

*Jude 8-11*

We are working our way through the book of Jude. You may want to turn there if you have a Bible with you.

Last week we looked at the part of this letter where Jude, in his argument about the dangers of rebellion and lust and presumption, mentioned that even some of the angels fell into all that and are *now* suffering and will *eternally* suffer God's judgment because of it. Jude's assertion there was that if even angels are in danger of falling from the highest spiritual heights and then are punished because of their immoral decisions, certainly we can't think we're immune from either.

Presuming upon God's grace: that was the issue in the church to which Jude wrote. It's been an issue to some degree in every church since. It is the temptation of *antinomianism*: misusing God's grace and using it as a license to sin or to do whatever we want to do, with immunity from judgment.

Jude says, "It doesn't work like that, and we put our eternity at risk if we dare think that it does."

Now, all that stuff about the angels that we got into last week: I told you that's where this book typically loses us, because we don't have the same context for this angel stuff as Jude's original readers did.

But, let me say that if the fallen angel argument from last week seems weird to you, that's nothing compared to where Jude goes today.

Let me read that for you – Jude, verses 8 through 11:

*In the very same way, on the strength of their dreams these ungodly people pollute their own bodies, reject authority and heap abuse on celestial beings. <sup>9</sup> But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not himself dare to condemn him for slander but said, "The Lord rebuke you!" <sup>10</sup> Yet these people slander whatever they do not understand, and the very things they do understand by instinct – as irrational animals do – will destroy them. <sup>11</sup> Woe to them! They have taken the way of Cain; they have rushed for profit into Balaam's error; they have been destroyed in Korah's rebellion. [NIV]*

Jude is talking now about the arrogance of these who are promoting this antinomianism, in the form of immoral sexual behavior. Verse 8's "In the very same way" refers back to examples in verses 5 -7. Just like the Jews after their deliverance from Egypt; just like the fallen angels who rebelled against God and His ways; just like those people of Sodom and Gomorrah, **so do these men** who've wormed their way into this church, as verse 8 states: "**pollute their bodies, reject authority and slander celestial beings.**" All in the name of grace, these people were committing sexual sins; they were rejecting God's word about what godly behavior is along those lines; and in doing so, they were misrepresenting God's very character.

When a person *says*—and not just when they say, but when they proclaim—and teaches others, "Oh, God is fine with you doing something," when, in fact He is not fine with you doing it, *that* is *slandering* the person of God.

And this is nothing less than enraging to Jude. You can't help but sense that by the way he is writing here.

*"In the very same way as the Jews whom God delivered from Egypt, just like those rebellious angels, and just like those of Sodom and Gomorrah, these weasels [that's a loose translation, by the way], these weasels pollute their bodies, reject authority and slander celestial beings,"* Jude says, "**all on the basis of their dreams.**"

Now, notice this: Jude gives us a clue here as to the basis of these people's claimed authority to say the things they were saying. Apparently, they were claiming that all this was revealed to them in dreams, and that their dreams were visions from God. They were telling people that these new moral codes they were espousing were special revelations from God to them, you see?

Remember – Gnostic thinking. "God has given us special knowledge that others don't have – and that special knowledge is that God has changed His mind about these sorts of behaviors. What was once thought of as bad is no longer bad – God told us so."

But Jude says, "No, that is not the case!" In fact, this whole argument of theirs is, what Jude calls, "*the heaping of abuse on celestial beings.*"

Now, what are the celestial beings that Jude says were being abused – or more literally, blasphemed?" The Greek word is actually *blasphemeo*.

That's a good question – one that scholars have struggled with.

Some people think this is Jude's way of saying, again, that they were rejecting Jesus – which would go along with verse 4 there, where we're told they were denying Jesus as the only sovereign and Lord.

<sup>4</sup> *For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.*

Others have suggested these celestial beings were angels – those who typically deliver God's Word to his prophets on earth, and the blasphemy against them was that they were actually delivering these messages of legitimized immorality – which could never be.

Either way, Jude's assessment was that they were egregiously speaking against – and in so doing, misrepresenting – the divine, and this was a great, great sin to Jude. It spoke of their extreme arrogance, which he illustrates with this strange story about the devil, the angel Michael, and the body of Moses.

Now, this is something totally weird to us, but it wasn't to Jude's original readers. This recounting all comes from a very popular, first century Jewish book, *The Assumption of Moses*, which everyone who would have originally read this would have known.

How does this go? Well, we know the story of Moses' death from Deuteronomy 34.

*The Assumption of Moses* goes on to say that the task of burying Moses' body was given to the archangel, Michael. But as he endeavored to do that, the devil tried to take Moses' body, claiming that, since Moses was a murderer (because he killed that Egyptian who had beaten one of his fellow Hebrews), Moses was not worthy of a divine burial.

That was the devil's claim. And in response to that claim, Michael simply said to the devil, "The Lord rebuke you."

Now, Michael is an archangel. He's mentioned three times in the Old Testament as a chief prince and protector of Israel, and he's mentioned in Revelation as the leader of Heaven's army who casts Satan out of Heaven.<sup>1</sup> In non-Biblical Jewish literature, Michael is presented as the leader of the chief angels that preside over the heavenly counsel of angels.

So, the short of it is that to the Jew, Michael is a big, big deal in the angelic world.

And the devil, well, the devil. Scripture says he is the father of lies, the deceiver of humanity, the rebellious, fallen angel who took on God the Father and lost, and is now out to destroy all he can before he, himself, is destroyed.

So here you have Michael, the greatest of the good angels, doing a task that God had commissioned him to do, and you have the devil trying to prevent him from doing God's will by making false claims that he had no standing to make.

The picture is that if ever there were a time for a person to speak against another, you'd think Michael would be justified in doing so against the devil. And yet, Michael neither spoke evil against the devil, nor brought accusation against him.

So, Jude is saying, "If the greatest of the good angels refused to speak evil of even the worst of the evil angels, even in these circumstances, then surely no human being ought to speak any evil of any spiritual being."

This is only sensible to Jude. It's only good and right and respectful and reverent to treat people – and certainly celestial beings, angels, even fallen ones – as Michael does, thus to assume our rightful position and to leave judgment to God.

Yet the false teachers thought nothing of declaring themselves judge and so bringing their verdicts against even spiritual beings who disagreed with them. So, you see, the sin of the false teachers was precisely the sin of Satan himself: to take God's authority upon themselves and to make judgments that are not theirs to make.

When you begin to comprehend Jude's argument here, it quickly becomes a powerful lesson on human judgment of others – human castigation of others. It brings to mind Jesus' words from Matthew 7, where He said, "***Do not judge, or you, too, will be judged, for the in same way you judge others, you will be judged.***"

Now, that's not to say it's impossible for you and me to determine right from wrong and good behavior from bad. Certainly, we can.

But it's not ours to condemn – to appoint ourselves judge, jury and jailer. Those roles belong to God alone, as the angel Michael shows us – even where the devil is concerned.

Why? Why is this so? Why is this such a big deal to Jude?

Because, unlike God, we simply don't know all things. We are all ignorant, to some degree, about the motives, intentions and circumstances of other people, just as – Jude points out next – these false teachers were.

Jude goes on there in verse 10, "**These people slander whatever they do not understand.**"

To dare to dismiss celestial beings. To misrepresent their character. To falsely attribute sinful messages to them. To take on authority that is not given to a person. None of this is the sort of sensible, rational behavior that is expected of humans, you see?

It's the culture of denial, of name-calling, of shouting down whatever we don't like, and then, with our fists in the air, demanding our own way.

It's less than human; in fact, it's animalistic, and that is the core of Jude's assessment.

These false teachers have so given in to their own lusts and base desires that they have given up their ability to think and speak with the thought and the rationality and the civility of humans. They have so justified their own lusts and behavior that those things were **now controlling them**, such that anything that disagreed with them – anything that might put limits on their own behavior – anything that attempted to stop them from doing whatever they wanted to do, they either dismissed or slandered.

They're operating, not in any Godly, rational way, but only by base instinct, you see?

And Jude says there in verse 10, "**and that kind of behavior – if we operate only by instinct, fallen as we are, we wind up living like irrational animals. And that sort of life will destroy us.**"

These people had given in to the power of sin – given way to it – and in doing it, they had lost a part of what it means to be human – to be made in God's image.

We're different from the rest of creation because we are capable of reasonable thought – like God. We can stand back and evaluate. We can consider, "what will this do to me in the long run?" We can hear and consider counsel from outside ourselves. We can think logically. We can look two or three steps ahead of where we are now. We can plan. We can assess the effects of behaviors on ourselves and on others, and then make rational decisions as to the wisdom of behaving like that.

All that, and much more, is unique to humanity, because we're made in God's image.

We don't have to simply give in to every drive, every passion, every desire that wells up inside of us.

That's how animals behave.

We're not animals. We're different. Unique.

But, if we stray from God's ways long enough, we can become like animals again.

<sup>1</sup> Daniel 10:13, 21; 12:1. Revelation 12:7

If we reject God's standards of good and right and simply leave it to ourselves to determine that by whatever feels good to us – if we give in to the feeding of every sinful behavior and desire and don't care about the consequence, we will degenerate into something less – something far less than what God designed us to be.

And, as Jude says, we'll wind up destroying, not only ourselves, but those who are unfortunate enough to fall into our sphere of influence.

In C. S. Lewis' Narnia series book *Prince Caspian*, the children were called back to Narnia to fight a revolution, but found Narnia to be a very different place – a darker place than when they'd left.

In chapter nine, they are very nearly attacked by a bear. Now, of course, many animals could talk and reason and function as humans in Narnia, and so in seeing the bear, the children are hesitant to kill it, because they don't know if it was a friendly, talking bear or a wild bear.

Their dwarf guide, however, killed it immediately as it charged at Lucy.

Reflecting on it later, Lucy said to her sister, "A horrible idea has come into my head. Wouldn't it be dreadful if someday men started going wild inside, like the animals here have, yet still looked like men, so you'd never know for sure which were which?"

Woe to them, Jude says, and he gives three examples of what this sort of degeneration is like.

He says first, "**They have taken the way of Cain,**" who was the first to murder, and it was his own brother! Cain let his own desires master him; he did exactly as he liked, and in so doing, he rejected God and God's order in the world.

Second, Jude says, "**They have rushed for profit into Balaam's error.**" Balaam was a false prophet, who deceived people for payment. Just as Balaam was consumed with the desire for money, so were these false teachers consumed by greed and immorality, desiring to do as they pleased.

Finally, Jude says, "**They have been destroyed in Korah's rebellion.**" Korah led 250 leaders in rebellion against Moses, trying to usurp his leadership. God quashed Korah's efforts by having the earth open up and swallow all 250 rebels.

Just as these false teachers were leading people in a rebellion against God's order and His leader, so would they share in Korah's fate – and the fate of anyone else who refuses God's will and way.

Woe to those who let their base desires direct their decisions and become their master. They will fail, and they themselves and those they lead will be consumed into hell for their rebellion.

Woe to them.

You see,

to act only on our basest desires,  
to reject God's determination of right and wrong,  
to presume upon God's grace,  
to abuse God's own messengers of truth,  
to cease thinking logically and rationally,  
to degenerate into something less than we are and  
less than God made us to be,  
and to teach others to do the same...

This is what Jude writes to warn against: that is, becoming

this, ourselves, and following others who have become this already

Friends, what to you is the determiner of right and wrong, good and bad? Is it God and His word, or the way you feel inside – the desires and lusts that well up within?

To whom do you listen for counsel? Do they speak the word of God – or the word of self-satisfaction?

Our world is consumed with self, and we see the evidence of that flung all through the news day after day. "I...want... my... way!"

And as a people who have in large measure rejected God, we are quickly becoming less than what we are – less than what God made us to be.

We stand for only that which makes us happy – that satisfies our appetites.

We speak against the word and messengers of God. And we insult and slander anything and anyone who disagrees with us.

We are living Jude in our day today.

But you and I are not doomed to live this ourselves.

God still offers redemption – salvation, cleansing and purity – for all who will turn and follow Him.

And God offers the power of His Spirit to resist the evils of our day – and the temptation to become like them in the way we live and respond to others.

The answer to the way of Cain and Balaam and Korah – the answer to preserving life and self – is only found in the saving grace and power of Jesus Christ: to submit ourselves to Him, so that He can make us all He intended us to be.

He is the answer to that rebellion that wells up inside and takes us so far from where God intended us to be.

He is the answer to all that ails the world.

Are you seeking Him first in your life?

Closing Prayer:

God, may it be so in my life and in all of our lives. May we not give in to the temptation that is so strong around us to feed only self, to satisfy every lust that arises, to ignore or marginalize Your word and Your messengers that, even in these days are trying to communicate with us: messages calling for repentance, for a return to a reverence for You and Your word and Your evaluation of goodness and rightness and justice.

Father, may we always be found on Your side – becoming, by the power of Your Holy Spirit, more and more human, more and more humane, more and more like you intend us to be – more and more like Jesus. Amen.

Closing Song: *Lord, Speak to Me*

Benediction:

May the Lord bless you and keep you.

May He make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you.

May He lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

We know He will indeed do these things for His own, as we'll walk in His ways. So, may He find us doing so faithfully – contending for the faith – until we see Him face to face.

Amen.