

Chapter 5: A Better Way Than Working Against Ourselves

By Pastor Jake Wilkinson

Let me ask a question to us this morning. Has it ever frustrated you to see the bad guy win? I'm not talking about movies; generally, there's resolution to that. I'm talking about in life. You know the person is kind of crooked and that things are bad, and you're watching them win and you feel a lack of justice. You want to see justice being done; we have that urge in our own hearts and we all have stories that we could share about that very thing.

I have a tradition where I go over to my mom's house every Monday night and we watch Monday Night Football. That's our thing—love you, mom. Football is only for a few months out of the year, and at the end of last season, something on Amazon Prime just popped up. I don't watch shows ever, and I know you don't either, right? But you ever get into a show and it just hooks you in? I have problems with sitting still, but this show totally hooked me in. It's called *Beast Games*.

I don't enjoy watching people break morally, but I do find it interesting what it takes certain individuals to reach a breaking point. The basic premise of this show is that the winner gets \$5 million, and they have to do all these crazy things to get there. Mr. Beast started this; he is the most successful YouTuber in history, and the show took after *Survivor* a little bit. Right off the bat, you know some of these individuals are crooked and just after the money. We know people in life like this, but the thing that is really intriguing is watching the people that you trust. At what point does that turn for people others think are good, trustworthy human beings?

There's one player in particular, player 566, named JC. He became the villain in the first show. In one episode, everybody trusted him; he became people's friends very quickly and people thought he was an amazing person. Watching the show, you thought he would never lie to anybody. There was a moment where ten players had to go privately into their rooms and take their share of one million dollars. If you divide a million dollars by ten, you get \$100,000 each. I taught math for a little while, so that's pretty good math. It started off well from my memory, but JC was early on and nobody could see how much he was taking.

He took \$650,000 for himself, betraying his friends. He said, "I gotta do this for me and my family". He took the cash into a private room and he sat there and wept. He was obviously distraught, and then the real kicker came: he had to go out and face the very people he took that money from. At first, he's looking around like someone is going to punch him in the face, but then he starts to justify his actions. I like the show because it was a profound psychological, emotional, and even spiritual reaction. He's caught because of what he believes about life.

Right before a commercial, it showed him weeping and they added flames into the shot like he was burning. I remember being furious at the injustice of him getting away with other people's money. But then I didn't feel mad; I pitied him. He was paying far more than he could ever take, and he was paying for it in that moment. He was a man ashamed of who he was, with no peace. Everything internally had been taken from him, even though externally he had gained the world.

We are coming to a close on the book of Jude. The Bible Project videos we've been watching are really amazing for reminding us of the big picture of what's going on. Primarily, this book is about Jesus's brother writing a letter to people where others have come into the church and are spiritually abusing them. They are

abusing their leadership and taking money. They are doing all sorts of stuff—getting drunk and sleeping around—because they believe that since they've come into contact with grace, it doesn't matter what they do. They think because Jesus is coming back to make everything right, they can do whatever they want.

Jude goes, "Hang on a second". He says it does matter what you do and how you live your life. How your life is played out speaks more to our God than anything we ever say. We need rules and structures in our life. I am aware of who I'm speaking to here in North Idaho. I was having a conversation yesterday about new laws restricting what we can do on our property. I hate it. I am from Alaska; where do people in Idaho and Montana go to get away from laws? They go to Alaska. I'm from a place where we get the freedom to do whatever we want.

I'm aware that as people in North Idaho and Eastern Washington, we sometimes have a negative feeling towards authority or rules unless they benefit us. But what if the laws actually made sense and you could see how you significantly benefit from them? We talked this morning about a dog and a leash. Dogs don't always love the leash, but my dogs love theirs. They come running at the sound of it because they know it means liberation and freedom to go outside. If we viewed certain rules as freedom and for our own benefit, we would have a different view of structure.

What if a Being knows us better than we know ourselves, knows our deepest desires, and desperately wants our life to flourish? He says there is a way of freedom, but it involves limiting yourself to this specific route. Jude is a book of "what not to do" and how to avoid the false way of living. Verse 11 says, "Woe to them". This is an awful thing that has already happened. It says they walked in the way of Cain, abandoned themselves to Balaam's error for gain, and perished in Korah's rebellion. These people are like hidden reefs at love feasts, shepherds feeding only themselves, and wandering stars reserved for darkness.

Jude's purpose is to warn us not to go in that direction and to disassociate with leaders who are a danger. Chronologically, Jude doesn't follow the Old Testament order; he's stating the sequence our life goes when we go down this path. He brings up three examples. Cain was a jealous brother who committed the first murder in the Bible because he didn't get what he wanted. He lived a life of anxiety. To "walk in the way of Cain" means to live a jealous life.

The second is Balaam, who is known for the story of the talking donkey. He was a prophet who betrayed God and His people for money. He lived a divided compromise and was destroyed by his own greed and double-mindedness. Then there's Korah, who took 250 people and rebelled against Moses because things weren't going their way. The earth split open and swallowed them. If you keep walking down this path, destruction is coming upon your way of living. In all three cases, they understood God's will but allowed their impulses and emotions to control them.

Genesis 4:7 says that if you refuse to do what is right, sin is crouching at the door like a salivating beast waiting to eat you. This is what we call self-sabotage. Every person has done something to sabotage their own life because they believed the lie that it would bring a better life. We think the ends justify the means, but Jesus says the means *are* the end. How you act is the point. When we believe the lie, the hope of our heart is ripped away and it hurts those around us.

There is a book called *The Mountain Is You* about how every person self-sabotages and how to heal from it. The enemy looks for wounds in our lives and salivates because he knows our trigger points. He preys on us by telling us that by doing things that hurt us, we'll somehow heal ourselves. On the surface, self-sabotage seems like self-hatred, but you're actually trying to save yourself. It is the presence of an unconscious need being fulfilled by self-sabotaging behavior. To overcome this, we must go through a deep psychological and spiritual excavation to pinpoint traumatic events and find healthier ways to meet our needs.

We need a baseline to change from, which is understanding God's love and grace. We need the courage to acknowledge who we've become. We self-sabotage because we ultimately want something, just like JC wanted to care for his family. We all want a better life where we don't have to worry about money or security. But JC found that instead of heaven, he was in a place of hell. God wants to save you from that moment where life is breaking down because of a crazy decision. He wants to give you His peace.

Peace is being confident in who you are because you've followed God's way of life and accepted His grace. Laying your head on the pillow knowing you've done the best you could is a rewarding feeling. We don't believe in an eternally burning hell; hell is right here in the moment where you can't live with yourself because of shame. But there is hope for JC and for you. There is no place so dark that redemption is impossible, but you have to take the step and turn towards God.

Look at the Apostle Paul. He was blinded on the road while persecuting Christians. Jesus asked, "Why are you kicking against the goads?" A goad is a sharp stick used to poke animals; Paul was pushing his bare foot into a sharp stick. Jesus was asking why he was hurting himself in the process. Paul became the most successful apostle in the New Testament, so there is hope for us no matter where we are. God has a better way where you can be secure.

Brianna Wiest says we can train ourselves to prefer behaviors that are good for us to restructure our comfort zones. C.S. Lewis says it's not about feeling what's right; if you start doing it, the feeling will follow. We crave what we repeatedly do, even if the first few times feel uncomfortable. We must override that hesitation to guide our lives with logic and reason rather than just emotion. God's answer might not feel comfortable at first, but it becomes the best thing you've ever felt.

I have a story about a young man struggling with alcohol while on probation. He broke his sobriety and I sat with him outside the courtroom. He wanted to lie and say he was clean, but I told him he should tell the truth. He went into that courtroom, owned what he'd done, and told the judge. The judge said, "I have no doubt that you're going to succeed," and gave him a punishment. Years later, that man is in school to be a doctor. He said that day was the turning point because he stopped running from himself and asked God to save him.

The things we use to try to heal ourselves are often the very things hurting us. This is self-sabotage. Jude is showing what happens when we decide our way is best instead of listening to the Holy Spirit. I'm not talking about being legalistic; I'm talking about being tenderhearted towards the Spirit and letting Jesus lead you. That is true freedom.

Finally, no matter what has been done to you or what is going on around you, the evil in this world will come to an end. Verse 11 is in the past tense because even though these people are alive, their way of living is coming to an end. There is a place where there won't be abuse or people taking advantage of you; it will all be undone one day. We will find healing, and even death doesn't have the final word. Hope changes everything. When we follow Jesus, we build our house on the rock that even the gates of hell cannot stand against.

Jesus, thank you for your way of life and for breaking the lies we tell ourselves. Break any lies that are sending us down a destructive path and show us the way of wholeness. Save us from the enemy and from ourselves. Thank you for a community that supports each other and continues the work of repentance. Help us. Amen.