

The Last Days

Jude 17-21

There are, I believe, really only three periods of time that you can identify in the Bible. They are easily and rather obviously defined – the past, the present and the future. There are really only three ages that describe and define all of history, and again, the same answer. The past, the present and the future. That simplicity is actually quite profound, because people are always trying to make it more complicated than that.

The transition from one age to another is also easy to define, for it is the coming of Christ that marks those transitions. The first coming, the incarnation, marked the transition from the past to the present, from the Old Covenant to the New. And the second coming of Jesus will mark the next, final great transition, from this age to the age to come. From the present age, to eternity. Jesus will come “at the end of the age.”

Now, it is interesting to note how this present age is described. In Galatians 1, Paul calls it “the present evil age.”

Gal. 1:3 “Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, 4 who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age.”

Praise be to God that our redemption is put in terms of that deliverance from “this present evil age,” for this is the age in which the world remains under God’s curse, where evil is still allowed to exist, and where the Devil is still allowed to cause affliction and trouble. So says Paul in Ephesians 5, “the days are evil.” So he describes the state of Christians before their salvation this way:

Eph. 2:1 “And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, 2 in which you once walked according to the

course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, 3 among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.”

So the prince of the power of the air is at work throughout this evil age! That is what Jude has been describing. And this afternoon we come to his description of “the last time,” a phrase which refers to this whole present age, from the first coming of Jesus until he comes again. So we are in the last time now, we are in the last days now, and we have been in them since Jesus walked upon the earth in his flesh. “The last time” is the same as “these last days.”

Let me show that from Scripture.

Heb. 1:1 “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, 2 has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds.”

There is the past, “time past,” or “long ago.” And the contrast is with “in these last days,” an age marked by the presence of Jesus on earth! So while it is sometimes appropriate to think of “these last days” with reference to the time just before Jesus will return, still the reality is that we are already there! We are already living in the last days, and the next great act of God in history will be Jesus’ return at the end of this age. We are urged in Scripture to long for that day, what Paul calls our “blessed hope.”

Titus 2:11 “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, 12 teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, 13 looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, 14 who gave

Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.”

So the present age always has reference to the future age. The experiences of the last days are always put in the context of the expectation of the age to come. And one of the consistent ways of doing that is to mark the characteristics of these last days. That is for your encouragement! That is for your understanding and stability in the midst of the troubles that inevitably will come. And that is what Jude does for us.

We’ve already described much of what characterizes the last days in previous weeks, and I don’t want to spend too much time on that this afternoon, since the descriptions have been detailed and rather intense. The threat of judgment has been severe. But to summarize all of that, look at,
v.17-18

I. MOCKERS WILL BE PRESENT IN THE LAST DAYS.

“There will be mockers, scoffers.” Those who mock, who mock the things of the Lord especially. They make a sport of their mocking, they poke fun, they ridicule, they malign and undermine any sense of the uprightness or value of the things of the Lord.

A. They will despise the things of the Lord.

Not just a denial of the truth of God. Not just a rejection of true doctrine. Not just an agnostic uncertainty, but intentional, active spite. Willful and deliberate mockery. Against the predictions of God and especially against the expectation of God’s judgment. Peter gives us a bit more full explanation in 2 Peter 3, with a very familiar answer.

2 Peter 3:1 “Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder), 2 that

you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior, 3 knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, 4 and saying, “Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.” 5 For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, 6 by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. 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.”

Mockery. Scoffing. Against the threatened judgment of God. And there is a generally common explanation for that, a motivation. Namely that they don’t want to feel guilty for their sins. And so they mock the things of the Lord because of their own sinful desires.

B. They will indulge all their worldly desires.

Jude makes that clear, again. Verse 18, they “walk according to their own ungodly lusts.” We focused upon that the past two weeks, so I won’t spend much time there today, but let the obvious be clear. One obvious motivation for those who scoff against God is that they don’t want God to put any restraints or

constraints upon their behavior. They want to indulge, to do whatever they want without any accountability before a judge!

When Paul wrote to Timothy about these last days, he describes those who would be “lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.” And that’s the point, isn’t it? That’s the besetting sin of so many people. They stubbornly rebel against the authority of God, because they want to follow “their own ungodly lusts.” They are “lovers of pleasure.”

There is a consequence to such behavior, especially in the church. Namely, discord. Divisions. And that, too, becomes a characteristic of the last days. And remember, those days have already begun!

II. DIVISIONS WILL BE EVIDENT IN THE LAST DAYS.

v.19

Good explanations are given, aren’t they? The are sensual persons, worldly people. Literally, “psychological” people. The Greek word has reference to the breathe of life, the psyche, the natural principal of animal life. It is a word that does actually apply to both men and animal, human beings and the beasts of the field. And the idea is of the life of nature, the life that is described and defined simply in terms of this world, this earth. Perhaps the phrase “natural man” would be best. The word is translated sensual, but I think the better idea is a reference to mere animal instincts. The ESV simply translates “worldly people.” People of this world. People whose life and existence has reference only to this world. So,

A. Worldliness causes divisions among believers.

We remember of that trouble in Corinth!

1 Cor. 3:1 “And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to

spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. 2 I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; 3 for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? 4 For when one says, “I am of Paul,” and another, “I am of Apollos,” are you not carnal?”

Jealousy and strife. Sadly, such is the lot of for every church in these last days. More or less, no one can expect to be exempt. These last days are known for divisions!

A second cause, obviously related to worldliness, is the absence of a reliance upon the power of the Holy Spirit. The two go hand in hand, as Jude combines them in verse 19.

B. Resisting the Holy Spirit causes divisions among believers.

These worldly people that Jude describes are “devoid of the Holy Spirit.” They do not have the Spirit. They do not have the restraining influence of the Spirit. They do not have the power of the Spirit. They are left to their own natural ability and inclinations. And we know what that produces. Among many other things, divisions.

Now, after 3-1/2 sermons essentially focused upon these dangerous people who “have crept in unnoticed,” lets look at what Jude has to say for our encouragement. Verses 4 through 19 are all an introduction to the main point of this little book, which is found in verses 20-21. Enough of these dangerous people. What about you, beloved? What should you do, you who love the Lord and love his church? Given all this description about the last days, and all the troubles that will come with it, what about your life?

How should we then live? That's always an appropriate question!

III. CHRISTIAN LIVING IN THE LAST DAYS. v.20-21

Jude identifies four things, four encouragements. Again, this is the heart of the message of this book. This is the main point. What can you do, what should you do, what does God want you to do, as you confront the troubles of these last days? First,

A. Build up your faith.

Interesting that it is put in that form, as an exhortation to us, "building yourselves up on your most holy faith." We need to be careful, because this isn't something you can do in your own strength. This isn't a matter of self-help, or a matter of works-righteousness. But neither are you passive, because God has given to us what we often call means of grace. He gives us means, by which we receive his help and avail ourselves of his strength. Especially the word of God. And prayer. Also, in terms of our public worship, the sacraments.

So "building yourselves up in your most holy faith" really means taking every opportunity to benefit from the means of grace. By reading the Bible, by meditating and thinking about what God's word says. By praying, talking to God; and listening! By taking part in public worship. And by living, walking day by day, trusting God to direct your paths. Walk by faith, not by sight. Walk with a confidence in the truth of God's word, with a confidence of the faithfulness of God's promises, with thankfulness for his goodness. Even in the midst of struggles! Even in the midst of the trials and temptations of life. Even in the context of the attacks of the spiritual enemies with whom we do battle.

Writing to the Colossians, Paul expresses a very similar thought.

Col. 2:6 "As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, 7 rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving."

Rooted and built up in Jesus! Established in the faith, as you were taught. So there are objective elements. What you are taught, the renewing of your mind. This isn't a call to some sort of mysterious or mystical religious experience. But rather to live out your life in the presence of Jesus, "walking him him." Building yourself up, the word

"But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith." Building up refers to the building of a house. Build the house! Put up the walls. Repair the windows. Paint the rooms. Finish the roof. The foundation is laid, which is Jesus, now finish the construction! That's the picture, one of constant building, constant increase and improvements being accomplished in the house.

Those things just don't happen automatically! They require a determination, goals and a purposes. So what are you doing to build up your faith? That's the challenging question of the morning. What can you do to build up your faith? Maybe an increased devotion and commitment to public worship on the Lord's Day, morning and evening. Maybe greater consistency in personal Bible reading and devotions, or family worship. Perhaps addressing the besetting sin that so easily entraps you. Maybe trying to seek out more fellowship, deeper relationships with fellow Christians. Or more accountability. More consistency. More reading. And certainly, with Jude's specific encouragement,

a deeper commitment to prayer. As he puts it,

B. Pray in the Holy Spirit.

Now, what does that mean? Is it a reference to some sort of ecstatic utterance, or speaking in tongues? Surely there is no sense of that here. But it does mean that your prayers are real, vital, and personal. Not just a routine, not just a habit. But by the power of the Holy Spirit, by the intercession of the Holy Spirit, you really, truly are able to talk to God! And your exercise of prayer is, therefore, a genuinely spiritual experience!

It means crying out to God, sometimes in the words of the Psalms, “How long, O Lord?” It means crying out with joy in those experiences that are good and pleasant. It means crying out, even unto despair, when those occasions come. Praying in the realm of spiritual reality. And that can be so subjective, can’t it? So filled with your own personal experiences. Not merely objective. Not merely the recitation of a list of requests.

So pray in the Holy Spirit. And that can be hard sometimes, because you can’t see the Spirit. You can’t touch him. Often, you have little or no sense of feeling his presence. So it is a matter of faith, a matter of believing what God has said about the Holy Spirit. And what God has said is this,

John 14:16 “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, 17 even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.”

John 14:25 “These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. 26 But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. 27 Peace I leave with

you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”

Praying in the Holy Spirit must mean that you believe those words, and live with that encouragement and comfort. Praying in the Holy Spirit means that you find your peace in him, not in the ever-changing circumstances of this life. Praying in the Holy Spirit, above all else, means that praying is a activity in the realm of the spiritual world. It is not simply a personal catharsis. It is not a yoga-induced mantra or meditation. It is not reciting a child’s Christmas list to Santa Claus. It is the exercise of communion between an infinite and eternal God and a mortal, finite man. It is the fellowship of a relationship, possible only by the presence and intercession of God the Holy Spirit himself!

So we read,

Rom. 8:26 “Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. 27 Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.”

v.20 “But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, 21 keep yourselves in the love of God.”

C. Keep yourself in the love of God.

Keep yourselves, again in the form of personal responsibility. Watch yourselves, preserve yourselves. The word means to protect from harm, to keep safe, and go back to verse 1 for a minute.

v.1 “Jude, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father,

and preserved in Jesus Christ.”

Same word! Kept! Preserve. And ultimately, God keeps us! I preached a whole sermon on that one word, with the emphasis upon the doctrine which we call the perseverance of the saints. God keep us! God preserves us. It is the same as what Peter writes about our living hope,

1 Peter 1:4 “...an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”

Guarded. Kept. Preserved. That’s God’s work. And, according to Jude, it is our responsibility, too. We are not passive. Keep yourselves, but don’t miss the rest of that verse, “in the love of God.” That’s where your protection is found. That’s where your security is found, by the working of God’s love. By the awareness of God’s love. By the faithfulness of God’s love.

So it isn’t a matter of your own hard work. It isn’t a matter of your own strength. Or, what you have earned or deserve. Keep yourself, protect your faith, by a constant, vital and fervent meditation upon the love of God. Consider, for example, these great words,

Rom. 8:31 “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? 33 Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised— who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or

nakedness, or danger, or sword? 36 As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.” 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Listen to this prayer, and meditate upon these words, preserving your faith in this declaration of God’s love. It is a prayer for that very thing.

Eph. 3:14 “For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, 16 that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”

People of God, may you be rooted and grounded in love, in God’s love. May you have the strength to know that love of Christ that surpasses knowledge. “Keep yourselves in the love of God.”

And,

D. Wait upon the expectation of God’s mercy.

There is hope, there is always hope. There is always the right and proper perspective.

v.21 “...looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.”

Looking, waiting!

Titus 2:13 "...waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, 14 who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works."

That's how you can keep yourselves, and how you can build up your faith. By looking forward to the blessed hope of the second coming of Jesus! By looking forward to the inheritance, your own eternal glory, a gift of God's goodness and mercy! So wait, people of God, in the expectation of the revelation of God's glory. Wait, even in all the sorrows of this life, wait in the expectant hope of God's mercy.

The world tries to take away that hope. The world tries to extinguish that hope. The world tries to deny and renounce that hope. And the world leaves you empty, depressed, hopeless. But my friends, as I stand before to preach this gospel, I live in this very place, as I wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. I hope no other hope, and no other joy!

Let me end with a great encouragement from,

Rom. 5:1 "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. 3 And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; 4 and perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us."

Beloved, build yourselves up in that faith; and keep yourselves in that love.