

Jude 4

(Readings: 2 Peter 2:1-22; Jude 1-4)

Watch Out!

What Jude has told us of so far is something like someone about to go on a roller coaster ride for the first time. This is because going on a roller coaster ride isn't like an everyday thing that you do. It's not like getting in a car or on a bus.

You see, the person about to go on that has been prepared for the ride. Perhaps he's been told all about it by his friends. And, then, when he has actually got on it, the attendant has personally checked him to make sure he is ready to go.

But all that anticipation is nothing like when it's happening is it? Off it goes! And there's all that speed and wind and rolling – and screaming!

Jude has already told the saints to hold on tight. He's prepared them for something that's going to really shake them up – if it hasn't already done so! And now they're on the ride of their lives – their spiritual lives, that is!

This is something they know is very frightening, and yet they know if they hold tight they will get through. If only it was over so quickly as a roller-coaster ride, though! And if only the worry was just that temporary physical apprehension!

What Jude is telling us of here in verse 4 is something they should be very, very, afraid of. That's why they have to know about it. They need to know where it's coming from, what's behind it, and how you can identify it.

It's no different for us today. Indeed, that's why the letter of Jude is in God's Word. It is equally for us here and now.

Jude Exposes the Danger in this Threat

So we turn to the first aspect in verse 4. Here we note, JUDE EXPOSES THE DANGER IN THIS THREAT.

Already the way verse 4 begins you know something is not right. From the very personal and warm way he spoke to the sincere believers at the beginning of verse 3, there is a complete change in tone. While in verse 3 he began saying, "Dear friends," now he speaks about "certain men". It is clear there is danger here. These are not friends – they are enemies. This is shown in the original Greek as the phrase "secretly slipped in among you" comes first in the verse. It is clear these are not those who have come in amongst them in a transparent and open way. They have become part of the church for quite a different reason than the sincere believers Jude addresses here. They aren't honest!

The slipping in would bring back to them that parable of the Lord's regarding the weeds. In Matthew 13, the verses 24 till 30, Jesus spoke of how the kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while he and his family were sleeping, his enemy came in and sowed weeds amongst the wheat.

By this the Lord was telling them about how His Church would be attacked by Satan. The devil would plant his own men amongst the people of God. "The children of the wicked one" are in amongst "the children of the kingdom."

But, tell me, how many churches would be speaking this way today about the devil's work? How many pulpits today aren't proclaiming that all men are brothers? They declare that all religions are the same, and it doesn't matter if you don't have a religion either, because everyone gets to be saved. While Christ said in John 8:44 there are children of the devil, some men say there are none!

In fact, hasn't this false doctrine of the universal brotherhood of humankind become so widely accepted that many think it's a central principle of Christianity? How many times haven't you heard that mindless mantra that Jesus is all about love?

This shows how much the devil has made himself quite at home in many denominations. Where once you had to believe the Bible revelation that only those who receive Christ have the right to be called sons of God (John 1:12), now it doesn't matter what you believe. Apart from the goodness of all men!

Christ warned of this, and now Jude tells them and us what to do. For this is continuing the theme of contending for the faith from verse 3. This is challenging believers to see that they need to be fighting for the Lord.

The phrase "secretly slipped in among you" further tells says that these people have come in and are right beside the true Christians. Peter used a similar word in what we read in chapter 2 verse 1 of his second letter. There he said of the false teachers that "they will secretly introduce destructive heresies." So as Jude tells them of men who sneak in amongst them, Peter speaks of the damnable false doctrine they stealthily introduce.

Paul in Galatians 2:4 uses the same rare word to describe the false brothers who had infiltrated the churches in Galatia. Other writers of the time used it too. It was used to describe a secret return to a country. And it was also used to depict the insidious decline of good laws and the stealthy substitution of inferior ones.

These are those the Lord vividly speaks of in John 10. There in verse 1 He says, "I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in some other way, is a thief and a robber." They had not come into the Church through faith in Jesus Christ.

Mind you, the fact that they seem just like anyone else in the church might surprise you. 'How could they just slip in and make out like they're the rest of us?' you wonder. Don't you wonder now if you can trust anyone anymore?

Well, in a moment Jude will help us so that we can now who to trust and who not to trust. But before he gets to those outward signs they show, we see that, in the second place, **JUDE REVEALS THE CHARACTER BEHIND THIS THREAT.**

Jude Reveals the Character behind this Threat

Here Jude digs into what the "certain men" are like on the inside. Here he exposes them for what they truly are.

The first thing to note about them here is that their "condemnation was written about long ago." So God has got their measure. He is in supreme control. Much as they think they have successfully sneaked in, they are quite clear on the Lord's radar!

Now, there has been some confusion over exactly what this phrase means. Some have thought it refers to Old Testament prophecy. Others think it is tying in with Peter's second letter. And still others tie it in with an extra-scriptural writing, such as the first book of Enoch.

There are problems with each of these. For example, Jude doesn't refer specifically to any Old Testament prophecy. It would also be difficult to see it as being from 2nd Peter as the phrase "long ago" tells us of something earlier. And then we aren't to sure if 2nd Peter was written before Jude anyway.

To be a quote from 1st Enoch is also unlikely. We know Enoch is mentioned later in Jude but to use him this way now is inconsistent. And knowing how careful the Church was in which books it included in the Bible, they wouldn't have been keen on adding something too dependent on that source.

Much more reliable is that the expression “written about” refers metaphorically to a list that’s kept in heaven. So this is a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is used to represent or stand for something else.

This term appears in secular Greek writing for keeping a list of either influential people or outlaws. And we know that God is keeping a list of the godless who deserve condemnation.

The book of Revelation quite clearly speaks of this symbolically.

Our reading from 2nd Peter 2 supports this understanding. There in verse 3 we read about those false teachers, “Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.”

The next aspect we see in connection with Jude revealing the character behind this threat is in the expression “godless men”. Another name we could use here for such a godless man is ‘apostate’. As we’ve seen earlier, while there is a book of the acts of the apostles, Jude could well be described as a book of the acts of the apostates.

Thus the root word for “godless men” means someone who is destitute of reverential awe toward God. While we naturally think of the next two attributes in verse 4 as what marks out an apostate, it actually starts here, in his heart. You see, he does not have what’s called in the Old Testament, “the fear of the LORD.” He does not have that highest respect for God which leads to implicit obedience to his revealed will.

Paul in 2nd Timothy 3:5 speaks of those having a form of godliness but denying its power.

And so they deny the Gospel of Christ as the power of God unto salvation, and they deny the transforming power of God which enables a true believer to live the truly born-again life.

Now, this man can seem a good man in the eyes of other men. He is law-abiding, well-dressed, polite, and friendly. And yet he is ungodly because of Who he doesn’t have in his heart.

Someone once said that he had yet to meet a heretic whom he didn’t like. And that is because on the outside they are the most upright and gracious people. It’s on the inside where the ultimate different lies.

The Lord says in Isaiah 66:2 that the one he esteems is the one who is humble and contrite in spirit, and who trembles at his word. But that is not this man! He may profess belief in God, but he does not believe in the God of the Bible, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He may speak of God as love, stealing that phrase from the Bible he despises, but he rejects God’s wrath against sin, God’s holiness, and God’s acceptance of the doing and dying of Christ for sinners who would otherwise be condemned.

In other words, they twist God’s grace. And how they do that in practice is what we turn to see now in the third aspect to verse 4. For now see that JUDE UNCOVERS THE PROCESS OF THIS THREAT.

Jude Uncovers the Process of this Threat

This is where we read next that these godless men “change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.” A very serious charge! In fact, there couldn’t be a more serious accusation, especially given that they have sneaked into the church in the first place in order to do this!

With the first attribute described here, changing the grace of God into a license for immorality, there is clear reference to a major distortion of the fact that God graciously accepts sinners. For what they do is to turn that unmerited favour from God into an excuse for flagrant, shameless sin. So they take that most gracious act of being saved by grace alone through faith alone and through Christ alone and use it to justify doing whatever they want!

This was equally a danger in the church then as was the legalism on the other side. When you read through the letter to the Galatians which specifically deals with those who put so many

man-made rules on top of the Scriptures, there we're also warned about this. Galatians 5 when it describes the acts of the sinful nature has this listed there.

Now, when someone becomes saved there is a great feeling of freedom. You are very much aware then of what you are saved from. But unless that it joined to realising who you are now saved for it becomes a perverted grace.

This was shown at the time of the Reformation. A number of Anabaptists responded to getting out of the Roman Catholic Church by throwing aside the law as well. They only went from the frying pan into the fire!

Peter pictures those men well in verse 19 of 2nd Peter 2. There he says this about their teaching: "They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity – for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him."

People who have this view have been called "antinomian," which means "against the law." But while they proclaim a freedom of lifestyle for Christians, so you can do what you want, the apostles quite clearly spell it out otherwise. For example, Paul in Titus 2, verse 12 and 13, says that the true grace of God teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, up-right and godly lives, while we waiting for Christ's return.

Apostasy always begins with rejecting God's Word. It was the way the devil first tempted Eve, and it's the way he continues amongst us today. But apostasy doesn't stop there, as devastating as attacking God's Word is to the Church of Jesus Christ. For next it turns to attack the Lord Himself!

They "deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord," verse 4 ends. So it is clear they are attacking everything that makes Jesus the Christ, whether it is His position as the Supreme Ruler over all, or the only Saviour of believers.

Some translations speak here about "denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ." So we could think this is about the Father and the Son. The better manuscripts, though, delete the word "God," and grammatically tell us that "Sovereign" and "Lord" belong together in the one name. This is what we read in 2nd Peter 2 verse 1. Thus this phrase is solely about the Lord Jesus Christ.

The title "Sovereign" tells us that Christ is the King over all, the One whom angels worship, and the One who is the Creator and Sustainer of all things. But they are saying He is only a mere man – Jesus was neither pre-existent nor virgin-born.

The title "Lord" describes Christ's rightful claim that He is the Master of all true Christians. But they deny that by saying He did not rise from the dead.

They also twist around the names "Jesus" and "Christ". They say that "Jesus" is not the divine Saviour but simply a human martyr. Sure He said some good things, but nothing that can do any more than what others could do. And they say that the name "Christ" is not because He's the Anointed One of Old Testament prophecy, but because that's some ancient myths. The Old Testament they say is a most unreliable patchwork of folklore.

By now you might really be honestly taken aback. This is shocking – how could it ever get to that? Imagine a situation where those in church denied the Lord who had bought them, denied His virgin birth, denied His miracles, denied His substitutionary death, denied His bodily resurrection, and denied His coming again!

Then add to that their lifestyle which is quite contrary to God's Word. You have to say there's no way Jesus is their Master! It's all about them. They're the masters of their own fate – and what a terrible end it will be!

But Jude doesn't want the genuine believers sucked into this vortex. He warns them so they know exactly what's going to happen. To be forewarned is to be forearmed!

Dear believer, it's going to be a rough ride. And, yet, by holding tight to God's Word, and always looking to the Lord Jesus, you will get to the end. Because then His Spirit has got you by the hand!