

Contending For the Faith

Jude 17-25

Pastor Tim Nixon, Clearcreek Chapel

For the past two weeks we have seen a problem faced by Jude and his church, laid out before us.

- We have seen a pastor who dearly loves his people warn them about false teachers who have crept in unnoticed among them.
- We have seen him identify these false teachers by both their character and their behavior.
- We have seen him confirm the promise of God's faithful judgment upon them, all the while warning the congregation to be careful and be true to the gospel.
- And we have seen him remind us that Jesus promises to keep us. Because of the work of Christ, we will persevere.

In a sermon many years ago by Charles Spurgeon, he wrote, "When I heard it said that the Lord would keep His people right to the end, --that Christ had said, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of My hand," I must confess that the doctrine of the final preservation of the saints was a bait that my soul could not resist. I thought it was a sort of life insurance--an insurance of my character, an insurance of my soul, an insurance of my eternal destiny. I knew that I could not keep myself, but if Christ promised to keep me, then I should be safe for ever; and I longed and prayed to find Christ, because I knew that, if I found Him, He would not give me a temporary and trumpery salvation, such as some preach, but eternal life which could never be lost, the living and incorruptible seed which liveth and abideth for ever, for no one and nothing "shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

This morning we conclude the book of Jude with a call to persevere, not only in our own faithfulness, but in our ministry to those around us.

Let's read versus 17 through 25 together.

It was common in the apostle's teaching that the church would face hard times after their departure because the way would be open for all manner of strange, even bizarre heresies to emerge. In verse 18, Jude accurately summarizes the alarm that they frequently voiced. Jude's readers obviously heard the warning from the lips of several of the apostles themselves, for he not only calls them to remember what the apostles told

them, but also what they said to you. Jude calls them to remember the constant refrain of their messages, rather than to recall one particularly hard-hitting fact.

The Old Testament looked forward to the day of salvation and the Day of Judgment, the two coming together in one event.

Jesus separated them and taught that his first coming as Savior was different from his second coming as judge. The period between the two comings of Christ is what the apostle's call here the last time.

The apostles said there would be scoffers. The freethinking and loose theology is already having a perceptibly damaging effect upon their own Christian standards, and it looks as if they are beginning to recruit successfully among Christians who want to fly the nest of the apostles teaching.

In verse 19 we see a character sketch of these. This is the shortest and sharpest of the five he's given. In these stark warnings he makes clear once and for all the consequences of the error they represent.

They are men who divide you. One of their distinguishing hallmarks is a tendency to form small cliques within a church, creating of division between the **real** Christians and the majority. Every church faces the basic distinction between those who are saved and those who are not. Jude is not criticizing that. These men are habitually divisive, and they become recognized centers of disagreement and discontentment.

These men are the men who follow mere natural instincts.

These men do not have the Holy Spirit. Jude gives us a glimpse into the twisted theology of these people when he says that they not only justify their behavior by quoting the Bible, they actually claim that the Holy Spirit is guiding them into their rebellion.

By contrast, Jude says that it is these self-proclaimed spirit led people who do not have the spirit, and that their new ideas reflect not openness to the spirit but openness to their desires.

Before God had saved Jayne and I we have Christian neighbors that were a very positive influence on us. We soon moved to a new neighborhood, but following our conversions, we kept in touch on and off. One day we heard that he had left his wife and 4 children for a nursery worker at their church. He response to questions was, "The

Holy Spirit brought us together. It is meant by God to be so. I am just sad that Jesus didn't do this years ago."

It is very easy to claim to be led by the spirit, and any sensitive Christian will pause when something is taught in the name of the Holy Spirit, and consider whether he might previously have been taught wrongly. But when the Bible is declared outdated, the resurrection denied, the saving death of Jesus watered-down or the biblical guidelines on sex and marriage made easy, we can be sure that the spirit is not leading us there at all.

Now in verse 20-21 the focus changes.

When Jude began his letter, he said that although his original intention was to write a personal letter about the salvation we share, he had changed his mind. He urged the church to contend for the faith. And now he reaffirms that appeal.

In a series of four pieces of pastoral wisdom, Jude urges us to keep watch on ourselves and on one another. They are all activities for which we are responsible, but they also involve the active work of God the Father, our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

First, build yourselves up in the most holy faith. The faith, as we have continually seen in Jude's letter, is that body of doctrine which Christians have believed from the earliest days of the church. Paul wrote in what is probably the earliest New Testament letter (Galatians), "If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than that which you accepted, let him be eternally condemned! I want you to know brothers that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. Because it is not a figment of our collective imaginations, but comes as a direct message from the throne of God himself, it is most holy and it has the power to make those who believe in it Saints."

When the Bible urges us to defend the gospel, it tells us to do so by teaching it fearlessly. We are to have a reverent but robust confidence in it and take practical steps to build ourselves up in it. This is a lifelong activity; we are to keep on building. And it is a corporate activity as well.

Secondly, pray in the Holy Spirit. This is the second time Jude has mentioned the Holy Spirit. He told us that the counterfeit Christian leaders do not have the spirit, and now he tells the genuine Christians to pray in the Holy Spirit. Despite what the counterfeits were probably saying, there is no such person as a Christian who does not have the Holy Spirit, for the spirit was God's gift to the church at Pentecost and to each of us when we were converted.

Thirdly keep yourselves in the love of God. Jude has written about both sides of God's love. He opened his letter by telling us that we are loved by God the Father and kept by Jesus Christ. Now as he closes he tells us to keep ourselves in God's love. We know from his letter that the way we do this is by ensuring that we are constantly obeying God. If we want to know what happens to those who do not keep themselves in God's love, we need simply to look back at the examples of the Israelites in the desert, the angels, the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, Cain, Balaam, and Korah.

Finally we are to wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ. Christianity makes sense only if the promises God makes are kept. Jude urges us to wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring us to eternal life. This indicates that only God's final intervention in our world will ultimately prove that God's word is true, and that it is his great gift to those who believe it.

We do of course enter into eternal life now as Christians, but what we experience in this life is largely dominated by a battle because we are still waiting for our resurrection. Paul wrote that the whole creation has been groaning... Right up to the present time.

Jude's prescription has involved the Christians with the living Trinity: they obediently keep themselves in God's love, pray in the Holy Spirit, and wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a powerful and effective antidote to the poison of the people Jude opposes.

While verses 20 and 21 involve our personal and corporate confidence and hope. Verses 22 and 23 call for us to step out bravely and influence those who are not as strong.

We are to be merciful to those who doubt. This probably means people who are asking questions, perhaps because they are at odds with themselves. These are the people who are starting to weigh the claims and arguments on both sides and are finding themselves caught between two opinions.

Our response to such questioning should not be to cast this questioner out as a heretic. While we are not to go soft on the gospel, there are those who have legitimate questions and who are thinking hard, and there must always be a welcome and patient understanding of these people.

The second group is those that we must snatch from the fire and save. These people have gone further than doubt; they are actually playing with fire.

They have begun to engage with the thinking and lifestyle of those who changed the grace of our God into license for immorality back in verse four. These people see no

reason that immoral behavior is actually unacceptable for Christians, so they see no reason to avoid it.

Jude may be alluding to Amos 4:11-12, "I overthrew some of you, as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and you were as a stick plucked out of the burning; yet you did not return to me," declares the Lord. Therefore thus I will do to you, O Israel; because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel!" God's judgment on the cities, and his snatching his people from them, remind us of judgment still to come.

As we pray for and talk to our friends who think like this, we must keep before ourselves this group and the fact that, without being offensive or insensitive, we are instructed by Jude to save them; the fire is near and coming closer, and we must watch that we are not sucked into its path as well. Snatch them, Jude says.

And then there are those who are committed, "to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh." These are the hard core people. They have been made filthy by the lies. The word for garment here is not the word for normal clothes. It is the word for underwear. These people are so gross there are compared to poop underpants. **AND WE ARE CALLED TO SHOW MERCY** to these people and that requires our interaction with them.

He says first that the mercy is mixed with fear. Once we have seen the reality of the fire, we shall be more keenly aware of the risk that these people are running.

- Perhaps Jude means we should fear the contamination that involvement with these fallen will bring.
- Perhaps he means we should fear them because of the way they have managed to persuade so many others to join them.
- Perhaps he means that we should fear God who is a right and holy judge.

Any of these would be a good reason to fear, -- But none would be a good reason for not getting involved.

If through our intervention the people Jude is describing are repenting, what we must expect of them a complete reversal of lifestyle and a change of attitude toward their past. For their sake, we cannot afford to require anything less of them; their former lifestyle and attitude are what the gospel is saving them from, and so we must show no compromise. We cannot lower God's standards in the hope that if the terms are easier, more people will repent. That is to love the clothing and to hate the sinners, because it denies the seriousness of their plight.

The closing words of Jude's letter in verses 24 and 25 are a magnificent ending to a disturbing report.

Jude reminds us that God is able to keep us from stumbling and to present us blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy.

There are two parallel actions of God.

- One negative, he is able to keep us from something,
- and one positive, he is able to present us to someone.

As marathons and half marathons become more popular in our culture, we're getting used to seeing amateur runners cross the finish line exhausted and hurting, but exhilarated at having covered so much distance without falling by the way. Having seen what Jude has taught about the dangers that surround us, it is a wonderful reassurance to discover that God is able to keep us from falling. In the Christian marathon, everyone who crosses the finish line is a winner. The prize is that God brings us before his glorious presence.

This is the final judgment scene, where God's glory is displayed in all its purity - the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.

Jude now closes by bringing another group of wonderful words of praise which overflow into one another, and which he probably does not intend us to disentangle too much.

He wants us to respond with praise to a God whose magnificent dominion is unchallengeable forever. It cannot be challenged because he has glory, majesty, dominion and authority before all time and now and forever.

Conclusion

Man of Sorrows! what a name for the Son of God, who came ruined sinners to reclaim. Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Bearing shame and scoffing rude, in my place condemned he stood;
sealed my pardon with his blood. Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Guilty, vile, and helpless we; spotless Lamb of God was he;
full atonement can it be? Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Lifted up was he to die; "It is finished!" was his cry;
now in heaven exalted high. Hallelujah! What a Savior!

When he comes, our glorious King, all his ransomed home to bring,

then anew this song we'll sing: Hallelujah! What a Savior!