

Jude 12 – 13

(Readings: 1 Corinthians 11:17-34; Jude 1-13)

Being Upfront!

Jude has thus far proved to be a very insightful analysis of how the wrong people get into positions of prominence in the Church of Jesus Christ. Jude certainly shows the Spirit of his half-brother, the Lord Jesus, in clearly identifying and condemning what is going on.

But the need is so urgent for the Church of Christ then, and for us today, that Jude continues on in these two verses to dig even deeper into these false brethren. It's not enough that we need to watch out, that we need to realise this is nothing new, and that we see they will be caught out. That's why in the verses 12 and 13 Jude goes on to 'being upfront.'

'Being Upfront' is a popular modern expression. It means that we are honest about things, especially what we are like and what we would want.

Well, in this case, the Lord is being honest about these people. And especially He is very open about what these people are like by telling us about where they are, who they are, and what they are.

Jude does this here through a series of word pictures. Word pictures that use images of when things are not right in ourselves and not right in the world around us.

These are also word pictures which are strikingly modern. Some of these expressions sound almost like the titles of paintings done by expressionists, surrealists, and magic realists.

Indeed, as we read through verses 12 and 13 didn't you find it's a terribly spooky landscape filled with death and barrenness?

The first part of verse 12 might seem a bit removed from what follows. But it actually shows this death and barrenness in the worst possible place for it to be. Because exactly where the congregation expresses its unity – its life - around the table of the Lord – at the Lord's Supper itself – there you have those who are determined to do the very opposite. They are set on destroying it!

Notice Where They Are

This is why we begin with the aspect that picks this out. This is why our first point says to us: **NOTICE WHERE THEY ARE!**

The original Greek starts here with the word for "love feasts". And these "love feasts" are clearly part of what the Church of Christ joined in together then. You see, the "love feasts" were those occasions in the Early Church where Holy Communion took place.

These days many churches will join the spiritual meal with a physical meal, and that's close to what they did then. It was and it is a special time of fellowship together. And it was very much meant to be a genuine Christian fellowship together.

Sadly, however, this is not the way it always developed in the Early Church. We read in 1st Corinthians 11 that far from bringing God's people together it only accentuates the social divisions there were in the congregation. The rich took their own special food and went ahead and ate it all on their own. Unlike our luncheons where everyone shares the food they bring and they can eat from all of the food that is brought, they had their own little cliques. They did not come to serve but to be served!

How completely opposed that is to the Spirit of the Gospel! That's why Paul in 1st Corinthians 11 straight away draws in what the Lord's Supper is truly about and the only way it can be a blessing to believers. In fact, he even goes on to say how some have been severely punished by the Lord because they weren't commemorating the body and blood of their dear Saviour.

This is why Jude describes those false brethren at the love feasts as “blemishes”. Well, that is how some translations put it. But others differ. There is a difference about what the original word means here.

You see, the original meaning of the Greek word is “reefs.” This term refers to “a hidden reef” or “a dangerous obstacle” on which a ship can be wrecked when it is approaching land. Some commentators therefore point to this speaking of heretics who mix in with the Christian community but haven’t yet been recognised as a danger to the church.

Over time, however, this word became translated as “blemishes”. We don’t know exactly when but it is helpful that 2nd Peter 2:13 speaks of false teachers also as “blots and blemishes”, though through using different Greek words.

Added to this is the very public situation Jude pictures in verse 12. It’s obvious they stand out here – they are far from hidden! A “blemish” is something you notice. Much as you might not like one on your own body, if you have it you know about it!

This follows through from what we have already seen about these people. They who are that full of themselves you notice them alright.

And added to this is the fact that they eat with them “without the slight qualm.” There is no sense of guilt or contrition in the way these men behave. Actually, to see them there you would honestly think they believe they have every right to be there!

Yet in the situation of joining together around the Lord’s table and remembering His death, this is definitely inappropriate. This should be the place of a respectful humbleness.

This is like the time when a believer lay dying in the intensive care ward of a hospital. As the family could only be with him one or two at time, most of them were in a nearby waiting room.

It was a sad situation. The prognosis was devastating. That young man was going down hill by the minute. And then the minister of a neighbouring congregation pops in, his face all beaming. He let everyone know he was there to help. And he said it in such a way that it was clear he was the one to be able to help!

That’s the attitude of those men Jude describes. They were themselves pastors, but pastors only interesting in feathering their own nests. They were feeding only themselves – especially their own egos.

Back in the Old Testament the Lord’s prophets had also spoken about such men. In Ezekiel 34:2 we read of those shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves. They get all the privileges that go with their offices but they bear none of the responsibilities. That’s why the Lord goes on to say to them in Ezekiel 34, through His prophet, “You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally. So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered they became food for all the wild animals.”

How accurately doesn’t that describe many pastors today? They who are so involved in everything but being pastors. And when it comes to seizing business opportunities they are very quick to franchise or market it out.

NOTICE WHERE THEY ARE, congregation. And then, in the second place, NOTICE WHAT THEY ARE.

Notice What They Are

Jude now moves into a vivid description of the make-up of these men. With four strong, clear images, he brings out what they really like. Using four metaphors taken from nature, Jude shows they take all and give nothing. They are so greedy for money that their selfishness is there one and only focus.

The first of these figures of speech is half-way through verse 12. There Jude says, “They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind.”

Now, how many times during the recent drought weren't farmers looking up expectantly at those passing clouds? Their parched fields so much need lots of rain. But how many times didn't those clouds just drift past, blown by the wind? Those clouds didn't even leave a single drop. “Fat lot of good that was!”

And that's exactly what those false teachers are like. They're just full of hot air. Much as they might have the gift of the gab, and much as that gab might fool people, when you honestly look at what they say and do, there's nothing in it.

Peter in his second letter chapter 2 verse 17 says that, “These men are springs without water and mists drive by a storm.” There's nothing in them.

It's a description found in the Old Testament too. Proverbs 25:14 perceptively noted, “Like clouds and wind without rain is a man who boasts of gifts he does not give.”

Much as they may claim to be enlightened and advanced they have nothing for nourishing your spiritual life, because empty words aren't going to give you the energy to keep going.

So they are deceivers. And then we see that they are useless. Jude goes on to say next that they are “autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted – twice dead.”

The picture here is of fruit trees that no longer bore fruit. Autumn was the time for these trees to produce a harvest but they didn't have any.

To the orchardist, these are useless trees. The best thing that can be done is to pull them out to make room for other trees. As Jesus said in John 15, such wood is only good for burning.

There is an added damnation here because it is said they are “twice dead.” It is an expression which refers to spiritual death. It too is found in the Old Testament. Proverbs 2:22 says, for example, “the wicked will be cut off from the land, and the unfaithful will be torn from it.”

And right at the end of the Bible, in Revelation, we read about the second death, which is the judgment of those rejecting the gospel (Rev.2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8).

So not only did these false teachers have no substance in their teaching, there was nothing in them either. Even though they're living they're really dead – spiritually dead. This is what Paul spoke of in 1st Timothy 5:6. There he says, “the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives.”

It's obvious that these ones have no faith. And then it is also clear these ones are without any shame. This is the meaning of the next word picture. For verse 13 says of these false brethren that, “They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame.”

Here Jude mixes the physical elements of nature with the moral qualities of man. So he compares waves with shame.

It's a metaphor that's also appeared in the Old Testament. The prophet said in Isaiah 57:20, “the wicked are like the tossing sea, which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mud and mire.”

There is no peace for the wicked. And that's because their evil nature drives them on to further depravity. Just like you would not want to be anywhere near the coast when a storm is crashing against the shore, so you need to keep right away from these men. The evil they do is so powerful, uncontrolled, unpredictable - if you're not careful you'll get sucked in!

If this makes you more than a little afraid then that's exactly what Jude wants you to feel!

You have to turn right away from them – don't listen to them and don't look at what they're doing! Just look at the mess they leave everywhere! That's what the foam represents – it's the seaweed and other rubbish borne on the crest of the wave and then dumped on the beach.

And how many times haven't folk used similar expressions after they were taken for a ride by such false pastors? They were sucked in and then spat out!

And then there is the last word picture. The metaphor which wraps it all up! Here Jude makes it clear how lost they are.

So, what are “wandering stars”? Well, one thing is clear and that is they are not stars to be followed. They cannot be guiding stars simply because they are not following a straight path – they are wandering.

Now, as stars they do shine. But don’t fix any faith on them. They are like the blind guides the Lord describes in Luke chapter 6. There in verse 39 he says that any blind person being led by a blind person is only going to end up in pit with his guide!

This figure of speech would have been particularly well known for Jude’s hearers as the apocryphal book of Enoch describes the stars which have transgressed and so have been bound into a prison in which they’re being kept forever. This brings back to mind verse 6 and the fate of the fallen angels.

The allusion to Enoch is especially fitting. For while the wicked angels lost their heavenly home by disobeying God, and so fell to destruction, Enoch gained heaven by obeying God, and was saved.

The destruction of the false teachers is accentuated by the term “blackest darkness.” It also brings back the end for the rebellious angels, but now it’s a judgment clearly pronounced upon these “certain men.” They are doomed for eternal damnation. That’s why Jude has used these four vivid illustrations from nature. He wants the believers then, and us today, to realise those who are so set against the gospel. ‘Notice,’ he says, ‘where they are and what they!’ Because they are right here, sitting next to you but not being one with you. And they are right out there – selfish shepherds, useless clouds, barren trees, foaming seas, and totally lost for all life.

How much different isn’t your life, dear believer! You don’t spoil any particular love-feast – you enjoy a lifelong love-feast! You aren’t tossed around by winds of false doctrine – you are carried along by the Holy Spirit! You aren’t a tree that produces no fruit and so is destroyed – you’re always producing, and after a life of it you’ll go home to be with Christ, in glory and honour! And you certainly aren’t going to the darkness that’s black forever – you’re going to live in the most glorious light!

Do you get the picture? Then let’s celebrate around the best word-picture of them. Let’s see Christ’s doing and dying in the Lord’s Supper! Let’s enjoy the foretaste of eternity. Let’s live like we’re never going to die.

Because, you know, we’re not!