

Sermon – Jude 8-16; Unity in the Body of Christ

Our scripture lesson this morning begins with *“In like manner these people also...”* or as the Christian Standard Bible translates it, *“In the same way these people...”*. So, what Jude is doing is relating the false teachers we have been discussing with the three examples of rebellion we looked at last week. The nation of Israel in the exodus, the fallen angels and the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Jude is telling us that these false teachers, these *“ungodly”* men as he calls them, didn’t learn the lessons of these examples of God’s divine judgement. He goes on to write, that these false teachers *“rely on their dreams”*, He calls them dreamers – the Greek here has the sense of “to have supernatural dreams or visions”.

What we see Jude doing here is comparing them to the false prophets that were condemned in the book of Deuteronomy. We read in Deuteronomy Chapter 13 (Deut 13:1-3a, 5a) *“‘If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or wonder that he tells you comes to pass, and if he says, ‘Let us go after other gods,’ which you have not known, ‘and let us serve them,’ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams. But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has taught rebellion against the Lord your God,”*

This false teaching manifested itself in two ways. First is says, that they *“defile their flesh”*. Remember back in verse 4 it said that they turned *“the grace of God into sensuality”* or *“blatant immorality”*. By rejecting God’s will for themselves, they then *“reject authority and slandered the glorious ones”*. Some translations say *“despised the glorious ones.”* In other words, these are the angels that had remained faithful to God. One of the commentators that I read, said that this makes sense in that it was the Jewish belief that angels were the mediators of God’s law at Mount Sinai. So, in criticizing the angels they were denouncing both the law and those who God had used to deliver it.

Jude continues saying; *“But these people blaspheme anything they do not understand. And what they do understand by instinct—like irrational animals—by these things they are destroyed.”* These men have no spiritual discernment, they are blind to all spiritual realities. Their way of life is to allow fleshly instincts to rule their lives. Jude is describing men who have lost all awareness of spiritual things and for whom the things demanded by fleshly animal instincts are the only standard. William Barclay in his commentary put it this way, **“It is a terrible thing for a man to reach a state where he is deaf to God and blind to goodness, and that is the stage which the men Jude attacks have reached”**

Now Jude goes on to give three more examples from Jewish history to parallel these wicked men. But this time he uses three specific individual examples instead of the three general examples he used previously.

The first example is that of Cain. Jude says that they “*have gone the way of Cain*”. Recall the story of Cain and Abel from Genesis chapter 4. They each brought an offering to the Lord and God had regard for Abel’s offering but not for Cain’s. This so infuriated Cain that he rose up and murdered his brother Abel. In the Jewish tradition, the rabbis taught that Cain was the type of the cynical, materialistic unbeliever who only thought of himself.

Next Jude says (I like how the NIV translates this) that they, “*they have rushed for profit into Balaam’s error*”. The story of Balaam is found in Numbers chapters 22-25 and chapter 31. Recall the King of Moab, Balak, was afraid that the nation of Israel was so large coming up out of Egypt that they would destroy the nation of Moab. So Balak sent to the prophet Balaam and asked him to curse the nation of Israel so that he could defeat them. Balaam initially inquired of God who told him that he was not to go to Balak nor curse Israel. Balak sent again offering great riches to Balaam if he would come and curse the nation of Israel. Eventually Balaam tried to go to Balak riding on a donkey and we all know the story of Balaam and the donkey. An angel came to stand in front of the donkey but only the donkey saw the angel and wouldn’t move. Balaam began to beat the donkey and it says that God opened the mouth of the donkey to speak to Balaam and at the same time God opened Balaam’s eyes to see the angel and Balaam knew that he had sinned. The story continues for a few more chapters in Numbers but the take away or the moral of the story as we like to say is that Balaam stood for the covetous man who was prepared to sin in order to gain reward and he was willing to teach others to sin also.

Finally, Jude writes that these “*ungodly*” men, “*have perished in Korah’s rebellion.*” This story is found in Numbers Chapter 16. This is the story of Korah who was a Levite and he took 250 prominent men of Israel and rebelled against Moses. They basically said to Moses, “Who do you think you are to exalt yourself over the Lord’s assembly - We are all holy and just as good as you.” You see they wanted to be priests over Israel, a position that God had set aside for a special few. The story ends with God opening up the earth beneath them, swallowing all of them including their families and then sending fire to completely consume them. So, what we see is that Korah represents the man who refuses to accept the authority of those over him and reaches for things he has no right to have.

Jude goes on to write: “*These people are dangerous reefs at your love feasts as they eat with you without reverence.*” The word “*reefs*” in the Greek actually has more of the sense of “a submerged or half-submerged rock” on which a ship could ship-wreck. William Barclay in his commentary says that the “*love feasts*” or the Agape was one of the earliest features of the church. The apostle Peter in 2 Peter 3:13 put it this way, “*They are spots and blemishes, delighting in their deceptions while they feast with you.*”

The “*love feast*” was a meal of fellowship held on the Lord’s Day. Everyone brought what they could and all shared alike. These wicked men were using the “*love feast*” as an opportunity to gratify themselves instead of serving others.

Jude continues with, “*They are shepherds who only look after themselves.*” The duty of a leader in the church is to shepherd the flock of God, but they cared more for themselves than the sheep. Someone who feels no responsibility for the welfare of others except himself stands condemned.

Jude finishes with describing these men in terms that display just how utterly worthless these false teachers are. He writes that they are “*waterless clouds, swept along by winds; fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, uprooted; wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame; wandering stars, for whom the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever.*”

“*Waterless clouds*” describes clouds that pass over head in the midst of a drought but bring no water, “*trees without fruit*” pictures a staving person coming on an orchard with no fruit on the trees, and “*waves crashing on the shore*” is a picture of the dead sea where drift wood that is thrown up on the shore is bleached white like bones from all of the minerals in the water. Each of them useless.

Finally, Jude drives the point home, writing, that these people are “*grumblers, malcontents, following their own sinful desires; they are loud-mouthed boasters, showing favoritism to gain advantage.*” We see that these are men who are governed by their desires with no self-discipline and no self-control with no desire to serve and no sense of responsibility.

So, after all of these negative examples what is the take away for us. All of these examples can leave us with a negative, helpless feeling. But the lesson for us, that it is all about “**self**”. The lesson Jude is showing us here is that we have a choice, are we “**selfish**” or “**selfless**”? These “ungodly” men were selfish, only concerned about themselves.

We are called to be different; we are called to be selfless. We read in our Call to Worship, “*but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, that is, Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.*”

When each of us is working for the benefit of each other, when we all do our part in body of Christ, when we emulate the sacrificial, selfless example of Jesus Christ who gave His very life for us, then we as a church will grow and will truly build ourselves up in love by what each of us has to give to the Church as a whole and to each other as individuals.