

Against Slanderers of Glory

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[0 : 0 0] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on June the 13th 1999 the preacher is Paul Barker his sermon is entitled Against Slanderers of Glory and is from Jude verses 8 to 16 God indeed we pray that you will move in our hearts write your word on it that we may faithfully follow and give glory to the Lord Jesus Christ Amen Please be seated and you may like to have open the passage from Jude that was read page 994 and this is the middle of three sermons on this little letter near the back of the Bible page 994 All of us dream and even if we don't remember what our dreams are when we wake up in the morning we're told that all of us dream but what do dreams mean?

For some they're just benign hopes the dream world dreaming of being the captain of the Australian cricket team For others dreams are expressions of internal fear I remember the week before I was ordained dreaming night after night of forgetting my robes forgetting the bread and the wine or the Bible or going to the wrong church or something like that and then got worse the week before the first wedding that I took I dreamt that I married the groom to the bridesmaid or the bride to the organist or the bride to me all sorts of combinations for a whole week expressions of my fear and nerves For others dreams are sometimes seen to have authority as though some external force or being or God has given us a dream in order to communicate something

Maybe Martin Luther King was rhetorically at least appealing to that sort of authority in his famous speech in the 60s But certainly in more recent years New Age and mystic spirituality see dreams as claiming some divine authority that some divine being has given us a dream which we are to interpret and follow as a divine instruction That's not new For centuries millennia that's been the case In the early part of the Old Testament Moses warned the people that there would be dreamers of dreams that is people who would claim to have had a dream come vision and that was some divine being speaking and by this dream they were to guide the people And it certainly seems to be the case in the church to whom Jude writes in the middle or later part of the first century AD We saw last week that this church was being infiltrated by false teachers

People who didn't come in with a great big banner saying don't believe in Jesus but rather people who came in subversively or trying to surreptitiously bring across their false teaching their perversion of truth Oh yes it was cloaked in words of truth but underneath was in fact far from it The diatribe against these people continues in verses 8 to 16 and Jude calls them dreamers which seems to suggest that they were claiming as some authority for what they were doing and saying some dream that they had had Yet in the same way he says in verse 8 These dreamers not because their head was in the clouds but because their dreams were their claim to their authority And Jude describes them in three ways as we saw last week Typical in this little letter are groups of three He greeted the people with three descriptions of being a Christian

Then he prayed three things for them Then we saw three examples of Old Testament warnings last week and here now again the next group of three Three simple summary descriptions All things that we saw last week They're people who defile the flesh that is they were sexually licentious and immoral They reject authority We saw that last week casting aside God's law just like the ancient Israelites did in the wilderness And thirdly and more puzzlingly the expression They slander the glorious ones It's hard to know exactly what that means Although it is clear that the glorious ones is a reference to angelic beings or angels Last week in the illustrations that Jude gave he mentioned the angels in verse 6 and their wrongdoing their pride and arrogance and lust And then he referred in verse 7 to the illustration of Sodom and their sexual sin

[5 : 2 8] But when we read Genesis 19 about Sodom we see that part of their sexual sin was actually aimed against people who are actually angelic beings in human form So maybe slandering the angels or glorious ones here is picking up that sexual licentiousness of the illustrations of verses

6 and 7 But maybe also something else is implied by this expression There was a tradition which occurs in the New Testament as well as the Old that the angels were mediators of God's law We see that for example in Hebrews 2 and other places So maybe the slanderers against the glorious ones is a way of saying you are rejecting the law which has been passed on by the angels to Moses and to God's people That seems to be the idea that will be picked up in a later verse we'll see today as well

In contrast to that is verse 9 Another illustration Jude is full of them They're not always things that we are familiar with Verse 9 says In contrast in contrast to these false teachers who slander the glorious ones the angels the archangel Michael contended with the devil and disputed about the body of Moses When that happened he did not dare to bring a condemnation of slander against him but said the Lord rebuke you Moses died at the end of the book of Deuteronomy He was buried by God on the hill the mountain overlooking the Jordan River and the promised land The Israelites did not know where he was buried In later Jewish tradition in a document called The Assumption of Moses It's not in the Bible and it's not in even the Apocrypha part of the Bible

There's an account fanciful I guess of Satan the devil contending with the archangel Michael Satan was accusing Moses of sin being a murderer which he was and saying therefore his body belonged to him and not therefore to Michael and hence God Michael's response is to say God is the judge in effect He's quoted here in verse 9 as saying the Lord rebuke you He's handing over judgment to God He's not claiming to slander the devil even He's letting God be the judge Part of the difficulty of this illustration is to whom Michael speaks He did not dare to bring a condemnation of slander against him Is that Satan or is it Moses?

The verse is ambiguous in the end Now let me say that though this illustration is difficult and unfamiliar to us in the end the basic message of it is clear We've got to remember also that Jude is referring to a story his readers would have known even if we don't like any good preacher I suppose picking their illustrations of things that the congregation knows about So we a preacher today wouldn't refer to this story because most congregations wouldn't know of it they'd find some other more familiar illustration But the point I guess is this If the archangel Michael was careful not to slander Satan or deal with him derisively then so ought Christians and Christian leaders Or if the hymn in verse 9 is Moses then if Michael was careful not to accuse

Moses then so ought Christians and Christian leaders be careful not to accuse other people And if Michael is reluctant to pronounce judgment but lets God pronounce such judgment doesn't usurp God's prerogative in that then so ought Christians and Christian leaders be slow to make statements of judgment Michael is an illustration of submitting to God's authority here Christians and Christian leaders ought to be the same The use of the illustration implies that the false teachers in Jude's church are breaking each of these things They are quick to deal slanderously or derisively or lightly with Satan and angelic beings They may be quick to accuse other Christians of sin They may be quick to judge where really judgment is

[10:26] God's prerogative They're quick to assert their own authority rather than submit to God's authority Well Jude says in a way that pulls the carpet out from under their feet in doing all of those things all they do is expose their own ignorance He says in verse 10 These people slander whatever they do not understand He's saying they're ignorant They don't understand God or angelic beings or judgment or grace certainly and they are destroyed by those things that like irrational animals they know by instinct He's saying in essence that rather than be spiritually superior people all they're doing is following their base instincts and hence their sexual licentiousness It's a scathing comment on spiritual arrogance

Jude doesn't leave it there though He gives three more examples We might think it's a bit of overkill He seems to go on and on about these false teachers but his concern for them or the people that he's writing to is that false teaching is serious and he wants them to be in no doubt at all about just how serious it is nor must we fall into the trap of treating false teaching lightly Jude begins verse 11 with a statement of woe a sombre and solemn note a word that Jesus uses in only serious places and his three examples follow the false teachers are like three of these things from the Old Testament they're like they go the way of Cain Cain we may well know the son of Adam and Eve in Genesis chapter 4 the first book of the Bible he kills his brother Abel despite the warnings by God not to do so in Jewish tradition Cain is the archetypal false teacher the one who rejects God's authority authority so to follow Cain's way is to do as these false teachers are doing to reject God's authority and by implication I think deal ill with other people the next illustration may be lesser

known for some of us they abandon themselves to Balaam's error for the sake of gain Balaam was a false foreign prophet in the book of Numbers the fourth book of the Old Testament first he resisted the pressure to speak falsely of the people of God but in the end we read that greed the lure of Luca led him to lead

Israel astray and through his leadership the Israelites committed idolatry and sexual immorality at a place called Peor the contrast or the comparison with Balaam here suggest that the false teachers of Jude's day were greedy for gain maybe charging exorbitant fees for their acts of spiritual leadership or their revelation of their dreams or something like that need to be saved the third illustration of the verse is perhaps even more lesser known but again from the Old Testament again from the book of Numbers though not in chronological order I suspect that the order is determined by seriousness not chronology they perish in Korah's rebellion in Numbers chapter 16 a man called Korah with some fellow cohorts stood up against Moses deliberately refusing his authority and rejecting him it was a blatant and in a sense full scale revolt against the authority of God and God's servant

Moses his fate was dramatic the earth opened and swallowed him up along with those who like him were rebellious Jude is saying here that not only are the false teachers like those people like Korah and Balaam and Cain in what they do in rejecting God's authority and so on but their fate will be the same as well maybe not literally the earth opening up but the chilling climax to the sequence of three in that verse is that they perish in Korah's rebellion that's where the emphasis in the verse in effect lies but even still Jude is not finished with these false teachers he now uses a sequence of images and metaphors or pictures or analogies to describe them so in verse 12 he says they are blemishes on your love feasts now a love feast is not an orgy a love feast for early

[15:55] Christians was a gathering of Christians for a communal meal each would bring something according to what they could and all were to partake and share equally in the meal and in the context of that meal there would be some remembrance of the Lord's supper the bread and the wine it would be unlike what we do today where we just have a sip of wine and a little tiny piece of bread theirs would be a proper meal but in the context of it the sharing of bread and wine as a remembrance of Jesus' death and resurrection it's clear that these teachers are part of the church and therefore part of these love feasts but rather than bring those love feasts honour and rather than honour the people of the congregation they blemish it stain it the word has got a couple of shades of meaning it could just be they blemish it that is they're a spot therefore it's not an acceptable love feast like an animal in the Old

Testament to be sacrificed must be without blemish but also the word is used for an underwater reef and so what it seems to be hinting at is to say that on the surface it looks calm and safe with these false teachers as we've seen their words are cloaked with hints of truth and grace but underneath they are dangerous and those who go too close will be shipwrecked on them that's the warning I think of that image keep away from them they ought not be part of your fellowship they ought not be part of your love feasts they ought not be part of your communal remembrance of Jesus death and resurrection not only do they eat with you but they eat without fear we're told they feast with you without fear that is despite their ungodliness and their false teaching despite their sexual licentiousness without fear they come in and celebrate the

Lord's Supper Paul's words about the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians words which are echoed in our own communion service each week remind us that if we come to the Lord's table without repentance but as ungodly people brazenly continuing in sin then we eat damnation upon ourselves these false teachers did not heed those words the second picture that's used in verse 12 two little words in our translation feeding themselves but literally it's about shepherding themselves but looking after themselves not the flock a standard way of describing God's leaders in human terms is shepherds preeminently Jesus the good shepherd but there are times in the Bible both Old and New

Testaments where the leadership of God's people is castigated for its selfishness the false shepherds of the prophet Ezekiel chapter 34 for example people whose interest is only in themselves not in their flock the self interested Christian leader exposes himself through his self interest he's a false teacher it's a good test of Christian leadership are they seeking the interests and concern and welfare of their flock or are they concerned purely with themselves the false teachers of Jude's church were concerned only with themselves then come a sequence of images from nature they are like waterless clouds carried along by the winds if you lived in

Israel a cloud would be a good sign maybe this morning we're a bit sick of them but the clouds would bring rain in a land that's very dry but a waterless cloud is the worst thing because it promises much as you see it on the horizon and yet delivers little it's rich in promise it's poor in performance all it does is obscure the light the false teachers are like that they offer nothing to encourage nothing to nourish nothing to water or to feed or to grow the people of God they're devoid of spiritual refreshment like waterless clouds they're also like autumn trees without fruit twice dead uprooted by autumn trees ought to have produced a crop of fruit but these trees have produced none the season is over it's clear that they're not going to produce fruit standardly in the Bible fruit is a metaphor for righteousness bearing much fruit is about living righteous lives both old and new testaments these false teachers lacked righteousness they bore no fruit twice dead we're told dead because they're barren of fruit but dead secondly because they're uprooted that is a metaphor of judgment the next illustration at the beginning of verse 13 is that they're like wild waves of the sea casting up the foam of their own shame if you walk along the beach as the tide has begun to recede you see the foam and the scum left by the waves the debris and litter that it spews out there's little of value or worth there and for these false teachers despite all their pounding and their beating despite perhaps their size and their energy despite their relentless activity all that's left to show spew scum litter debris and lastly in this list of pictures they're like wandering stars in ancient greek the language this was written in the word for planet is just like the word for error and so maybe these wandering stars are planets rather than stars but whatever is the actual situation the point's clear in the ancient world you didn't have a melways or a jerusalem ways or whatever you had you followed the stars much more than we would ever do they provided direction stars were relatively reliable but wandering stars weren't wandering stars were misleading they led you astray so too these false teachers you imagine getting a report card from your school teacher that says these things about you your parents wouldn't be happy this person these teachers they provide no benefit they do not nourish anyone they serve their own interests entirely they are misleading they are deceptive they are full of promise but they deliver absolutely nothing and the end of verse 13 sums it up worse than a school detention or worse than being repeating you know one of the school years the deepest darkness has been reserved for them

[24 : 11] forever hell is their destiny i'm not i'm not scaremongering to say that false teaching is common in churches today of any denomination but don't think the way of tolerance is the christian way because what we see in our churches today so often is that false teaching is subsumed under the category of diversity so that in the anglican church for which i can speak best of course we have an extraordinary range of teaching but those up front often describe it as the rich diversity of the anglican church nuances and facets of ways of approaching god and thinking about god there is diversity and there is legitimate diversity diversity but much of what is called diversity is lies and falsehood and god has no time for the teachers of lies for that's what these false teachers were they looked harmless they cloaked themselves with words of truth and grace but they are wolves in sheep's clothing seeking to devour and destroy there is no reason whatsoever why our response to false teachers today ought be any different from jude's in his day jude rounds his argument off in verse 14 by quoting from a book called one enoch it's not in our bible nor is it in the apocryphal part of the bible it was a book that was popular in his day it was a spiritual book a jewish book the name enoch is goes back to a person in genesis chapter five i think it would be the great great great grandson of adam i may have got one great wrong but enoch didn't die he walked with god and he was taken up to heaven almost uniquely in the bible apart from elijah in the old testament because of that he became a figure of renown a figure of intrigue or interest in the years leading up to jesus day and therefore jude's day the book one enoch is not really written by him even though it sort of claims to be but it's clear that it's a pseudonymous work somebody else has written it and put his name as the author i suppose it's a little bit like this is a bad analogy but it's a little bit like the interest that is is about elvis presley in the last 20 years and whether elvis still lives or not now it's very different so it's a bad analogy so don't push it too far but because enoch didn't die and rose i'm not saying that's what happened to elvis at all but there became to be a lot of interest and intrigue attached to him now the point of saying that is that in jude's day this book was well known jude quotes it not because it's scripture he doesn't say scripture tells us or god tells us he just quotes a book that's well known he is the preacher who's using illustrations that his congregation know and he quotes the book see the lord is coming with ten thousands of his holy ones in the book of enoch it would be god coming for jude it's the lord jesus christ one of the ways in which the new testament acknowledges that jesus is divine by

ascribing what others write about god to jesus himself he's anticipating jesus return he when he comes it will be with ten thousands or myriads of holy ones that is angels again and the point of this illustration is i think to say that jesus when he returns will judge that's clear in verse 15 and the angels will be with him in that act of judgment and just like in the old testament god when he gave his law on mount sinai was accompanied by myriads of angels you can read that in deuteronomy 33 the basis of judgment will be that same law that was given then it's tying judgment to god's earlier law now the point of the association for jude is this these false teachers have have renounced the law rejected its authority and in doing so in effect slandered all the angels who are involved with it they're wrong jude is saying that that very law will be the means of god's judgment and when god comes in jesus christ to judge all his angels will be there with him to show the link and it shows these teachers to be wrong so when jesus comes in verse 15 he'll do he'll come to execute judgment on all to convict everyone of all the deeds of ungodliness that they've committed in such an ungodly way and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against him it's a convoluted sentence but there are two key ideas in it in fact there's a deal of repetition all to execute judgment on all to convict all of all the deeds four times in that verse that greek word appears the repetition i think gives this a rhythm it's like nailing nails into the coffin of these false teachers all all all and the other word that's repeated four times is the word ungodly not each time in english it come out but it's there and again that repetition is deliberate you see when jesus comes to judge it will be universal there'll be no exemptions christians won't be exempt nor will the false teachers be exempt and it seems to imply that they were saying we won't have to be judged because we're christians or christian teachers jude's saying that none of us is exempt from the judgment of god but he's also saying that the judgment is moral you cannot put aside god's word and god's law because that is the basis of god's judgment and verse 15 makes it clear that it's ungodly words false teaching as well as ungodly acts or immorality on both counts these false teachers fail now the stress on judgment here i think is deliberate back in the third chapter of the bible genesis 3 the first thing that the serpent or satan denied was god's judgment he said to adam and eve you eat this fruit it's nice and if you eat of it you won't die it's a denial of judgment and false teachers of every age are the same and jude's false teachers no doubt the same as well false teachers sit loose with the judgment of god that's why this book is full of illustrations of warning from the old testament cain was judged by god balaam judged by god korah judged by god the israelites we saw last week judged by god the angels judged by god the sodomites judged by god do not think we can be free from the scrutiny of god jude's saying jesus is returning to judge us all we might expect that to be the climax of these words verse 16 almost looks trivial by comparison and yet it makes a keen observation these false teachers are grumblers and malcontents well so what i mean half of us are grumblers and malcontents i bet most of us got up this morning and thought oh what a miserable day this is ten times in the wilderness israel we're told grumbled murmured against god you see to grumble or to be a malcontent or a fault finder is an indicator of being out of step with god people who are satisfied with nothing complain at everything the grass is always greener somewhere else in summer we'd rather be in winter in winter we'd rather be in queensland the weather is never right life is never good enough the people down the road have always got it easier than i have now don't laugh because i think many of us fall into this trap if this is you take heed grumbling and being malcontent is an indication of being out of step with god paul elsewhere writes godliness with contentment is great gain these false teachers also indulge their own lusts serving their own interests and desires that is they're bombastic in speech flattering people to their own advantage they say what itching ears want to hear in order to win an audience in order to win a following in order to be paid a fee like jude's readers we are called to contend for the faith there's no wide broad-minded tolerance here the line is clearly drawn we need to be wise as serpents to discern falsehood we need to be steadfast in submitting to god's authority we need to keep away from the lure of ungodliness we need to pray for christian leaders that they do not err and we need to be under no delusion that jesus is returning to judge us all solemn uncompromising words these are next week we'll see jude's warm encouragement to his readers about their own lives but for now the solemnity must stay with us let's pray

O God we pray preserve us from error and ungodliness keep us in the paths of truth give us eyes to see and ears to hear that we may rightly discern between error and truth we pray this for jesus sake amen true a time cer