Jude 10–13

A Ministry in the Word

Scripture Reading

> *But these speak evil of those things which they know not: but what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves. Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core. These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever.*

They Speak Evil of What They Know Not

Verse 10 opens with the same movement that Jude has employed throughout — contrast and comparison. Against the example of the archangel who would not bring a railing accusation even against the devil, *these* speak evil of things they do not know. What they have not been taught by the Spirit of God, they rail against rather than search out. The Bereans are the opposite example: when they heard something new, they searched the Scriptures whether those things were so. The natural response of the flesh to an unfamiliar thing is rejection — *I have never heard that before, therefore it must be wrong.* That is not faith; it is instinct, the operation of the natural mind without submission to God's word. What they do know they know as irrational animals know things — by natural instinct — and in those very things they corrupt themselves.

The Way of Three — Woe unto Them

Verse 11 gives a three-fold characterisation of these men by reference to three Old Testament figures: Cain, Balaam, and Korah. The three verbs that describe their course are striking: they have *gone* in the way of Cain, they have *run greedily* after the error of Balaam, and they have *perished* in the gainsaying of Korah. Gone, run greedily, perished — three stages, each more advanced than the last. And the woe at the beginning anticipates all three.

Cain: the way of a non-bloody sacrifice, of coming before God without the shedding of blood. He had as much opportunity to learn as Abel, being the older brother. Yet he brought what he brought — an offering that represents all those who are not before God on the ground of the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ. The various alternative theories of the atonement that have been developed over the centuries — which deny the substitutionary and propitiatory character of Christ's sacrifice — are in the way of Cain. They have no blood.

Balaam: the error of using a religious position for personal gain, running greedily after reward. Scripture speaks of Balaam's way, his doctrine, and his error — three different things. Here it is his error: the use of ministry for self-enrichment, making religion a vehicle for personal advantage.

Korah: the gainsaying — the contradiction — of Korah, who offered strange fire and set aside the appointed priesthood. This is false worship combined with rebellion against the order that God has called. Together, these three combine in the persons Jude is describing: a false approach to God, a corrupt motive, and a false worship in defiance of God's appointments. It is a rather complete picture of religious corruption from within.

Significantly, the three figures in verse 1 that describe the genuine believer — called, beloved, preserved — stand in exact contrast: Cain was not called as Abel was; Balaam was not beloved as the saints of God are; Korah was not preserved as those kept in Jesus Christ are.

Spots in Your Feasts of Love

Verse 12 places these men within the assemblies of the Lord's people: *spots in your feasts of love, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear.* They are spots — defilements — present at the feast. And they are there without fear. No conscience operates in them; no sense that they do not belong. Self-confidence and absent conscience often go together. The danger of such spots at a love feast is that in the atmosphere of affection and warmth, the soul relaxes, and what is defiling goes unnoticed or becomes familiar. The earnest contending for the faith that verse 3 calls for would have made such spots far less comfortable.

Seven Figures of Speech — What They Are and Are Not

What follows is one of the most sustained and vivid pieces of characterisation in the New Testament — seven figures drawn from nature, each pressing the same point: appearance without substance, profession without reality, the promise of something and the delivery of nothing.

Clouds without water, carried about by winds. Clouds are where the refreshment comes from. Ministry is meant to refresh and cleanse, like water. These offer the appearance of it and have none. And they are not solid — they are carried about by winds, every wind of doctrine, the systematised error of men who have brought their own presuppositions to the text of Scripture and found only what they put there. Ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Proverbs 25:14 is the exact parallel: *as clouds and wind without rain is a man that boasteth himself of a false gift.*

Autumnal trees without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots. Autumn is the season of delivery — when the fruit of the year's growth is to be received. Ripe scholarship, one might say, with something to give. And there is nothing. Twice

dead: dead as to divine life, and dead as to their profession, which carries no standing before God. They look not unlike Christians — they may dress and speak and carry themselves in ways that suggest life. But they have no source of supply, no root, no water. Plucked up by the roots: no standing, no permanence. Compare Psalm 1 — the blessed man is planted by rivers of water, his roots go deep, and he is fruitful in his season. These are the direct opposite.

Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shames. Darby has *foaming out their own shames* — not shaming others, but producing what belongs to themselves. Foam: appearance without substance, ninety-nine percent air. Like the clouds before them, it looks like something and is nothing. There seems to be no restraint on what they say, no check, no hesitation before issuing what comes from themselves as if it were revelation.

Wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever. Stars move together in their courses — that is what stars do. The wandering star moves contrary to the rest — retrograde motion, as astronomy calls it. These move against the current of what God has established. Stars are also used for navigation: the north star, the stars that point toward the north star, give the traveller his bearings. A wandering star does not only fail to help — it actively misleads. And for a wandering star that claims to be a source of light, the reservation is supremely appropriate: the gloom of darkness for eternity. The light they claimed to give, they will not have forever. God has made reservations for them — and their reservation is the absence of all the light they pretended to possess.

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