



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Jude 5-7

Jude

"Fire and Brimstone"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Thank you, Mark. Good morning. We are in the beginning stages of a series in the Book of Jude which is a short book. It's only 25 verses long, but it's a compact book. This morning, we're in verses 5 through 7, and Jude is illustrating the danger that he's alerted this congregation to. There are false teachers. Men have crept in, he said, unnoticed. So, these are clever men. These are men that don't appear to be dangerous, but they've crept in, and they have a significant hold on this congregation, and he's alerting them to it, and he alerts them now to the dangers that these men pose, and he does so out of three very significant events in the Old Testament that were known to them, and he reminds them of again. Verse 5:

Now I desire to remind you, though you know all things once for all, that the Lord, after saving a people out of the land of Egypt, subsequently destroyed those who did not believe. And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day, just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they in the same way as these indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh, are exhibited as an example in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire.

It's a sobering text. May God bless it to our understanding. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, bless us as we do look at this text from Jude. It's a brief text, but there's much there. There's much material to be covered, just historically, from the events of the Old Testament, but the lessons are important for us to know. They

apply to us in this day. We live in a day, it's very similar to the days that Jude speaks of, and to Jude's own day. And we need to be aware of the dangers we face not simply from the world around us, which is alluring and full of temptations, but from what can happen within a church. Our enemies are not only without, but they're within, and these that Jude speaks of had crept in unnoticed. They seemed so genuine when they really weren't. There were telltale signs evidently, and there will be, should they creep into church as well, but we need to be on guard, and we need to judge things according to the Word of God, and that includes every one of those who'd stand in this pulpit. We need to be men and women who are equipped with the Word of God and can analyze what is said by the Word of God. It's our standard. Teach that to us, Father. May it be engrained in our thinking, and may we not only think that way but live that way. But we won't live that way; we won't live according to the Word of God. We won't live righteous lives if we're not thinking the Word of God. So, make it a part of our minds, our thoughts, and then part of our behavior.

We've certainly learned the danger of veering off from Your truth and going the way of the world, as attractive as it may seem, rebelling against You. It has terrible consequences. And so may we learn that. What we know is You're a gracious God, a patient God, a long-suffering God, but You are a holy God and You must deal with sin and You must deal with rebellion. And You do so. May we be aware of that and live lives with a proper fear of You, and a knowledge of the danger that comes with a rebellious life.

We thank You for Your Son that has saved us from the consequences of sin. We're still sinners, but by His sacrifice and Your grace, we have been saved and justified. We're being sanctified. Someday we'll be glorified. We praise You for that, thank You for saving us from the wrath to come. May we live wisely in the meantime. Bless us spiritually, and may the time we spend together in this text be to that end. May it further us in our growth in Christ and the wisdom that we need to have.

But Lord, we also have needs materially, and we pray for those. We pray that You'd bless us physically. Some face difficulties in life with sickness and surgeries, and issues at work, maybe the loss of work or just pressure at work that can be a real difficulty in life. For those who are experiencing these things, bless them, encourage them, help them to think about the great promises we have, and to realize that our

God is a sovereign God. Nothing happens outside of His will. We may not understand everything, but it fits somehow within Your will. It may be to test us. It's always to bring us to maturity and development. So may that be the result of the difficulties that Your people are going through, and we pray that You'd strengthen them.

We pray for those who are grieving. Some families in the church that have been touched by death, and we pray that You would bless them. And Lord, give us who are experiencing what we would think of as the pleasant things of life, give us appreciation for that, thankfulness for that, because it comes from You. We're dependent upon You for everything. You give us much, You bless us greatly. May we be men and women who rejoice in the midst of a world that is full of sin, a world that is fallen, a world that is in rebellion, may we be lights in that world and may people see something living and joyful in us. So, we pray You'd bless us to that end, and we will be that as we reflect upon Your great work of salvation in our lives and what we have now and forever. We thank You for Chris, for what He's obtained for us at the cross. Thank You for all that we have in Him and the future that we have because of Him. And it's in His name we pray. Amen.

[Message] We've all heard about shooting the messenger as a way of dealing with bad news. It actually goes back to the Greek historian Plutarch and a story he told about Tigranes the Great. A messenger came to him with news about war, and the king didn't like what he heard, so he beheaded the messenger. Well, the result of that was: no one dared tell the king the truth after that. They only gave him flattering messages while Plutarch said war was blazing around him. No one wants to lose his head over an unpopular message, so they often avoid them.

But the reality is: that doesn't change things one bit. War continues to blaze around a person. So it doesn't help to avoid that kind of thing. It doesn't help to give a popular message when the unpopular message should be given, and Jude is certainly a man that did not shrink from doing that. It is amazing what a storm he raises in such a small letter. It's got good news. Lots of that. But, Jude didn't avoid the bad. He actually gives some of the scariest warnings in the Bible. In just the three verses we will look at, he warns of judgment, about the punishment of eternal fire, and censors behavior that many in our generation celebrate today. People today cringe when they

hear such things. It sounds negative, judgmental, and joyless. It's that hellfire and brimstone preaching that trades on fear to get converts. That's today. That's the way people look at things today, but I doubt that Jude's warnings were any more popular in his day, which is very much like our day.

But he wasn't silent, even though as someone said a long time ago : no one loves the messenger who brings bad news. So he brought bad news. He's already done that in this brief letter. He warned the church about false teachers who had crept in unnoticed. They were immoral men who he said deny our only master and Lord, Jesus Christ. So they are dangerous men. But in order to leave no doubt whatsoever and rescue from their influence any who might be wavering, might be drawn a bit toward them, Jude gives three examples of how God treated those who rebelled against Him. They're well-known examples from the Bible. The people to whom Jude was writing were well-acquainted with them. Still, Jude wanted to remind them of these things though, he said, you know all things. Even though they knew these truths, even though they're well-known to all of us, I think, they still needed to be reminded of them. We all do.

It's easy to forget. It's easy to become forgetful about important matters, important truths. And when we do that, we become a bit dull toward the truth. And then we begin to drift. That's one of the great warnings that the author of Hebrews gave to those to whom he wrote. The outset of that book, in the second chapter, he tells them, "You're beginning to drift." That's his warning, and that's the case with all of us. If we forget the fundamental truths of the Word of God, we will begin to drift. And so, it is important continually to go back to basics, to remind ourselves of them. Scripture teaches that. In fact, all through the Old Testament, you have these commands to remember. Remember the great truths. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. All of Israel's feast days and ceremonies were intended to teach them and remind them of God's grace and His care, and our responsibilities in this life. Even Israel's clothing was designed to teach that.

You may notice in our Jewish neighbors. If you pay close attention to the way they dress, you'll notice some of them have tassels that hang from their shirt. That's from the law. That's a command that's given to teach them to keep the law. When they saw these tassels, they were reminded that they're to keep the law. Everything

about the nation, its culture, the society, was geared toward bringing truth to their remembrance.

We live, really, under the same principle. We live in a new dispensation. This is a new age. It's different from the dispensation of the law. We're no longer under the law of Moses, but the principles of that law still apply to us and are repeated in the New Testament. We need to be a people who remember the things of God, remember the truth of God, remember the principles of God and the principles of Godliness. Remembrance, in fact, is part of our week. The Lord's supper is for that purpose. It's a weekly observance intended to remind us of the Lord's redemption of us. It's placed at a very important time of the week, at the beginning of the week, the first day of the week. So, our mind is set in that way, in remembering the Lord. This is what Jesus said: "Do this in remembrance of Me." That is important. It has a sanctifying effect upon the believer. When he or she is there at the Lord's supper, taking it, remembering what our Lord has done for us, His great work of redemption. That is where Israel really failed. Another command that they were to remember is given in Deuteronomy 15 verse 15. "You shall remember that you are a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you."

They didn't do that. They never really got that truth. They never really came to appreciate what the Lord God had done for them. He delivered them from slavery. And so, because they didn't really understand that, and didn't appreciate that, when they were put to the test, they failed with deadly consequences. That's the first of the three examples that Jude gives. He writes in verse 5 that the Lord, after saving a people out of the land of Egypt subsequently destroyed those who did not believe.

That's the tragic lesson of that generation that was brought out of slavery. It wasn't long after they started out of Egypt, after they left those bonds behind them, that they began doubting Moses and doubting the Lord. When they came to the Red Sea, Pharaoh was in hot pursuit, and then they found themselves between the sea and Pharaoh and his chariots, and they were terrified. They accused Moses of bringing them out there to die. Better to be slaves in Egypt than die in the desert, they were saying. Even after God delivered them, though, brought them through the sea in a spectacular, miraculous deliverance, they grumbled. Long after they get to the other side and they celebrate their deliverance, that they come on to difficulties. They're out in the desert. They're in the wilderness. They began to grumble about the water, the

lack of water, and the lack of food. That tended to characterize, in fact, did characterize them. But the great act of rebellion happened at Kadesh Barnea when 12 spies returned from scouting Canaan and they came back with their report. It was a divided report. Ten of the spies said, "We can't conquer it. It's too much for us. The land is too strong, in fact, it's filled with giants." Only two, Joshua and Caleb, gave a good report. They said, "Yes, we can. We can take it. We can conquer it."

Well, this is one of those rare occasions when people did love the messenger with bad news. They rejected the good news. They rebelled against the Lord. And so, as Jude wrote, the Lord destroyed them. Over the next 38 years, the Lord killed off an entire generation. Everyone 20 years and older with the exception of Joshua and Caleb.

In spite of all of the wonders that generation had seen, the plagues in Egypt, the parting of the sea, food from heaven, the pillar of fire and cloud that led them daily through the wilderness. Still, in spite of all of that, they did not believe. And because they did not believe, they did not enter the land.

There's an analogy. There's a comparison between that generation and the church. Those people lived between the exodus from Egypt and the possession of Canaan. We live between Calvary and heaven. And just as there were people among the Israelites who did not believe, there are people who call themselves Christians within the environment of the church who do not believe. Those early Israelites came out of Egypt joyfully. They were happy. They were laden with riches. They were free. They rejoiced. But it wasn't long before they wanted to return. It wasn't long before they rejected it all. There are people who associate with the church who reject the gospel. It has never really taken root in their heart. They're among the believing people but they're not genuinely believers themselves.

The author of Hebrews warns of that. That generation not entering into the rest. That's what he called Canaan. The rest. And they were people who had good news preached to them, but they didn't profit from it because they didn't join that good news with their faith. They never truly believed it.

Jude cites the same incident to warn the church not to be taken in by these false teachers, because they're those kind of people. They're among us, he was saying, among you, but they're not genuinely of you. To follow them is a dangerous thing. They're rebels, and they're headed for destruction. They'll bring those who

believe what they believe and follow them with them. They're like that unbelieving generation that died in the wilderness.

So, the lesson here is quite simple: unbelief is deadly. In verse 2, Jude gives a second example of rebellion. It's of the angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode. It's a reference to the strange incident in Genesis chapter 6 verses 1 through 3 of the sons of God and the daughters of men, which recounts an angelic invasion.

Now, there are different interpretations of that passage, and I'm not going to get into it in this hour. I think from my studies that the scriptural support is describing an angelic invasion. It's not a unique interpretation with me by any means. But there's exegetical support for that. For example, that expression, "sons of God." Sons of God and the daughters of men. That expression, sons of God, is used in the Book of Job of angels. Second Peter chapter 2 gives the same warning about angels and God not sparing the ancient world in the days of Noah. Peter connects the angelic rebellion with the flood, which puts it in Genesis chapter 6 where the angels intermarry with the daughters of men.

Now, say, that's strange, a strange interpretation, not unusual interpretation, but it is a strange event that's described there. And Jude doesn't explain how this occurred. In fact, it seems to contradict Jesus' statement in Matthew 22 verse 30 where He says that angels don't marry. But that is now. That is the present situation. It must've been different before the flood. The angels, to do this, would've had to take on bodies, had to have some kind of physical appearance, and there are examples of that in the Old Testament. There are examples of that in the Book of Genesis, Genesis chapter 18, which we'll look at in just a moment. It gives one such example of that. The Lord and two angels visited Abraham and they appeared as men. In fact, in Genesis 18, they are described as men who come to Abraham's tent. In chapter 19, they're called angels.

So, these angels come in the appearance of men. They came in bodily form. They even ate a meal with Abraham. Then, the angels went on to Sodom where the men of that city took them to be men. Jude refers to that in verse 7. But clearly, angels could take bodily form and engage in physical activity. That seems to be what is referred to in Genesis 6 and Jude 6. Maybe they're able to do that, to take bodily form in order to carry out their angelic ministry, their responsibilities. I'm speculating

on that. I don't know. But they were able to take bodies evidently, and when they did that, they took a great privilege and misused it. They used their bodies for immoral purposes. And in so doing, crossed a line that God had established. It was an act of rebellion with terrible consequences. Moses wrote, "The Nehalem were on the earth in those days." And while the text doesn't explicitly connect the angels with those Nehalem, that certainly seems to be the connection, that they are the result, the offspring of this strange union, this unholy union. As a result, they filled the earth with these giants, as they're called, the Nehalem, and filled the earth with violence, and all of that provoked God's wrath. It was a time of great rebellion. I don't think the world's ever seen anything like that since. As rebellious as we see the world, it wasn't quite like that.

And so, the world was judged with the flood, and the angels with prison. Jude writes that God kept them in eternal bonds, under darkness, for the judgment of the great day. They are there even now, at this present time, awaiting that day of judgment. The angels had a privileged position. They had a position of knowledge, and authority, and power. They had a ministry to mend, but they used it for selfish reasons, and used it for purposes of self-gratification. The lesson is: since God did not spare the angels when they rebelled, when they did that, He surely will not spare men when they do what these angels did. The angels are higher than men. we're created a little lower than the angels. Well, if God will judge angels when they rebel, He'll surely judge men when they rebel, and these false teachers were the rebels. Very similar to those rogue angels.

In verse 4, Jude described their conduct, the conduct of these false teachers, these men who had crept in, as licentiousness. That's their behavior. It's a word that has the idea of unrestrained vice. They were immoral men. They were what we might call today "sexual predators." They used a position of privilege and knowledge to seduce the unsuspecting and take advantage of them for their own gratification.

They didn't appear to be that. They'd come in, they seemed to be men who were orthodox. They seemed to be righteous. They seemed to be right. They weren't. They'd crept in unnoticed. Well, the nature of their behavior is defined further in the third example given in verse 7, that of Sodom and Gomorrah, the Cities of the Plain. What a place in what cities they were. When Lot looked at them and chose to live there, they were in a verdant valley. It's described in Genesis 13 as

being "well-watered everywhere like the garden of the Lord." And he lifted up his eyes, he saw those cities and where they were, the environment in which they were placed, and that's where he wanted to live, which would be the temptation all of us would face. It was a spectacular place.

It reminds me of something I read in a book recently about the banana business in Central America. The early developers came to Honduras, and the writer describes what they saw when their ship docked in Puerto Cortez. The mountains, he wrote, were green in the distance, but terrible wilderness up close, and the terrible wilderness up close was a city. It was a wreck.

That was Sodom. It's surrounded by this lush, green plain, fertile valley, a beautiful place. But the city itself was a terrible wilderness, a moral wasteland. Genesis 13 verse 13 says, "Now the men of Sodom were wicked, exceedingly, and sinners against the Lord." The great event of Sodom and Gomorrah and all of that takes place in chapter 19. But in verse 13, they're sort of given a heads up of what it was Lot had chose for himself, and what it's all going to come to. The men of Sodom were wicked, exceedingly, and sinners against the Lord.

On the sin of the Sodomites was homosexuality. That's the sin that's focused upon in Genesis 19. The fact is, there were other sins as well. Isaiah and the other prophets speak of Sodom, and when they speak of it, they speak of its pride. They speak of its selfishness, its greed, its oppression. So there's more to it than that. But certainly, in Genesis, that sin is what is focused upon. And it brought on Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities of that region, one of the most catastrophic acts of God's judgment in the Old Testament. Jude writes that in the same way as these, that is, in the same way as these angels, just as they had done something unnatural, these men indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh. It's recorded, as I said, and I'm sure you know, in Genesis 19, which is one of the most disturbing chapters in the Bible. In chapter 18, the Lord and the two angels visited Abraham. They came in the appearance of men. They had bodies. Abraham prepared a meal for them, prepared a feast for them, and the Lord announced to Abraham that Sarah would have a son. Then He sent the two angels on to Sodom to warn Lot of the coming judgment. When they arrived, all the men of Sodom, young and old alike, surrounded Lot's house and demanded that he bring the two men out to them so that they may have relations with them. It's a shocking chapter and it was appalling to Lot. He tried to

reason with these men, but they would not listen. They'd have nothing to do with what he was saying. They were determined to have those men and threatened to violate him if he didn't exceed to their demands. They would've done that, except the angels rescued him, pulled him into the house, and struck the men around the house with blindness.

We're told that even then, they were groping for the door. Not even their blindness stopped them, which illustrates how enslaving sin can be. It becomes controlling. A person goes into sin, seeking the pleasures of life, and the enjoyment and the excitement of life, and one is trapped in a life of enslavement. Sin is enslaving. It certainly was in that city. It was the driving force of their lives, of the lives of these men. As a result, Sodom was a wicked city. And yet, Abraham prayed for it.

At the end of chapter 18, the Lord told him what He intended to do, that the city's sin was great. In fact, He describes it as the outcry of that city has come up to heaven. And so He'd come down to examine things to see if it was as He had heard. Of course, the Lord knows everything. He's omniscient. It's a way of saying: God deals with men justly, fairly; not impetuously as we often do, but justly and fairly, and He would examine it all and weigh all the evidence righteously.

And so, He'd come down for that reason, because the sin was so great. And based on what He had heard and knew of the condition of the city, judgment was coming. He was going to destroy it. So He announces this to Abraham, and Abraham's response is to intervene, to take up the cause of Sodom. He prayed that if there were just ten men in Sodom, and that's the end of the process of reasoning with the Lord, He comes down to just ten men. If there are ten righteous men in Sodom, would He not sweep it away? The Lord agreed. He promised that He would not destroy that city for the ten, the ten righteous men. But, there weren't even ten there. It was just one: Lot. And as soon as he and his family had fled the city and had reached a safe point in their flight, fire fell from the sky on Sodom and Gomorrah and the Cities of the Plain. In the morning, Abraham learned their fate, and he learned it when he looked toward the valley and in the distance saw smoke barreling out of that valley. It's described like the smoke of a furnace. The green valley that was like the garden of the Lord became an instant wasteland. And today, it is the region of the Dead Sea where nothing lives.

That area, if you've been there, you know that it has a beauty to it. It's an eerie beauty, but it's a moonscape. That which had been like the garden of the Lord is like a place off the surface of the moon. Jude says that these cities are exhibited as an example of what happens when people undergo the punishment of eternal fire. In other words, they are a picture of the greater wrath to come.

Now, Sodom and Gomorrah are cited all through Scripture as an example of God's wrath, but even outside of Scripture, the region itself, that area itself is an exhibit of it, kind of a monument to it. The Dead Sea is just 30 miles from Jerusalem. And according to Josephus, in his day, there were traces of the five cities that could still be seen. Now, today, archaeologists can't find any of that. So if there were in Josephus' day, there aren't anymore. But there were, and the place itself is a constant reminder of this very thing. It's a reminder of God's judgment and the sin that invites that judgment. What happened to those cities was devastating, but Jude says it's just a picture. It's just a type of the greater eternal judgment to come.

What is disturbing is: the sin that brought fire and brimstone on the Cities of the Plain has become acceptable in our society. Well, will our cities escape if those cities didn't? The Bible has some things to say about homosexuality. What it says about it is it is sin. Now, the day may come when it will be illegal to say that in the pulpit, but the Bible says it regardless. In Leviticus 18 verse 22 it's called an "abomination." Paul, interestingly, called that sin "judgment." In Romans chapter 1 verse 24, he doesn't say it invites God's judgment. It does that, of course, but that's not what he says. Paul says it is God's judgment, because men rejected the Lord, because they, rather than worshipping the creator, worshipped the creation, because they went into idolatry. God gave them over to impurity. That giving over is punishment, and that is disturbing because that is what is happening in our nation, which suggests, according to Paul, that God has already begun judging us. It's a serious thing. I know that sounds negative. I know that sounds judgmental and joyless. It's not what people want to hear. It's bad news, but it's what the Bible teaches. This is God's verdict on that behavior. And I think if we want to apply what Abraham did, we should be praying for our cities and for our nation, certainly.

That may be an implication here, but Jude's concern here was not for the cities around him or for the nations which surrounded him. It wasn't for his nation or anybody else's nation. His concern, his warning here is for the church because certain

men had come in like this, rebellious men who practiced such things as were practiced in Sodom. They crept in and they would have an influence on those people in the church, and he's concerned about them.

These were dangerous men. They were false teachers and sexual predators. We're very familiar with that from the news of men, who under the guise of religion, abuse children. These men were that way. These men were that dangerous. They were to be avoided. Sin is serious, very serious. Not just the sin of homosexuality. That's one of many. All sin, all sin is dangerous, all sin is deadly. Fundamentally, it is all rebellion against God. it is unbelief, and that, in fact, is the root of all sin. Paul says that in Romans 14 verse 23. He wrote, "Whatever is not from faith is sin." Whatever is done in unbelief is sin. We can put pride at the top of that list. But unbelief is the root. And so, it may sound negative, even harsh to condemn certain forms of behavior and warn people of the wrath to come, but the truth is: it is callous and it is cruel, not to do that, not to warn people of what is coming, of the eternal fire, as Jude puts it, that is going to come on those who are in unbelief.

What a terrifying thing that is. It should be. It's infinitely worse than anything that fell on those Cities of the Plain. What Jude is talking about is eternal fire. And yet, sanely, that's just what people don't want to hear. It's bad news. So they dismiss it. They dismiss hell as fiction, as a tool for preachers to gain converts by scaring them into believing. And so, many preachers today reject the whole idea of hell and advocate what's called universalism, the idea that all people universally will be saved. In the end, everyone's going to be saved. None will perish. There is no such thing as eternal fire. It doesn't exist. People are relieved by that.

It's not a new idea. In fact, a theologian William G.T. Shedd wrote about this well over a hundred years ago and warned about the dangers of that doctrine of universalism. He warned of the delusion of it in his book titled *Endless Punishment*. He asks us to imagine a person making the searching cry from Thy wrath, and from eternal damnation, good Lord, deliver us. Then writes, imagine a bystander to say to the soul that just agonize this prayer, thou fool, there is no everlasting damnation. He wrote the effect of that denial and rejection of endless punishment is: it cuts the ground from under the gospel. Salvation supposes a prior damnation. It does. We're saved from something. What are we saved from? Well, if we deny , then, that there is no judgment to come, then what we're doing is we're denying any need of salvation.

No error, Shedd wrote, is more fatal than that of universalism. The Bible, which is our authority for such things, gives no ground for believing in it. It clearly teaches hell. Jude taught endless punishment. He describes it as eternal fire.

He's not alone. Jesus warned of it frequently, of being cast into hell, where there, worm does not die, and their fire is not quenched. Paul warned that those who practiced the very sins that Jude describes here are not saved. That is, if that's the pattern of their life; it doesn't mean that a people can't fall into a sin. We all fall into sin. But when this is the pattern of life, when this is the pattern of life that one has devoted himself or herself to, there's no kingdom of God for them. That's what he says in 1 Corinthians 6, 9, and 10. The unrighteousness will not inherit the kingdom of God. He says, don't be deceived. Don't be deceived. Neither fornicators nor idolaters nor homosexuals will inherit the kingdom of God. There are many people today who would have you be deceived about that. What Paul says is there's no inheritance of the kingdom of God for that kind of life. That's not because those sins are just too heinous to be forgiven or because the sinners are just too sinful to be saved, but because the root of all those sins and any other sin is that of unbelief. And unbelievers is not going to be saved.

People just do not believe or do not want to believe that God knows best. They want to live their life their way so they reject the Lord, they reject His revelation in order to follow the path of their liking. But that path is a deadly path. If it's a path contrary to the will of the Lord God, it is a path that leads to destruction. And so, we warn people. We don't warn people, we shouldn't at least, with anger or disgust. Our attitude should be one of humility. Our attitude should be one of compassion, very much like Abraham's attitude. After all, there but for the grace of God go any one of us.

Again, Abraham understood that. He prayed for the sinful cities. He interceded for them with the Lord. If there are ten righteous, will you spare those cities? That's what we're to do. God's grace is great. It's great enough not only to withhold judgment but to actually save sinners who deserve judgment. He's done that to His great glory. After that list of vices that Paul gives in 1 Corinthians 16, He adds the encouraging words, "Such were some of you, but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified." God saves sinners. That's the reason Christ came and died on the cross. He saves the worst of sinners. Paul was a testimony to that.

We want to put certain sins at the top of the list that are very graphic in our minds. The sin that Paul would put at the top of the list, and I think that the Lord would put, would be self-righteousness, pride, and that was what characterized Saul of Tarsus, and God saved him out of that. and then Paul is saying, if He can save me, He can save anyone. He saves the worst of sinners. That's the message of the cross, and that is not bad news. That is good news, and Christians must proclaim it.

Shedd wrote that hell is the most dreadful event conceivable because it is about the eternal ruin of an immortal soul. That's true. So, no one can preach about hell without a sense of sorrow, I think. It's about dreadful things. But because it is so dreadful, it must be told, even if it is unpopular. Christians are watchmen. That's what Ezekiel says, and Ezekiel warns that if the watchman sees the sword coming on the land and does not sound the trumpet, God will require his blood. That's serious, and that's for us. We're watchmen. We must be faithful and remember that God saves sinners. Saved Paul, Saul of Tarsus, saved John Newton, a fornicator and slave trader who was even in fact enslaved for a time in Africa. Chained up, had to crawl around on his hands and knees under his mistress' table, a woman who had him as her slave. She fed him crumbs like a dog. But Newton was saved out of all of that, saved out of his lifestyle of immorality, saved out of that condition of slavery to become a great and godly preacher of the gospel who never stopped reminding himself of God's amazing grace. To do that, he had painted on his mantle in his home Deuteronomy chapter 15 verse 15. "Thou shalt remember that thou wast a slave in the land of Egypt and the Lord thy God redeemed thee." That was literally true for him. He never stopped reminding himself of that. God saves sinners. He offers escape from the punishment of eternal life, and blesses us in the present. Not just a future blessing, He saves us from the wrath to come, but He saves us from the slavery of sin in this very moment and frees us from that and begins to transform us through the power of the Holy Spirit within us to cleanse us and make us altogether different people. That is for all who come to Him. Come to Him through faith alone. It's not by learning a great deal that we do that. It's not by resolving to do great things. "I'm going to clean up my life. I'm going to do this or that."

No. Come as you are, where you are, trust in the Jesus Christ. He receives all who do and transforms them. May God help you come to Him if you haven't. And if you have, rejoice in what you have in Christ. Right now, you have the Savior who is

watching over you, guiding you, and transforming your life, and you have a future that's certain, and glorious, and beyond all comprehension. That's something to rejoice in. That's good news. May God comfort us with that. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank You for Your goodness to us. We looked at a text that says a lot of what we might categorize as bad news. And of course, it's disturbing. Three different illustrations, examples of judgment, but it pictures something much worse. And the good news is: Your grace delivers from that. Through the sacrifice of Your Son, You've redeemed a people for Yourself and all who believe in Him and trust in Him and through faith and faith alone are saved forever. We thank You for that. Thank You for Him. May we live lives that bring honor to His name. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.