

Sermon Title: But You, Beloved

Scripture Text: Jude 17-20 (Bible Postcards #12, Jude #6)

Speaker: Jim Harris

Date: 12-11-22

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What a glorious time to be together. It always is, when we are with the Lord's people in our gatherings together. When an unexpected and unwanted bug visited me last weekend, I *really* missed being here with you. I was also truly rejoicing for having Scott Basolo in our midst as we were sharing Jude, and I threw in the towel Saturday afternoon. He said, "Well, I'm almost done. I can finish up. I'll just do Part 7, and you can come back and do Part 6." So, thank you, Scott. And then *he* was rewarded with Covid-19. Scott, we miss you, and please get well. We look forward to having you back with us.

Well, since I couldn't be here with you last Lord's Day, Marsha and I watched the livestream of the service. And if you have had a chance to do that, you know what a bittersweet experience it is: It's really sweet to be able to look in and say, "Yeah, that's home; that's where I belong." But it's really bitter at the same time, to *not* be here in person.

Well, we got ready for church—which means: moved from one chair to another. And for over an hour before our livestream began, out of curiosity I did something that I can almost never do: I watched on television parts of many Sunday morning broadcasts of church services and other so-called "Christian" programs. I wasn't thinking about it when I did that; it was purely curiosity—and then I realized: that was like intensive review for the book on apostasy. There was not one of any of the maybe ten programs that I happened to sample that I could *ever* recommend that you watch. There *are* some; there are a few.

But when we read in Jude that "certain persons have crept in unnoticed" (vs. 4), we know we are reading about Jude's time at the tail end of the Apostolic Era in the First Century. And if Jude were to send us an update today, I think he would say: "They have crept in unnoticed, and they love to use television and the internet." What a relief, when we finally got to watch the service of Heritage Bible Church, and hear someone open God's Word and expound upon it.

Now, as you know, it wasn't our plan for me to preach the final installment of our series on Jude, but that's how it worked out. So even though you've heard the marvelous end of this book—so enriching and encouraging and convicting and uplifting, all at once—we are going to fill in the missing piece today: officially, Verses 17 through 20. And with that in mind, and especially since it worked out that I get to do the wrap-up to this seven-part series, I want to take the wide-angle view of the Book of Jude; so I'm going to give you an outline that covers the entire book. I almost giggle at my first point here, that I got a change to say this in public: Verses 1-16 is about The Creepy Ones. And then, starting in Verse 17—But You, Beloved. And again in Verse 20—But You, Beloved.

You know Jude told us why he wrote this letter; it's in Verse 3—"Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints." (NASB-1995; and throughout, unless otherwise noted) Now, typically, we say that Jude started out to write on one subject, and he changed subjects; he was going to write a sweet little letter about "our common salvation," but he changed the subject entirely.

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Well, the text *does* say that something changed along the way; but on further review, I do not think Jude switched topics, because he *did* write about "our common salvation." He said right in the first verse that he was writing "to those who are the called, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ."

He *is* writing to people about "our common salvation," but when we concluded this book last week, you saw how powerfully he encourages us and exhorts us to spread the news of salvation; and he even mentions that our purpose on Earth now, before Jesus comes, is to "have mercy" on people (vss. 22-23), and to "save" people, even "snatching them out of the fire" (vs. 23). He *is* talking about "our common salvation."

But what he meant in Verse 3 is that part of accurately *understanding* "our common salvation" is understanding that this sweet, pure, wonderful fellowship of "the body of Christ" that we enjoy (Eph. 4:12; cf. 1 Cor. 12:27; Col. 1:18, 24) is *constantly* under assault (cf. 1 Pet. 5:8; Rev. 12:17). We can only be what God intends us to be as a church if we "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints."

You know what he said next, and it's where I get my first point of my outline. Verse 4—"For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ."

You see, friends, *always*, wherever Jesus is building His "church" (Matt. 16:18) and gathering believers together into local spiritual families that we call "local churches"—wherever that happens, Satan attacks; and his primary attack comes through infiltrators (Acts 20:29-30; cf. Matt. 7:15, 22-23; Acts 8:13, 18-23; 1 Cor. 5:1-2, 9-11; 2 Cor. 11:4, 13-15; Gal. 1:6-7; 2 Thess. 3:6, 11, 14; 1 Tim. 1:3-7, 19-20; 6:3-5; 2 Tim. 2:16-18; 4:3-4; Titus 1:10-13, 16; 3:10-11; 2 Pet. 2:1-3; Rev. 2:2).

It's just exactly as Jesus described in that Parable of the Wheat and the Tares, where the farmer sows wheat—"good seed" (Matt. 13:24)—and then an "enemy" comes along and sows a seed—"tares" (vs. 25)—that, while it is growing it looks *just like* the wheat, and you can't tell for sure until the end (vs. 26). The infiltrators look and talk and act like Christians, but they are phonies (Ps. 81:15). Satan's deception is so skillful that most of his dupes have no idea of their true spiritual condition (e.g., Matt. 7:22-23). These people have "crept in unnoticed"—that's where I take the license to call them "The Creepy Ones," because they come creeping in.

Now, our passage for today is the turning point in this letter, but I want you to see that turning point by seeing what comes before it. There are at least seven references to The Creepy Ones, and there are more than a dozen descriptions of them. Actually, if you count all the pronouns that refer back to them, there are more than seven; but I have picked out the seven that add to the composite description of these ones—and hence: The Creepy Ones.

Follow along; I'm going to show you these seven reverences:

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Reference Number 1—you already saw it in Verse 4—those "certain persons"; and it tells us there two things about them: They have "crept in unnoticed." No one ever shows up at any church and says, "I'm here to cause trouble!" No, they look good. They know the right words to say. They sound good. They act nice. The second thing we know about them is that they "were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation." That refers to the fact that God has never been secretive about what happens to people who oppose Him. "Long beforehand," He said, "If you come and cause trouble with God's people, here is what is going to happen to you." (cf. 2 Pet. 2:3)

Reference Number 2 is also in Verse 4, where they are called "ungodly persons"; and he told us two more things about them there: They "turn the grace of our God into licentiousness"—that means they tend to excuse themselves for ignoring God's morality and overemphasizing His grace (Deut. 29:19; Jer. 7:8-10). "We can do whatever we want to, because we are forgiven!" (cf. 1 Jn. 2:4; 3:10)

And secondly, in that verse it says they "deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ." They want to avoid the uncomfortable reality that the truth of the Gospel is divisive (Matt. 10:34-36; 12:30). It is *very* narrow-minded, that Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" and "*no one* comes to the Father but through Me" (Jn. 14:6; cf. Acts 4:12; 1 Tim. 2:5). Some people don't like that! They want to mix in whatever else suits their fancy (e.g., 2 Kings 17:33; Zeph. 1:5b; Acts 7:42-43).

A few weeks ago, after the first service, a man came up, and we were talking. We had talked on many occasions. And he proposed to me an interpretation of something that Jesus said that is recorded in the Gospels. And I told him that "I get what you're saying," but the meaning that he was giving to that verse was not possible, according to the Greek—or even the English, for that matter; it's not that there's a translation problem. And when I said that, he became quite agitated. And so I explained to him, "We need to understand that there is only one correct meaning of any passage of the Bible: It is what the original writer—in his vocabulary, in his place, in his time—was inspired by the Holy Spirit to write to his original readers, and what he expected *them* to understand in that grammatical and historical context. That's the one correct meaning, and we have to sometimes work a little bit to make sure we know what that meaning is."

And when I said that, he raised his voice and said, "Oh, you're an *expert*, are you?" And I explained, "Well, I was telling you, that *is* what the Greek says; and, yeah, I *do* know it. But anybody else can verify what I said." And so I went on to explain—I thought this would settle things down—that if we have different interpretations of a passage, then either I'm right and you're wrong, or you're right and I'm wrong, or we are both wrong and we haven't found the meaning yet. But there are *not* contradictory interpretations of any passage of the Bible." Well, he ended up yelling a couple more things, and he stormed out.

That was the culmination of a number of interactions that Scott Basolo and I have had with him over a span of many weeks. And I prayed for him. I would love to have him come back, once he meets with the elders and we talk about what some ground rules are for fellowship in the church.

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But what *offended* that man, and what *infuriated* that otherwise quite friendly man, was the idea that there is *one* specific and understandable faith (Eph. 4:5); there is *one* set of doctrines which is "once for all handed down to the saints."

He e-mailed me later that one of the reasons that he rejects the authority of the Apostle Paul—which was one of his big points—and he rejects the authority of Paul's New Testament books, is that he said Paul disagreed with Jesus and the earlier Apostles; and he offered me proof. His proof was: "We don't have any verse where Jesus says you are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, and therefore Paul was twisting what Jesus taught." You see, he didn't understand the idea that God has used *all* of the writers of Scripture *together* to put together this "once-for-all-handed-down-to-the-saints" faith (cf. Matt. 5:18; Lk. 10:16; Jn. 13:20; Acts 1:8; 26:16-18; 1 Cor. 14:27; 1 Thess. 4:2; 1 Jn. 4:6). In other words: he was denying the uniqueness of the one true Gospel, and the one set of truth in the New Testament; he was denying the Gospel of our "our *only* Master and Lord, Jesus Christ" by denying the plenary verbal inspiration of the Bible—that "every word" is inspired (Prov. 30:6; cf. Matt. 5:18), and all of it is equally "inspired" (2 Tim. 3:16; cf. Ps.12:6; 119:128).

Now, I have to say: Church life would be easier, especially for the shepherds of the flock, if only people would shout and storm out when they reject something that the Bible teaches (e.g., Jn. 6:66)—but that's not usually how the "creepy ones" act. Most stay under the radar, and they take the long game, and they choose to stay and sow discord or spread apathy or discontent (e.g., Jn. 6:70).

Having referred to "certain persons" who have infiltrated, and having labeled them "ungodly persons," the next thing Jude did—and we saw this—he gave us three vivid illustrations of evil influences that corrupt God's people, if allowed to continue; that was Verses 4, 5, 6, and 7. Those "ungodly persons"—for example: the unbelievers who kept Israel out of the Promised Land (Heb. 3:19); they were perfectly fine with accepting the deliverance from slavery, "But that 'Ten Commandments' stuff? I don't think so!" (1 Cor. 10:1-5; Heb. 3:16-18) And then there were the "angels" who sinned grotesquely (vs. 6). There were the men of "Sodom" who tried to do what the evil angels did, only in reverse—going after "flesh" of a different kind (vs. 7).

The third reference to the "creepy ones" is in Verse 8: "these men." Verse 8 begins: "Yet in the same way these men"—that is: "in the same way" as those three illustrations of rebellious infiltrators, that's what "these men" are doing.

Reference 4 is again "these men"; it's in Verse 10—"But these men revile the things which they do not understand."

And from those two references, we know that they flout the boundaries that God created, just as demons do. An example today would be the "Respect For Marriage Act"—we respect marriage so much that we are going to give it a new definition that is *completely* in contradiction to what God says! That's the kind of thing that is coming; it is here, actually.

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It also tells us that they "revile the things which they do not understand." The word "revile" is literally "blaspheme"—they will raise their voices; they will try to criticize things that they don't even understand.

There's another reference to them in Verse 11 (Reference #5), with the pronoun "them." Verse 11 begins with a three-word sentence: "Woe to them!" "Woe" is that pronouncement of divine damnation (Is. 3:11; Jer. 50:27; Hos. 7:13; Matt. 26:24).

And then Jude gave us an avalanche of illustrations to describe those infiltrators; and he goes on from Verse 11 through Verse 13. None of these descriptions do you want to wear: "gone the way of Cain"; "rushed headlong into the error of Balaam"; they are "hidden reefs in your love feasts"; "clouds without water"; "dead trees"; "wild waves"—like a hurricane, leaving its wreckage; "wandering stars" that are headed for "darkness."

The sixth reference to them, in Verse 14—it's another "these men"; Verse 14: "It was also about these men that Enoch, in the seventh generation from Adam, prophesied." Now, as Scott explained when he go to this passage: The reference here is from the Book of Enoch. That's part of a group of Jewish books—Jewish writings—collectively known as the "Pseudepigrapha." It contains some things that *were* said by the man, Enoch. You can read about him in Genesis Chapter 5. He is one of two people in the Bible that got sort of a personal Rapture—he didn't die; he was just taken directly to be with the Lord. The other one is "Elijah" (2 Kings 2:11).

But the Book of Enoch was not written by Enoch, and it is not part of the canon of Scripture. Nevertheless, it was well-known among Jews of the First Century, and it *came to be* well-known by all of the early Christians, both Jews *and* Gentiles. So Jude just simply quoted something with which they were familiar, that reiterated his point. I could quote to you from Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. That wouldn't make the Gettysburg Address *inspired*; but if it is illustrating a biblical principle, I could use it as an illustration. That's all that Jude is doing.

And the reference to the Book of Enoch describes "these men" in several ways, and there is definitely a theme-word in what he included there in Verses 14, 15, and 16: "all the ungodly"; "their ungodly deeds"; "done in an ungodly way"; and "harsh things...spoken" by "ungodly sinners." He is talking about the fate of the "ungodly," and the fact that there are "ungodly" ones who infiltrate the fellowship of God's people (cf. Titus 1:16).

I'll give you a little sidebar here. Scott, being as respectful as he is, didn't want to trample on my turf, knowing I wrote my Master's Thesis on the identity and the sin of those "angels" back in Jude 6 and 7; so he left it to me to tell you that something else interesting about the Book of Enoch is that the Book of Enoch contains the oldest known comments on Genesis Chapter 6; and it tells us that the best of Jewish scholars, a century or two before Jesus, understood the "sons of God" in Genesis 6 to be demons—and that was what I came to understand that to mean (e.g., Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; cf. Lk. 20:36; and Jude 6 with 2 Pet. 2:4-5). That in itself—the fact that that is in Enoch—doesn't prove that my interpretation of Genesis 6 is correct. But along with all the exegetical reasons for saying they are fallen angels, it is kind of like a cherry on top of the whipped cream of the

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conclusion that that *is* the correct understanding of that. So, if you disagree with me, you have a few centuries of interpretation to argue against. You can get to Heaven without a proper understanding of "the sons of God" in Genesis Chapter 6, but it's more fun to agree with me—so, take that.

Reference #7 to The Creepy Ones: Verse 16—the pronoun "these"—"These are grumblers, finding fault, following after their own lusts; they speak arrogantly, flattering people for the sake of gaining an advantage."

And from that description, we know more about these infiltrators. They are "grumblers"—that's that word *gonguzō* in the Greek; it means "murmuring" about circumstances (cf. Num. 1:11; Deut. 1:27). They are "finding fault"—they not only complain about circumstances, they find people to blame for those circumstances (Gal. 5:15; Jas. 4:11). "Following after their own lusts"—they are selfish (Jas. 3:16; 4:1-3); they want to have things their own way (3 Jn. 9). "They speak arrogantly"—they are self-inflated (Neh. 9:16; Jas. 3:14; 2 Pet. 2:18). And they love "flattering people"—they are manipulative (Prov. 29:5).

And if you assemble all the pieces from all those references to The Creepy Ones, it is easy to see: They subtly do the opposite of all of the "one anothers" of the Body of Christ. There is a Greek reflexive pronoun—*allēlōn* is how you say it—that is translated "one another"; and it is one of the most fascinating studies you can do. If you want to just clear your head of a whole bunch of clutter, and figure out: "What does God want me to do in regard to other people?"—go study the "one anothers"; there are a couple dozen of them, and we've studied them in the past; you can even find sermons on it on our website, if you want to—fascinating thing (e.g., Jn. 13:34-35; Rom. 12:10, 16; 1 Cor. 12:25; Gal. 5:13; Eph. 4:2, 32; 5:19, 21; Phil. 2:3; Col. 3:9, 13, 16; 1 Thess. 3:12; 5:11, 13, 15; Heb. 10:24-25; Jas. 5:16; 1 Pet. 1:22; 4:8-10; 5:5; 1 Jn. 4:7, 11; 2 Jn. 5). The Creepy Ones do the opposite.

Look at some of that summary there in Verse 16:

They are "grumblers"—that refers to the quiet discontent with things in the church; it's the same word that is used over in Philippians Chapter 2, Verse 14: "do all things without *grumbling* or disputing." There, "grumbling" describes the quiet, behind-the-scenes complaining, the whispering, the mumbling, the sour expression. And then, "disputing" refers to open criticism and attack, like Korah and his cohorts did to Moses and Aaron, that Jude referred to earlier (vs. 11; cf. Num. 16:1-3).

"Finding fault" describes the person who is not at all interested in finding a solution to a problem, but always interested in blaming it on someone, who complains against God for His will. That's a word that is not used very often in the New Testament. We found a use of it—it came from a description of a character in a Greek play; and this character was described in the play this way: "You are satisfied by *nothing* that befalls you; you complain at everything! You don't want what you've got; you long for what you haven't got. In winter, you wish it were summer; and in summer, that it were winter. You are like the sick folk, hard to please, and the one who complains about his lot in life."

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So, what is Jude's point in all of this? Don't play games with God and His people! "Flattering people" there, and "speaking arrogantly" and "following after their own lust"—that is a perfect description of much of what is done in churches these days, designed to make people feel good (contra Gal. 1:10).

I have lived through the arrival of, and the planting of the seeds and the sprouting of the plant of this entire "self-esteem" movement. When I was in school, we didn't talk about "self-esteem"—that was *never* a subject; now, it's the *cornerstone* of anti-Christian Psychology! "Well, your problem is, you don't have high enough self-esteem." Now, we know what people *mean* by that; it isn't that there isn't a kernel of truth in there, if you're constantly diminishing yourself, and all of that. But the point is: The whole "self-esteem" movement is *absolutely antithetical* to Christianity! The problem is *not* that you don't have enough self-esteem; the problem is: you have *way too much* self-esteem! (e.g., Prov. 21:4; Rom. 1:30; 2 Tim. 3:2)

That is why Jesus says, "Love your neighbor as [you love] yourself" (Matt. 22:39)—meaning: Apply as much love to your neighbor as you do to taking care of your own self (Eph. 5:28-29; cf. 1 Cor. 13:5b). *Humility* is what will allow you to know the Lord, serve the Lord, build up other people—and, oh, what does He do with the "humble"? He "exalts" them (Matt. 23:12; Lk. 14:11; 18:14; cf. Jas. 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5-6). Do you want to build your self-esteem? Head for the bottom of the heap and start lifting up other people.

Do you understand: It is antithetical to Christianity, to "speak arrogantly," to manipulate people. What does Second Timothy Chapter 4 say? "Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when" people "want to have their ears tickled" and "they will accumulate for themselves teachers" who tell them what they want to hear (cf. Is. 30:10; Jer. 5:31).

It wasn't on Sunday morning last week, but since I was last with you, I also listened to a rather in-depth exploration of what Joel Osteen preaches; and it was *appalling*—absolutely appalling! It was all excerpts from interviews that he has done. When somebody like Larry King or somebody else would say, "So what is your position on same-sex marriage?" And he *always* begins his answer the same way: "Well, I don't know." That's *always* what he says! You *cannot* know the Bible, and *not* know God's design for the human race: "male and female He created them" (Gen. 1:27; cf. 1 Cor. 7:2). And so he says, "Yeah, I *know* what the Bible says, but we don't condemn anybody!" Well then, you're not *preaching* what the Bible says! Why did I come to Christ? Because I found out, I'm "condemned (Mk. 16:16)! I found out, I "deserve" eternity in "the lake of fire"! (Rev. 20:10, 12-14; cf. Is. 3:11). That is exactly the opposite of what The Creepy Ones want to teach. Now, pastors are trained: "Don't confront anyone. Meet their needs if you can, but don't call them to repentance; don't call them to commitment."

One of the other things that was asked of Osteen was, "So you don't preach on sin?" "Well, I don't know. People already have a pretty good idea what they've done wrong; they don't need me to tell them." How do you tell the good news if you don't tell the bad news? "Christ died," not for your lack of self-esteem; He "died" for your "sins" (1 Cor. 15:3; 1 Pet. 3:18).

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But now we're to tell people things like, "Come and be refreshed"; or, have you ever heard this one? "Give Jesus a chance!" Okay, you've tried a whole bunch of other things; now give Jesus a chance! He'll give you a 30-day money-back guarantee, if He doesn't come through!

All of that stuff is designed to tell people they are important, and they are in control. That's what you do to draw crowds—it's just that it isn't Christianity!

Well, there are a lot of "creepy ones," I'm sorry to say. And now look at the punchline: What to do. Point Number 2, starting at Verse 17: But You, Beloved. It says: "But you, beloved, ought to remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ"

"But you" is the contrast. He said all those terrible things about the ones who "crept in unnoticed"; but Jude says, "But since you are not like The Creepy Ones, here's what I want you to do. First command: 'You ought to remember.' "

"Remember" what? Well, glad you asked. Go back to "the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ." That refers to "the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints" (vs. 3). That refers to everything so far in the New Testament: what was said by the Apostles; and they accepted the canonicity and the inspiration and the inerrancy of the Old Testament (Matt. 5:18; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 3:2). Everything but the Book of Revelation had been written; and very soon, the Book of Revelation was going to come along and say exactly the same thing about it. In other words: Cling to what God says in His written Word! (Jos. 1:8; 2 Chr. 20:20; Acts 20:32)

"You, beloved, ought to remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ"—then look at Verses 18 and 19—"that they were saying to you, 'In the last time there will be mockers, following after their own ungodly lusts.' These are the ones who cause divisions, worldly-minded, devoid of the Spirit.' "

In other words: They are not brothers and sisters, they are infiltrators! (cf. Rom. 8:9) And the most specific reference to these "ungodly," phony infiltrators that comes from the "apostles" that came before—mainly, I think he was almost quoting verbatim the Apostle Peter; Peter wrote, in Second Peter Chapter 3, Verse 3—"Know this first of all, that in the last days *mockers will come with their mocking*, following after their own lusts." This is one of the reasons that we understand that Peter *predicted* the proliferation of the infiltrators, and Jude sent notice: "They're here!"

And by the way, a little note on Second Peter Chapter 3, when he talks about "mockers" coming in their "mocking"—follow through in that context a little bit: What, primarily, are the teachings that people slip into the church? *Most of all*, they attack the beginning of the Bible and the end of the Bible. "Just get rid of those first 11 chapters. Just say that they are *symbolic*, or they are poetical, or they are to be interpreted allegorically." Because if God created everything in "six days" (Ex. 20:11), we are His direct creation (Ps. 100:3; cf. Deut. 4:32; Ps. 95:5; Ezek. 18:4). And if "He created them male and female" (Gen. 5:2; Mk. 10:6), that's the design for marriage (Matt. 19:4-5; 1 Cor. 7:2).

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And if Adam and Eve, our Federal Heads, fell, then we all fell in Adam and Eve (Rom. 5:12; cf. Gen. 3:20). And if the Flood happened, that shows you how firmly God deals with rebellion and with sin. But if you can just *spiritualize* all of that away, then you don't have to deal with the "bad news"—to which the answer is the "good news" of Jesus Christ.

And the other place they tend to attack is the end. Peter says they "will come with their mocking...saying, 'Where is the promise of His coming?' " (2 Pet. 3:4) "Everything is going on *just like it always has* 'from the beginning!' " And Peter rather subtly says, "When they say that, it 'escapes their notice' that God killed them all in the Flood."

So, looking back to "the beginning," but then they say, "Where is the promise of His coming?" And then Peter says, "Look, God doesn't live within time! Who are you to put Him on a timetable for when He is going to fulfill His promises?"

But the "mockers" mock the beginning and they mock the end. And once they do that, they can mock all through the middle of it, and get away with it!

It is interesting to also notice that in that same context, Jude said, "remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles"; and back in Second Peter's context—Second Peter Chapter 3, Verses 15 and 16—he connected the dots between the "mockers" to come and the words of the Paul. Second Peter 3:15-16—"just as also our beloved brother Paul..." Don't tell me Peter and Paul were not friends; they were! Paul loved Peter so much, he confronted him when he erred (Gal. 2:11). "...just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction."

The infiltrators *love* to distort Scripture! They don't mind quoting it; they just mind being precise about it. They are just like Satan was when he came in the person of "the serpent" (Rev. 12:9; 20:2), and he confronted "Eve" (2 Cor. 11:3), and he *quoted God*—with *just a little tweak* to make her doubt what God had said (cf. Matt. 4:5-6).

I love Verses 15 and 16 of Second Peter Chapter 3. Isn't it cool to have you know that none other than the Apostle Peter found some of the things in Paul's letters "hard to understand"? So if you say, "I don't quite get that." Okay—*neither did Peter!* We have to dig here; we have to do some homework.

And would you notice, he also calls Paul's writings "Scriptures"—equal in authority to what we call the Old Testament (Matt. 5:18; 25:35; Jn. 13:20; 1 Cor. 14:37; 1 Thess. 4:2).

And by the way, Paul was also specific in warning that troublemakers would come, and that they would infiltrate the church—even to the point of seeking to infiltrate the leadership (cf. 2 Cor. 11:13-15). When Paul was saying goodbye to the elders in Ephesus on his last visit there, we read in Acts 20:28-30, he says: "Be on guard..." You don't have to "be on guard" unless there's a danger of attack, right? "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the

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church of God which He purchased with His own blood"—like we celebrated at the Table earlier (1 Cor. 11:25). He says, "I know that after my departure savage wolves *will come in among you*"—The Creepy Ones—they are going to "creep in unnoticed"—"not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves"—even from among the leaders—"men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them."

Well, that's a *big, long* description of The Creepy Ones. And then he says, "But you, beloved," be on your guard. And then, look what he says next, in Verse 20: Again, "But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit"—and then he goes on and gives you the next command—"keep yourselves in the love of God" (vs. 21; cf. Jn. 15:10).

"Building yourselves up on your most holy faith"—*what* "most holy faith"? That which was written "beforehand by the apostles"—that "faith which was once for all handed down to the saints."

And notice the repetition: "But *you*, beloved..." The first thing he did to describe these people was call them "the called" and "beloved" in Verse 1 (cf. Rev. 17:14); and now he says, "But you, beloved."

Scott already took us from here to the glorious conclusion of this book; review as needed. You might like his sermon even better—it was really good last week; you might like it even better when you have the one that leads up to it.

These orders are *very* specific. They tell you what to do for yourself: "Build yourselves up on your most holy faith" (cf. Acts 20:32; 1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:18). "Keep yourselves in the love of God"—that means: By the way you live and what you believe and what you act on and the way you treat people, keep yourself where you are going to be a conduit for God's love to pass through you to other people (Phil. 2:15).

And then, what should you do for people who do not yet know "the love of God"? "Have mercy" on them; "save" some of them. God wants to bring some people to "faith" (Rom. 10:17); they have to "hear" the Gospel in order to come to faith (Rom. 10:14); we are the ones who can speak the Gospel to them. And then he says for some of them, it's even like "snatching them out of the fire" (Jude 22). That is what God has left us here to do (Matt. 28:19-20; Mk. 13:10; 16:15; Lk. 24:47; Acts 1:8; 2 Cor. 5:18-20).

Now, if I knew for sure that I could say one last thing to you—and don't get me wrong: I'm not dying; I'm not retiring; I haven't lost my brains yet...trickling. But if I knew that I was speaking to beloved children of God, and it was the *last thing* I could ever say, I can't think of *anything* I would rather say than: "Remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ," and "keep yourself in the love of God."

But you, beloved ones: Hang your hat on the Scripture. Believe it. Stand on it. "Contend earnestly" for it, because there are "creepy ones" that the enemy continues to send into our midst (cf. Is. 8:20; 1 Tim.1:3-4; 6:3-4).

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Let's pray:

*Father, thank You for this fellowship among the beloved ones, and thank You for the privilege that is ours to worship You in this manner, to proclaim Your Word. Father, we pray You will help us to be on the alert. Remind us that we must always "contend earnestly for the faith." But we do that best when we are "one anothering," we do that best when we are fellowshipping and encouraging; and in that way, we keep ourselves in the midst of the flow of Your love—from person to person, even from generation to generation. Thank You, Father, that You call us "the beloved." Thank You that we are secure in Your Son, Jesus Christ. Use us for Your glory, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*