

Empty Promises
Battling for the Faith Series
Jude 8-16
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We reminded ourselves last week that the culture is a minefield and there's endless mines that can do great damage to our lives, so figuring out how to navigate the minefield safely is quite a challenge. So, let's imagine that we decide to go to minefield navigating school. We show up at school and there is a team of instructors, but we start to notice they are all missing hands, feet, eyes, parts of their body. Their arms are in slings; they are on crutches; they have bandages on their heads. We start to ask questions and what we find out is none of them have actually ever crossed the minefield safely. Wouldn't that raise a question? Maybe that's not the voice I want to listen to. That's what we want to talk about this morning; if you have a Bible, turn with us to Jude. Jude is the next to the last book of the Bible in the New Testament—Jude, then Revelation. Last week we reminded ourselves from the text that what God wants for us is to experience more of His mercy, more of His peace, more of His love, but the concern is there are false teachers. He describes them as ungodly, meaning they are not Christians, but they creep in unnoticed. The language is really important! It means they are intentionally sneaking in, and unnoticed means they look like a Christian; they talk like a Christian; they smell like a Christian, but they aren't really believers and their intent is to lead people astray. Specifically Jude talks about how they turn the grace of God into a license to sin and they deny Jesus is the Master and Lord—basically saying Jesus is not in charge. "I'm going to be my own God; I'm going to run my own life. I'm going to decide what's right and wrong myself," and yet they seek to convince others God is somehow okay with that. Basically there are thousands of Christians who have convinced themselves that it's okay to decide how they want to live—their own morality—the world as they want it to be, and then I'll search and find somebody that will tell me that's okay with God. So, we start with our own morality and ultimately construct a theology to accommodate that morality. That's the concern of Jude. The false teachers are saying Jesus is not coming back; He's not going to judge. Jude reminds us that history tells us that God judged Israel, God judged the angels, He judged Sodom and Gomorra, so of course He's going to deal with rebellion and sin. That gets us to verse 8 where we pick it up this morning.

Yet in the same way these men, also by dreaming, defile the flesh, and reject the authority, and revile angelic majesties. (*NASB, Jude, vs. 8)

Meaning they live in a dream world; it's a fantasy if you think you can rebel and live that way and God's okay with it. **Also, by dreaming, defile the flesh** is a reference to sexual sin and **reject authority**—nobody is going to tell me what to do—and **revile angelic majesties**. That word revile means to *blaspheme*, but probably more clearly it means to *mock*, it means to *belittle*, it means to *make fun of*. Basically the idea is they dabble in powers they know nothing of, powers that are ultimately going to destroy their lives. This is a huge problem in our culture. Our culture dabbles in powers we don't understand, we know nothing of, and cleverly, systematically, these powers destroy lives. Verse 9:

But Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!"

It's a very interesting verse. We know very little about this story other than what we are told here, but apparently when Moses died, there was a contest for the dead body of Moses between Michael the archangel, the highest of all the angels, and the devil. But even Michael as the most powerful of all the angels, did not believe he had sufficient power to go directly at the devil. So what the text says is Michael went to God and God rebuked the devil. The warning is if even Michael didn't feel he was powerful enough to dabble with these forces of darkness, we should take a lesson from that.

This has been my go-to verse for spiritual warfare. I think there is a tremendous amount of confusion in our churches about spiritual warfare—what it is and how to go about it. I know a lot of people take their model for spiritual warfare from Jesus, but it's good to remind ourselves, "I'm not Jesus; I'm not God in the flesh." There were so many things Jesus did that I can't do. It wasn't meant to be a model for me; it was a demonstration that He was God in the flesh. I also think the fact that God took on human flesh and walked on the earth brought kind of this cosmic war to the near East in a unique way—all hands-on-deck demonic forces—that is unique as a period of history. Once you move to the Epistles, which are really our instructions for life in Christ, you don't have instruction about exorcisms and casting out demons and naming them and taking authority over them. What you have is much more of this idea of truth. Ephesians 6, "Arm yourself with the truth." James says, "Draw near to God; submit to Him, and the enemy will flee from you." So, this verse in Jude has been very helpful for over thirty years as my model for spiritual warfare. I've really never found it to fail. My job is to keep my eyes fixed on Jesus, the author and finisher of the faith. My job is to be faithful to fulfill my calling, to build the Kingdom. When the enemy gets in the way, I don't challenge him; I don't talk to him; I don't try to call him out by name. I immediately go to God and I ask God to deal with it—and God deals with it. I've never found that to fail, and I don't know how you would possibly go wrong with your eyes fixed on Jesus. I think it is a huge mistake to start dabbling with powers we really know little about. That's the point that Jude is trying to make. Verse 10:

But these men revile the things which they do not understand; and the things which they know by instinct, like unreasoning animals, by these things they are destroyed.

We as people are made in the image of God. As people made in the image of God, we have the capacity to think, to learn, to believe, to reason. It's what sets us apart from the animal kingdom. Animals operate on the basis of **instinct**. They don't think and learn and believe and grow and reason like humans do. What the text is saying is that these false teachers essentially act more like animals than like people made in the image of God. They just go with their feelings; they go with their instincts; they live life according to their longings and desires. Now one of the interesting things about animals is that God has created them with these amazing instincts, but for those who hunt, for those who fish, for those who trap, for those who capture, one of the things you understand is it's the instinct of the animal that makes them easy to hunt, easy to catch, easy to trap, easy to capture. You just figure out their instincts and you exploit that. I love to fish, and that's what fishing is. You figure out the fish's instinct; you exploit it; you catch them. It's exactly what the text is saying—that the enemy exploits when people operate on the basis of their instincts. It makes them easy to capture and destroy.

So now stop and think about this. We live in a culture where this is a huge problem. We as a culture have convinced ourselves that each individual should be his or her own god. "I should be able to decide for myself what's true and what's right and wrong," and we have elevated it to the level of a virtue—the idea of, "Be true to yourself!" One of the great virtues of our culture is to be true to

yourself: “Whatever your feeling is, whatever your longing is, whatever your desire is, go for it; be true to yourself!” Therefore, the great sin in our culture is self-denial, is some level of discipline, some level of saying, “No,” to our longings and desires in order to be called to something different and something better! You hear people argue this all the time. “If this is my longing, if this is my desire, if this is what’s in me—it’s like this natural longing—it’s got to be there from God. Therefore, it’s got to be right.” We fail to acknowledge there are all kinds of things within people—these longings and desires—that are wrong and sinful and hurtful and do great damage. Jesus said, *“If you want to find life, you die to yourself. You pick up your cross and you carry it; you have to die in order to live.”* The message of the gospel is a message of brokenness and surrender—that we don’t find life in our own longings and feelings and desires, but rather we pursue what God has created to satisfy us and to bring us joy and happiness. So, the concern of Jude is this message that if you have this longing, if you have this desire, if you have this feeling, whatever it is within you, and you just go with it, that makes you easy prey for the enemy to destroy you. He says in verse 11:

Woe to them! *(That’s a strong warning)* **For they have gone the way of Cain,**

You’re familiar with the story, probably, of Genesis chapter 4. Coming out of Genesis 3, there are two paths. One is the path of surrender to God and one is the path of being your own god. Abel represents the path of surrender to God; Cain represents the path of being determined to be your own god. Cain is determined to live life on his terms. He’s determined to worship God on his terms; he’s going to do it his way, and God just needs to be okay with that. So he offers God what he wants to offer God as an offering. God comes back, and the text tells us He had no regard for Cain, so He had no regard for his offering, and He challenges Cain, which makes Cain very angry. God essentially pleads with Cain to rethink the path he’s traveling because it’s only going to lead to misery and heartache. Abel represents righteousness and righteousness exposes unrighteousness. Cain, rather than choosing a different path, chooses to kill his brother Abel in order to eliminate the righteousness that exposed his unrighteousness. God comes back to Cain and says the result of this—essentially what He says—is you will never be happy; you will never be satisfied; you are going to spend your whole life, your whole family, and they will be wanderers; they will be vagabonds; they will just move from place to place, never able to settle, never being happy, never being satisfied—just a life of wandering and a life of misery.

I want to throw a picture on the screen; many of you have seen this before as I’ve shown it before. It’s a painting by a painter by the name of Corman; he lived in the late 1800’s, early 1900’s. This is a massive painting that today hangs in a museum in Paris. It’s 23 feet long, 13 feet high, in the original. The title of the painting is simply, “Cain.” It is meant to depict the picture of Cain and his family as vagabonds, as wanderers, of spending their whole life searching for that which will satisfy—but it just was a miserable experience. Now stop and think about this: Cain’s intent, the reason he wanted to be his own god, the reason he wanted to live life on his own terms is he thought it would make him happy; he thought it would bring him joy. He thought it would be the better way to live, but actually “this” is the result. I found this painting so powerful and so compelling that I actually purchased a print of it, framed it and it hangs in the church office right across from the mailboxes that the staff uses. So, essentially, almost all the staff sees that painting every single day, and it reminds us this is what we’re up against. This is where people are headed if we do not reach them with the message of the truth, if they don’t encounter the life-changing message of the gospel. That’s **the way of Cain**. Next, he says in verse 11:

...and for pay, they have rushed headlong *(full speed ahead)* **into the error of Balaam,**

If you don't know the story of Balaam, it's Numbers chapter 22. Balaam was a prophet of God and whenever Balaam blessed Israel, Israel was blessed. So Balak, an enemy king, figured out, "If I give Balaam enough money or enough wealth, I can buy him off and I can convince him to curse Israel. Whatever he says seems to come true, so if I pay him enough money, he will curse Israel. So, they negotiate back and forth, and finally Balak offers Balaam enough wealth that Balaam agrees. He will be a prophet for hire. He will curse Israel because of the money. Well, it doesn't work out so well, as God intervenes and deals with both Balaam and Balak. The idea here is they go full speed ahead in order to gain, in this case gain financially, and they will tell people whatever they want to hear. In the 1st century it wasn't all that unusual that preachers would go out and work the circuit. They were gifted communicators, but what they actually preached went to the highest bidder. So they would show up to a town and people would literally pay them considerable amounts of money to proclaim something, and they would simply preach whatever the message was from the highest bidder. So, it's this imagery of preachers who were willing to tell people anything they want to hear, in order to gain. You say, "Well, why would they do that?" "Because religion has always been big business. You have preachers today who have figured out what to tell people to become incredibly wealthy with multiple mansions and jets." They've figured out, "This is what people want to hear; this is what people will pay for." They figure out how to write books; they figure out how to say it on the internet; they figure out what makes entertaining television and they get thousands of people to follow them and give to them, and they become quite wealthy in what the New Testament calls, "tickling people's ears." That's what he's talking about—the **way of Balaam**.

...and perished in the rebellion of Korah.

If you don't know this story, it's in Numbers chapter 16. Korah led a rebellion against Moses and Aaron. It reaches basically a showdown when God shows up, and the earth literally opens up and Korah and two hundred fifty rebellious people basically drop into the earth and the earth closes on them. Again, it's a reminder of God's judgment. God takes seriously this rebellion. Now starting in verse 12, there are five word pictures, images to describe these false teachers.

These are men who are hidden reefs in your love feasts when they feast with you without fear, caring for themselves; (Vs. 12)

Hidden reefs in your love feasts—that makes perfect sense, doesn't it? (*laughter*) So what is he talking about? A love feast was like a potluck, maybe what we would call a section party. Being a Christian in the 1st century was extremely difficult and so there were times when they gathered as Christians and they encouraged one another; they loved one another; they challenged one another; they ate together; they made sure everybody was okay; they called it a **love feast**. So these false teachers—we've already been told they *creep in unnoticed*—and that language is so important because they are sneaking in and nobody notices. They look and sound like everybody else. They're doing so **without fear**. Nobody is going to catch them; nobody is going to expose them. They are right in the mix, and yet they're **hidden reefs**. The idea is: imagine a boat going through the sea in tranquil water, unaware that there are reefs that are right below the surface of the water. It's only a matter of time until the wooden boat hits a reef, tears open a hole in the bottom of the boat, and the boat sinks. That's the description. Everybody thinks everything is good at the love feast, but actually these hidden reefs are there, and it's only a matter of time until somebody hits one, makes a hole in the boat and sinks the ship.

So, think about this: How many unaware, somewhat naïve Christians, who don't really know the truth, go to a church and they think everything said there is true. Or they go to a website...a

podcast...the radio...the television, or they read a book. As long as there are verses in parentheses, they think that's what the Bible says, and they have no idea that this is not really God's truth. They think this is true but they just get led astray. That's basically the idea there. The second word picture is they are:

...clouds without water, carried along by winds; (Vs. 12b)

Now imagine an ancient world; imagine a drought. The clouds are starting to form—this is life and death stuff—but maybe finally there is some relief and they'll live. But these are clouds that only tease them, and at the end of the day they have no water. They just blow past and it's just another disappointment. What the false teachers do is they prey on your hurt; they prey on your disappointment; they prey on your failures. They come after you and your hurts and your struggles and your confusions and they promise you all kinds of things that aren't true, and about the time you think, "Maybe, finally, this is going to be the answer that your soul has longed for," you find out that they are just empty promises. They are **clouds without water**. They just tease you and you're left with more hurt and more pain and more disappointment and more disillusion than before. That creates this cycle that makes you more desperate and more vulnerable and you just cycle lower and lower and lower. The next picture is very similar:

autumn trees without fruit, doubly dead, uprooted, (Vs. 12c)

So again, imagine an ancient culture. The tree producing fruit is part of how you survive. You couldn't go to the grocery store, so it's very important for the tree to produce, but you show up in the fall and there's no fruit. This is life and death stuff and there's no fruit. But what you find out is: not only is there no fruit, there will never be fruit because the roots are dead, it's **doubly dead** is what the text says. That's the idea again that the false teachers come with all these promises, "This is the way to be happy;" "this is the way to be fulfilled;" "this is life as you want it to be," but it's just an empty promise, and you end up more broken, more disappointed, more discouraged than ever before. Verse 13:

...wild waves of the sea, casting up their own shame like foam;

So, if you've been to the ocean or the sea, when the waves come crashing in, there's a lot of noise. It's pretty majestic, but then they go right back out and all that's left is this weird, smelly, stinky foam—kind of this white **foam** that remains. So, these people would have been very familiar with this imagery. Again, the false teachers come with a lot of talk, with a lot of promises, with a lot of noise. You know sin is fun for a season, but then you wake up the next morning and you're more empty, you're more discouraged, you're more disappointed; it doesn't fulfill what was promised. So that's the waves crashing in. They quickly go away, and all that's left is the **shame**, and the shame is like that stinky, sticky white **foam** on the beach. The last one:

...wandering stars, (We would call them shooting stars.) for whom the black darkness has been reserved forever. (Vs. 13b)

So, the false teachers come along full of promises which end up to be nothing more than a *shooting star*—here today, gone tomorrow, empty promises—and once more you're left alone in the darkness. Have you ever tried to show someone a shooting star? It's very difficult because immediately they are there...they are there...and they're gone, and that's the imagery: they are

there, and then they're gone and it's dark again. And that's all these false teachers had to offer—so just very descriptive word pictures! Verse 14:

It was also about these men *that* Enoch, *in* the seventh generation from Adam, prophesied, saying, “Behold, the Lord came with many thousands of His holy ones, to execute judgement upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their ungodly deeds which they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.” (Vs. 14-15)

The book of Enoch is a book that was written after the book of Malachi, before the beginning of the Gospels. It was a group of books called Pseudepigrapha, so it's not Scripture; it's never intended to be Scripture; it's not an inspired book. It bears the name of Enoch but whether it has anything actually from Enoch or not is hard to say. But, it was a book that Jewish readers would have been familiar with and in the book of Enoch, just like Paul quotes from the Greek poets, he reminds them, essentially saying that even the book of Enoch says that Jesus is coming back and He'll bring His holy ones—the saints—with Him, and there will be judgment on the ungodly. It's essentially saying that at the end of the story, God wins! You can't fight God and win; you can't rebel against God and win! If you think you can make up your own story, your own morality, your own truth—lead your life your own way and God's okay with that—you're living in a dream world. Somebody has convinced you of a fantasy, and it's a reminder that at the end of the story, God wins, and God is going to hold the ungodly accountable! Finally verse 16: Well, who are these people?

These are grumblers, finding fault, following after their own lusts; they speak arrogantly, flattering people for the sake of *gaining an advantage*.

It's a very interesting verse. Who are these people? Well, they are **grumblers**, they are **fault finders**. They're complainers; they grumble about everything; they are dissatisfied with everything. They don't like anything; everything is wrong; they are always trying to find that certain something that will satisfy. So, who do these false teachers prey on? Answer: the grumblers, the fault finders. They're looking for Christians who are dissatisfied, that are grumbly, that find fault in everything. They are never happy with anything, so they are easy prey for the false teachers.

Now that's a big concern. We live in a culture where lots of people have lots of issues with the church—not specifically this church—but *the Church*. They're grumblers: “The church doesn't do anything right; the church messes everything up; the church is full of hypocrites.” They're fault finders; they're grumblers; they're dissatisfied with everything, and nothing makes them happy. Nobody seems to get it right, so the false teachers come along and they prey on that because they find people that are like-minded, and they tap into that. It's helpful to understand that if your bent is as a grumbler—you're a complainer; you're a fault finder; nobody knows how to do anything right; the church is all messed up; it's full of hypocrites—you are easy to lead astray, because it's not difficult for the false teachers to tap into that and convince you of something that's not true.

So, practically speaking, how do we move forward in this? Here is a good way to think about it; we talked about this a little bit last week: If your determination is to live life on your terms—you want to believe what you want to believe is true; you want to decide what is right and wrong; you want to decide what's good and evil; you want to go with your feelings; you want to live life your way and so that's where you start and then you're determined to find someone to tell you God's okay with that—you are guaranteed to go down the wrong path. It's all about where you're starting from. There are a lot of Christians today who have decided that this is the way I want the world to be.

This is what I want to believe; this is what I want to be true and I'm going to find somebody out there to tell me it's okay. But the consequences of that will be destruction. It's a very different approach when your heart is broken and humble before God, and your desire is first and foremost, "I want to know what's true; I want to know what God has said; I want to know what God has commanded; I want to know life as God has defined it to be, and as I learn the truth, then I will conform my beliefs and my behavior and my morality to submit to my theology." That leads to the path of life!

So, I want to throw the picture on the screen one more time and just remind you that if you're determined to go the way of Cain—"Nobody is going to tell me what to do; I'm going to live life on my terms. I'm going to decide what is right and wrong; I'm going to decide what's going to make me happy, and I'll find somebody to tell me it's okay—and that's your story...that's where you're headed...then you need to ask yourself, "Is that really the path I want to travel?" Jesus couldn't have been more clear, "You shall know the truth, because it's *the* truth...*true* truth...*God's* truth that set's you free."

Father, my prayer this morning is that we would be people of truth, not lied to and deceived by the enemy, but we would stand firm on what You have told us is true. That we might die to ourselves, that we might take up our cross, that we might find the life that our souls long for and the life that You, and You alone offer us. Lord, may that be so. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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