Danger Ahead

Jude 12-16

We often use the description “safe” today to describe both people and places. A safe place is a one where you are protected, where danger is unable to cause you harm. A safe place is one where you feel no threat, there is no perception of vulnerability. And a safe person is someone who conveys all those things within his or her own personality, within the relationship which you have with them. A safe person is someone who bears you no threat of any harm of danger, and we often use that description in the realm of psychological experiences as well as physical. Safe people are wonderful to know, and so very helpful to be around.

On the other hand, some people are not safe! They are, in fact, quite dangerous. For a variety of reasons, they pose a significant threat to your well-being. Sometimes, the greatest danger is the ease with which the potential harm is hidden. In other words, the most dangerous people, the least safe, are those who pretend to be harmless. The greatest danger comes when you are least on guard, the least able or willing to identify the potential harm that could befall you.

Thus Jude gives us a helpful warning. And remember the context for the whole book,

v.4 “For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Since they crept in unnoticed, they managed to mask or hide their threat, so Jude exposes them. Fully and completely. Perhaps more fully than you would wish, but here is his list. Here is his description of those types of people who are especially dangerous to the church, unsafe. We would do well to take note of these characteristics, to spot them in others in order to hold them accountable. And to spot any measure of these characteristics in ourselves, in the desire to avoid altogether any trace of any of these things in ourselves. So let’s begin…

I. DESCRIBING THE DANGEROUS.

First, “these are spots in your love feasts.” The love feast was something very roughly akin to our fellowship meals, though in the early church the meal was particularly associated with the Lord’s Supper. That custom had its problems, especially in Corinth, as Paul was compelled to write these words of correction before his more familiar instructions regarding the Lord’s Supper,

1 Cor. 11:20 “Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord’s Supper. 21 For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk. 22 What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in?”

He concludes those instructions with these words,

1 Cor. 11:33 “Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. 34 But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, lest you come together for judgment. And the rest I will set in order when I come.”

So the church enjoyed meals together! As we do today. It is such a common and profitable expression of our unity, our fellowship. We share our lives together, and that becomes especially obvious when we share a meal together.

But some people infiltrate that fellowship with the threat of danger. A spot, a hidden reef, an unseen rock prepared to cause a shipwreck. That’s the point, that’s the danger.

A. A shipwreck awaits.

This Greek word translated "spot" or "blemish" does seem to have reference to the great danger of a hidden reef. But even if you describe it as a spot or blemish, then consider a spot or blemish right in the middle of the forehead of a very insecure teenager struggling with his or her complexion. It is the very beginning of an acne sore that threatens to burst out in the middle of the face. Now, you are a little closer to the idea of shipwreck. It is an undetectable iceberg, ready to bring down the mighty Titanic. That's the danger that Jude describes. Ready to strike at the very heart of the experience of Christian fellowship within the church.

The root of the danger is common, and it ought to be easy to identify. It selfishness, combined with a complete and total disregard for the needs of others. So Jude writes about a,

B. Selfish disrespect.

They feast with you without fear! No reverence for God, no sense of his glory and majesty. None whatsoever. They are only interested in themselves, serving only their own needs and desires. They are "shepherds feeding themselves," as the ESV puts it, instead, of course, of feeding the sheep! Such a dangerous contradiction. The idea is of a careless and cold disrespect toward others showing forth the selfish, hardness of heart that could care less about anybody else.

Again, 1 Cor. 11:20 "Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper. 21 For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk."

The specific judgment is pronounced against all unfaithful shepherds in,

Ez. 34:2 "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD to the shepherds: "Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? 3 You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool; you slaughter the fatlings, but you do not feed the flock."

The list in Jude continues, with easy to understand images of the danger of emptiness. Next, "clouds without water," describing,

C. Unfulfilling emptiness.

Such promise. Such expectation, so think drought not flood. Rain is good, profitable, and necessary to sustain life and to grow crops on a farm. The clouds hold great expectation of satisfying water. And they disappoint terribly. They are empty. And they are simply "carried about by the winds." They blow in the wind, but they do not water the ground.

One example from the Proverbs,

Prov. 25:14 "Whoever falsely boasts of giving Is like clouds and wind without rain."

Sadly, how often it is that certain people creep into the church and seemingly offer the refreshment of rain, only to show themselves empty and dry of any spiritual benefit. A waterless cloud is useless, unfulfilling, and unsafe. Dangerous!

And fruitless. They bear no good fruit, they produce no benefit for the body of the church. The image is of "late autumn trees without fruit." These people contribute nothing to the body, showing forth instead nothing but a,

D. Barren fruitlessness.

The fruit is all gone. The leaves are all gone. It is late autumn, and the outward, visible signs of life on the tree are all gone. They are "twice dead," not only unfruitful but cut off from the very source of life, namely Jesus himself. Therefore, they are also described as "uprooted." A weed simply pulled from the ground! Useless. Barren. And, therefore, dangerous, because they are also,

E. Wild and restless.

Like the "raging waves of the sea." Again, these images are easy to understand, aren't they? Isaiah puts it so well,

Is. 57:20 "But the wicked are like the troubled sea, When it cannot rest, Whose waters cast up mire and dirt. 21 "There is no peace," Says my God, "for the wicked."

So says Jude, they are "foaming up their own shame," "casting up the foam of their own shame." They are full of shame, and they spread their filthy scum as does the ocean tide along the seashore. Imagine a beach littered with the debris of the wild and restless ocean, rubbish and seaweed scattered otherwise pristine sands, and you get a sense of the problem that Jude is trying to identify so clearly. Waterless clouds. Fruitless trees. Wild waves. And wandering stars.

The image there, of course, is the danger of,

F. Aimless wandering.

Can you imagine a star falling away from its course? A star simply falling through the sky, wandering about with no purpose, no direction, no accomplishment. Just a random free-fall, which is an accurate and often appropriate description for the lives of many people. And it is dangerous, if for no other reason that it is contagious. Living your life as a star falling from its course, is hardly a godly aspiration. To the contrary, we read in,

Eph. 5:15 "See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, 16 redeeming the time, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is."

Jude gives no comfort these wandering stars, instead condemning them as those for "whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever." "The gloom of utter darkness. So wandering aimlessly means wandering apart from the Lord. It means wandering with no purpose to bring honor and glory to God, no intention to be pleasing to him, to desire to accomplish his will and purpose.

This rather extensive description and list of dangerous people continues in verse 16,

v.16 "These are grumblers, complainers [or malcontents], walking according to their own lusts; and they mouth great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage."

I don't remember that last time I had so many sub-points in a sermon outline, but for sub-point "G" under the first point, these unsafe, dangerous people are identified as,

G. Grumbling complainers.

Grumblers, in the Greek. Sometimes translated murmuring. This is a significant element of biblical godliness, an import aspect of God's work of salvation. So we read,

Phil. 2:14 "Do all things without complaining and disputing, 15 that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, 16 holding fast the word of life."

Similarly, we read a similar word, complainers or "malcontents." Those who lack any sense of contentment. Always a complaint, always finding fault, always.

How dangerous are the grumblers, the grumbling complainers, the malcontents, and what a threat they are to the peaceful fellowship of God's people in the church.

Then the libertines. Those I would label,

H. Lustful libertines.

Those who feel the freedom to say and do whatever they want, believing they can live however then wish, with no restraints from God's revealed law. Rather their only guide in behavior is to "walk according to their own lusts," "following their own sinful desires."

That word for "lusts" or "sinful desires" is important, and profound. It refers to the strong desires of passion, inappropriate desires. Or as Peter puts it,

2 Peter 2:10 "…those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness."

The Greek word itself doesn't always refer to sinful passions, but very often it does. Unrestrained passions. Forbidden passions. Prohibited desires. And it so often seems to be the case, that such people also have,

I. A big mouth.

v.16 "…they mouth great swelling words."

"They are loud-mouthed boasters." In other words, arrogant words. Boastful words. And quite generally, foolish words! Those who speak loudly, who speak boastfully, so often display their foolishness the most clearly. Peter puts it this way, "speaking loud boasts of folly."

And they do so to gain their own advantage, utilizing

J. Deceitful flattery.

v.16 "…flattering people [or showing favoritism] to gain advantage."

Ulterior motives, to be sure. Always trying to gain influence, to gain some advantage, to gain someone's favor. With flattery. Telling people what they want to hear, perhaps. They show favor to certain people, in order to gain the advantage, to gain a benefit for themselves. They show favoritism, all for the benefit of their own gain.

Dangerous people. And yet, to be sure,

II. JUDGMENT IS COMING.

Jude gives us some interesting words here,

v.14-15

The interesting thing is that Jude seems to be quoting from the apocrypha, the book of 1 Enoch. We know that Enoch walked with God, and Jude uses his prophecy to prove his declaration regarding the coming judgment. God will execute his judgment! Scripture is abundantly clear on that point.

2 Peter 2:9 "…then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment."

2 Peter 3:7 But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

8 But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. 9 The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. 10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up."

A couple things about that judgment here in Jude. First, notice that "the Lord comes with ten thousand of his saints."

A. The Lord comes to judge with his people.

With his people. We are united with Christ, as he executes his judgment! We are with Jesus as he carries out that exercise of his authority to judge the world.

1 Thes. 3:11 "Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you. 12 And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you, 13 so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints."

Jesus comes back WITH all his saints, according to verse 14. Ten thousands of them, a number obviously symbolic of fullness and completeness. We might say a million, or in the common made-up vernacular, a zillion. Ten thousands, or perhaps ten thousand times ten thousand. The idea is that the number is beyond our own calculations, countless. The word literally is "myriad."

That's what will happen at the end of this age. That's what will happen when Jesus returns. That's what will happen to the dangerous and deceiving people who have crept into the church to cause harm and trouble.

In the form of a doxology in,

Rom. 16:20 "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you."

And that judgment will be just, because it will be a,

B. Judgment according to works.

When God judges the wicked, he judges their works, their evil works. He judges them, and condemns them, for their sin. The Lord comes…

v.15 "…to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him."

For the unbeliever, for the wicked, the judgment will be a conviction. They will be judged guilty, and the evidence will be brought forward. God's sovereignty and the doctrine of election or predestination doesn't mean that there are some innocent people out there that God simply refuses to save. No, his condemnation is always based upon the principles of strict justice, they are condemned for their sin! They are judged on "all their deeds of ungodliness."

So we read,

2 Cor. 5:10 "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad."

Those who have done evil will be judged for their evil. Interestingly I believe that as we would apply that verse to

Christians, the idea becomes that Christians are judged for their good deeds. In other words, the good works that God enables us to do are actually received and recognized as good on the day of judgment, and rewarded! Our sins are already removed as far as the east is from the west. God promises that remembers our sins no more. So we don't face a judgment of our sins, but rather of our good works.

More description of that judgment is found in,

1 Cor. 3:11 "For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. 14 If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. 15 If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire."

So, for the context of Jude, we take comfort and encouragement in the fact that the wicked troublemakers will be judged, and the church is wise to ever be on guard against the dangers of their influence here and now. For them, verse 13, "is reserved the blackness of darkness forever."

And yet that promise of judgment is of great encouragement to us as Christians, for it is the promise of our triumph in glory as well.

Heb. 9:27 "And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, 28 so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation."

Let me read ahead in Jude just a bit for the application for us today, because this whole book obviously fits together. Though we have focused the last two weeks upon the judgment that is coming to the wicked, here is where Jude is going. And here is where I end this afternoon with this timeless exhortation,

v.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, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life."