in their misfires. The balance is this – we are merciful, patient, kind, and encouraging – but we do not cross any lines ourselves.

IV. Jude ends his letter with encouragement for US:

Jude 1:24-25 – “²⁴Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, ²⁵to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and ^lforever. Amen.”

A. Who can keep us from stumbling? Jesus!

B. How does Jesus keep us from stumbling? Through His Word!

C. What does His Word teach us about staying faithful? Obey God, build up in the faith, pray in the Spirit, have mercy, and save others.

D. It is a fact that if you are in the regular business of winning others for the Lord – staying faithful yourself becomes much more automatic. God blesses such efforts!

CONCLUSION: Jude’s conclusion is epic. In simply one chapter, he has shared with us a treasure chest of truths. Above all these truths is the truth-giver, Jesus Christ, and all of these truths and their subsequent blessings are available to us if we obey God.

Obeying God begins with faith – we believe Jesus is the Son of God – that He was virgin born, lived a perfect life, taught us, healed us, loved us, and died – for your sins and for mine. Then, he rose from the grave to defeat death once and for all, crushing Satan’s head once and for all.

Christ offers you life and life abundant – He offers you to be a son or daughter of the Kingdom of God. He offers you kinship in His family. He offers you love that never ends. Accept it – on His terms – today – and know peace all people everywhere desire.