March 15, 2015

“Needed Reminders”

Jude 5-16

**FCF**: The need for reminders about unapparent but still important things

**PROPOSITION**: (anchor) Because of the stakes and our tendency to forget,

(magnet) we need to welcome even the Lord’s stern reminders.

**SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:**

If you’re not accustomed to things you need to beware of, you need to have someone warn you. Think of driving in the wintry weather these past weeks. It’s not just the white ice but the black ice that can put you in the ditch. It’s good to know that. Or that the roads are now not what they used to be – potholes to swerve around and delays because of repairs to plan around. If you’re not accustomed to things you need to beware of, you need to have someone warn you.

There are things you need to know that will spare you physical damage. And spiritual damage as well. Which becomes all the more apparent the further we get into Jude’s letter.

**SCRIPTURE READING**: Jude 1-16

**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

**SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

This is the story of “The Hole in Beaver Pond”. Back when I was a kid, the local pond had frozen over and a bunch of us went out on it after school. I’d made my way to the other side, discovered that the lines in the ice where I was standing were really flaws that became cracks that then gave way under my weight. Fortunately, I caught myself by my elbows and crawled out. As I was shivering back across, I saw my brother, Ed, and warned him not to go near the hole. But Ed didn’t heed my warning, kept on skating in that direction, and slid right in himself.

There are warnings worth hearing. And certainly not forgetting. This letter is from Jude, a brother of Jesus, to a church in the mid-60’s. He is writing to warn them of a grave danger. It seems that they were unaware of false teachers in their midst and the threat they posed. These were folks that were “all about that grace,” their twisted view of the gospel, and the idea that, since God loved them, they could live however they pleased. But the fact is that we’ve been saved not just from sin’s deadly penalty but from its very power, saved not to sin but from sin.

Jude wrote this because his readers had dropped their guard, forgotten the stakes, and needed a reminder. They needed to welcome this reminder, stern as it sounded. So do we. With such stakes and our tendency to forget, we need to welcome even the Lord’s stern reminders.

We’re going to look at this in three parts. First, a description of the false teachers. Second, the reality of what awaits them. And then, third, some reasons we need to take heed.

1. **A DESCRIPTION OF THE FALSE TEACHERS**

So to start, a description of the false teachers. How does Jude characterize them?

1. *Analogies from the Old Testament*

He begins with some analogies drawn from the Old Testament.

1. Historical events

First, in appealing in vv.5-7 to some historical events – to rebellious Israel, fallen angels, and Sodom and Gomorrah. He then summarizes all this (READ Jude 8). The thread holding those together being privileged place and position giving way to foolish presumption and pride.

1. Historical figures

Jude also appeals to some historical figures (READ Jude 11). The common thread here being that of rebellion against God, being brought to ruin, and bringing others down with them.

1. *Lessons from Other Sources*

But Jude uses not only analogies from the Old Testament but lessons from other sources as well. Which several biblical authors do, making a point by appealing to common material.

1. Jewish literature

In vv.9-10, Jude alludes to *The Testament of Moses*, a work of Jewish literature and a text within it illustrating a refusal to submit to God’s authority, then a life ruled by impulses and feelings.

1. Nature

In vv. 12-13, Jude appeals to lessons from nature (READ Jude 12-13). The thing these six images have in common being hidden dangers, of sure destruction veiled by sheer appearances.

1. Their own speech

But Jude isn’t done. He appeals to the speech of these teachers (READ Jude 16). The fact is that our words are an overflow of our hearts. And these are all indicators of a life without God.

So, in essence, Jude is saying, “*I know this may sound harsh. But you really do need to know what these folks are like. And what their teaching does, what it inevitably leads to*.”

*Application:*

“*You need to mark it. This abuse of the gospel will bring damage to your relationship with God. And with each other. So be on the watch for such as these. And for such in yourself.*”

For this is no game. We need to take heed of this description of such teachers. Because of the stakes and our tendency to forget, we need to welcome even these stern reminders.

1. **THE REALITY OF WHAT AWAITS THEM**

Stern reminders of what such teachers are like. And then the reality of what awaits them.

1. *Analogies from the Old Testament*

Again, Jude uses analogies from the Old Testament to press his point. Look at vv.5-7.

1. Israel

Jesus, in His eternal and divine nature, is said to be active in the world from the start. Active in the exodus from Egypt, the wanderings in the desert, punishing those who forsook the Lord.

1. Angels

Then there are angels – likely alluding to Jewish writings on Genesis 6, reading it as angels having intimate relations with women. Not by God’s creation design. And so (READ Jude 6b).

1. Sodom and Gomorrah

Then there was Sodom and Gomorrah. 1st century writers spoke of the smoke still rising from the sites of these cities all those years later, seen as a visible symbol of eternal punishment.

Pulling these three together, these analogies point to those destroyed by Jesus, “kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness,” and a graphic picture of “a punishment of eternal fire”.

1. *Lessons from Other Sources*

But Jude isn’t done. Pressing harder, he draws in more lessons from other sources, all consistent with the Scriptures. Here *1 Enoch*, a 3rd century B.C. work (READ Jude 14a-15).

1. Judgment is universal

Four times it’s made clear that judgment is universal. Nothing and no one will escape.

1. Judgment is moral

Four times, with emphasis on “ungodliness,” it’s made clear that the judgment is a moral one. Which had to have been understood as a strong rebuke against this anti-obedience teaching.

So, in essence, Jude is saying, “*I know this may sound harsh. But you need to know what is coming – the eternal judgment of Christ. And that is what this teaching really leads to*.”

*Application:*

“*So you need to mark such teaching. You need to know the reality of eternal punishment and its nature*.” Part of which is alluded to here. God is God. But man chooses. So Hell is not imposed on anyone. It is always freely chosen. Think of it this way. Someone spends a lifetime on the path of self-dependence and self-righteousness. Hell just takes that path on out forever.

Why is this important? Sometimes I’m asked, “*Do you really think Hell means fire and brimstone?*” And I say, “*I think those are likely metaphors*.” Then, just as my questioner is getting comfortable, I follow up and say, “*That is, metaphors for something far worse*.” Hell is our getting what we want – for God to leave us alone – forever. The worst thing imaginable.

This is no game. We need to take heed of this description of such teachers. Because of the stakes and our tendency to forget, we need to welcome even these stern reminders.

1. **SOME REASONS TO TAKE HEED**

Which, as if that wasn’t enough, takes us to more reasons to take heed of Jude’s words.

1. *Real Warnings*

Again, these are real warnings of real dangers Jude is speaking of.

1. Great stakes

The stakes are great. The gospel message is one of freedom from sin, both its guilt and its grip. It is vital we get that message right. The ramifications affect our lives now and flow on forever.

1. Need to contend

So with such stakes, Jude urges us to contend, to wrestle, to face the resistance and fight it.

1. *Rich Assurances*

We are being given real warnings here. And then rich assurances as well.

1. Warning given

First, just in the fact a warning is given. Don’t you see? Jude didn’t keep silent. God cares enough to warn us! Why? Clearly, He’s not apathetic towards us but passionate about us.

1. Justice coming

We also have the assurance that justice is coming. And that too is good. People glibly say, “*God is love*.” Yes, but He doesn’t love everything. And He has said He is going to do something about it. Hell is the assurance that all wrongs will be made right, that justice will be done.

1. Wrath exhausted

Which is truly good news when you hear it with the cross in view. At the cross, we see God’s wrath exhausted upon His Son. There we see His holiness and our sin. And His amazing grace. And for those whose sole hope is in the finished work of His Son, that is good news.

We have great reasons to take heed here – both in the warnings and the assurances. Perhaps most especially that Hell is good news when we know Jesus endured it for us already.

*Illustration:*

One morning in August 1949 in the Helena National Forest, lightning struck the south side of Mann Gulch. Foreman Wagner Dodge told his team of smokejumpers to start on the north side of the gulch and hit the fire from the back side. But the fire soon jumped the river and began moving up towards the men. It had “blown up” and was spreading much faster than anticipated. But the crew didn’t know this because of the various smaller ridges on the slope. It was only as they came over a larger ridge that they saw the huge fire coming towards them, only a few hundred yards away. All they could do was turn around and run for it. But even as they began dropping their heavy tools, they realized they were not going to be able to outrun this fire.

But the foreman got an idea. He started an “escape fire,” taking a match and burning an area of grass to lie in so that the fire would burn around him and his crew. He then ordered everyone to lie down in the burnt down area. Now tragically, not everyone could hear him. They were spread out. The noise of the fire was intense. And an “escape fire” had never been part of their training. So they left the foreman. He survived unharmed. All the rest, except for two who hid in a crevice, died. The lesson? Fire cannot burn the same patch of grass twice.

*Application:*

The deeper lesson? Just as God’s anger burned against the sin that Jesus took upon Himself at the cross, it burns but once and for all. Once the judgment fell, it cannot fall again. Or, to put it another way, Jesus went through Hell for you. All of it. He bore it all, paid it all.

**CONCLUSION:**

Oh, we dare not spurn these reminders. Think of it this way. Back when he was the host of “The Tonight Show,” Jay Leno was known for a segment called “Jaywalkers” in which spoke with a person-on-the-street, asking questions about current or historical events. “*Finish the name of this Civil War battle. The Battle of Bull*…” “*Winkle?*” Oh my. Or this one. “*Who fought the Battle of Bunker Hill? Which two sides?*” First answer, “*The North and the South?*” Seeing that wasn’t right, the next person said, “*The East and West?*” Which, of course, is funny but, on reflection, there’s a lesson here. “*Those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it*.”

Move that now to a national cultural scale. Have we learned anything in terms of foreign policy, domestic policy, economics, or ethics? Or the church. Have we learned anything from our fore-bearers and their experiences? Or our own individual lives. Have we learned anything from our own stories, our own experiences of success and failure? Quite often not.

We can’t afford to think we know better, that we’ve somehow arrived or have no need of these kind of reminders. Do we really need this letter from Jude? Yes. The Lord gave it to His followers. That alone should be enough for us. Beyond that, we so desperately need these grave warnings and great assurances. We never outgrow it, the need for these words. Because of the stakes and our own tendency to forget, we need to welcome even the Lord’s stern reminders.

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