

Jude: contend in our faith

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[0 : 00] Well, good evening. Thanks very much for the kind and warm welcome, and thanks as well to Fergus for leading us through the first part of our service. I think the verses might come up on the screen. Are they? No, sorry. That's okay. Well, if you've ever got a Bible, then please open up the letter of Jude. I will focus on the last two verses, the doxology, verse 24 and 25. And just as you turn up, let me lead us in a short prayer to ask God for his help. Let's pray together. God, our Father, we give you thanks for your word, and we pray just now as we open it together, as we look at it together and think about it, we ask that you might open our hearts, that you might give us receptive hearts, and that we might hear your voice. Would you do us good and lead us forward in our faith as we ask it? In Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, there's a fairly well-known story about a turtle and a scorpion. Some of you maybe know it, but I'll tell it anyway. One afternoon, a turtle was swimming happily along a lake, and as the turtle was nearing the land, he heard a scorpion calling him from the shore.

The scorpion, being a poor swimmer, he asked the turtle if he would carry him on his back across the lake. The turtle thought that this was the craziest thing he'd ever heard. He said, why would I carry you on my back? You'll sting me while I'm swimming, and then I'll drown.

My dear turtle friend, the scorpion replied, if I were to sting you, you would drown, and I would go down and drown as well. Now, where is the logic in that? The turtle eventually agreed, you're right, hop on, and so they started to go over the lake. Halfway across the lake, the scorpion gave the turtle a big sting, and he started to drown. As they both sank into the water, the turtle turned to the scorpion and said, my dear scorpion friend, why did you sting me? Now we're both going to drown. Where is the logic in that? It has nothing to do with logic. The scorpion sadly replied, it's just my nature.

Even though the scorpion perhaps didn't want to sting the turtle, he explains that even though it made absolutely no sense to do so, he just couldn't help it. It's his nature. It's what he does. He's unable to do anything otherwise. And in the letter of Jude, he is aware of our nature. He's aware that we as humans are weak sinners by nature, and that there's nothing we're able to do about it. Within his short letter, Jude is writing to encourage a group of Christians to contend for the faith, to stand firm for the truth, despite the pressures coming from people who have crept into their church unnoticed and who are perverting the grace of God, denying our master, the Lord Jesus Christ. And so Jude calls out these false teachers in the main body of his letter. He refers to them, you might have noticed, as these people several times. And he goes on to tell his recipients of the letter, and by extension us, what these people are like. In verse 10, he says, they are like unreasoning animals. They're ungoverned by anything other than their natural instincts, following only their sinful nature.

[4 : 20] Verse 11, they have abandoned themselves for the sake of gain, like Balaam of old, who went astray and sought gain from wrongdoing. Something I guess we still see going on within the church across the world today, with the prosperity gospel. False teachers seeking gain from wrongdoing. Many promising health and wealth to those who believe, but mainly to those who give large sums of money.

And yet in these churches, the only people that become rich or who get any gain are the so-called ministers. Verse 16, these people are grumblers, following their own sinful desires. They are loud-mouthed boasters, showing favoritism to gain advantage. And Jude says, listen to them carefully and watch them closely. It will become clear whose agenda they are serving. Jude is clear throughout that these people will come under judgment for their actions. And that is just. That is what they deserve because they are causing harm within this church. And as Jude calls these false teachers out, while calling upon the true believers to persevere and to contend for the faith, I think it

is also made clear that Jude knows fine well that if these Christians are focusing upon themselves for the strength to contend for the faith, they will likely be tripped up. They will likely give in to their own sinful nature, which is to rebel against the living God. And although it's illogical, like the story with the scorpion, it's simply human nature. And so Jude here reminds them who it is we look to for strength, who it is that keeps us in his love.

And he actually bookends his letter with that idea. In verse 1 he says, to those who are called beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ. That word, kept, we don't depend upon ourselves to keep us, but we are kept firmly in the grip of the living God who will never let us fall. And then we turn to the closing verses of the letter and he returns to that idea. Saying, now to him who is able to keep you.

Saying, now to him who is able to keep you. Jude is being realistic there. He knows in a world that sets itself up against the living God, that we're going to be drawn in.

There's going to be temptation and our sinful nature is going to cause us to slip up. But Jude is encouraging the believers here. Reminding them and reminding us that the gospel doesn't call upon us to do it on our own strength. But instead it calls upon us to look away from ourselves and to depend upon the one who promises to keep us for eternity.

[7 : 33] This doxology, these closing verses at the end of Jude, they're often read at the end of a worship service. And I think they're great words to close a worship service on. But it can perhaps make it seem like this doxology is just stuck on at the end, almost separate from the letter.

But as we've just considered some of the content of the letter, the reality of what the false teachers were like, the pressure the Christians would have been under to conform rather than contend for the faith. I hope that we can see just how essential this doxology is to the message of Jude.

Without it, the letter would end on a note where we think we have to do all the contending. Where the focus is on our ability to remain firm in our faith.

But these closing verses, they flip that on its head. And they remind us of who it is that keeps us. As I've mentioned, a big theme in Jude's letter is him calling upon his readers to contend for the faith. And that's really his primary purpose in writing this letter.

He outlines in verse 3 for us, saying that. So he really gives us the instruction. He tells his readers what they're to do. They're to contend for the faith.

[9 : 02] He then, in the main body of the letter, explains why his readers are to do it. Why they're to contend for the faith. Because of all that was going on with the false teachers.

And so, he gives us the what and the why. And then in these closing two verses, I think what he gives us there is the how. He tells us how we are able to contend.

And so, we're going to look at each verse and turn verse 24 and verse 25. And so, verse 24, I think, really offers us the answer to that question of how do we contend.

And so, our title here is, We Contend by Looking to Him. Usually, in this life, when we think about contending, the emphasis is on ourselves.

Whether you're a boxer looking to contend with an opponent. Whether you're contending against a rival in an argument. It all depends on your own ability.

[10 : 03] Jude says here, Not so in regards to contending for our faith. He says to his readers and to us, that we ought to look to Him who is able to keep us from stumbling.

Or from falling. Here, Jude is talking about God's ability to not let us go. That once He has called us to Himself, He will keep us. That we cannot stumble or fall or wriggle out of His grip.

In the context of this letter, he's telling his audience that God is able to keep them from turning away from Him. And joining these false teachers. People will, of course, go through periods of up and down in their faith.

But Jude is assuring his readers here. That God will keep them through it all. In His grip. That they'll not be able to turn from Him in a permanent sense.

That He will indeed keep them. And as a Christian, being certain of this truth is one of the greatest encouragements that we can ever experience in our lives.

[11 : 16] How often can we feel tossed around by life? How often can we feel like we're taking blow after blow? That things just seem to keep going wrong.

And at times it can feel like our whole world is caving in around us. That we can become overcome with doubts, concerns about our faith. Doubts about whether we're able to keep contending for the faith amidst some of the tragedies that we face in this life.

And maybe that's how some of us are feeling today. Maybe it's the person sat right beside you. Perhaps life has you questioning whether you can go on living life as a Christian in this fallen and broken world.

Maybe it feels like it's all becoming too much. And well to us this evening, Jude says that you're right. You can't go on living life as a Christian.

Life is too much. It's too difficult. It's too hard. Like the scorpion, our nature wants to reject God and His authority. But Jude also says at the same time, that's the beauty of the gospel.

[12:30] We, on our own strength, can't do it. But He can. He says look away from within. Look away from our own weaknesses and our own shortcomings.

Look away from our own inability to not stumble and fall. And instead, look to Him. Fix our eyes upon Him. He's the one who promises to bring to completion the work that He's begun in us. And this is a truth that's not only found here, but elsewhere in the Bible. Jesus Himself says in John 10 verse 28, Once we, as God's people, are in the grip of the Good Shepherd, He will never let us go.

And no one will be able to snatch us from His hand. It's an incredible truth for all believers. But it's also an incredible truth for the person who's on the cusp of placing their trust in the Lord Jesus. Perhaps someone here this evening hasn't quite taken that step of faith. That they're anxious to take that step of faith. Because perhaps they think they would never last as a Christian in this world.

[13:56] And there's too many temptations around. And again, Jude says to such people that, of course, you're right. But in your weaknesses, it is Him who will keep you.

You don't trust in yourself to not fall. But you trust in the living God. The one who is able to keep you from stumbling. The one who is able to keep you from permanently abandoning the faith. Many Christians throughout history have joined monasteries to try and develop a more spiritual life. Because they see the world as too evil.

And so they want to withdraw to a separate community where there's perhaps less distraction and temptation. But Jude says to all of us that God is able to keep us.

Even as we engage with the world. He will not allow the world or anything in it to snatch us from His hand. It's impossible. This doesn't mean we live like the world.

[15:01] But that we live like God's people. While we engage with the world. One question we might have is, How do we know for sure that we are being kept by God?

That we really are firmly within the grip of the Good Shepherd? And I think verse 21 helps us to answer that question. Where Jude writes, Keep yourselves in the love of God.

Waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus that leads to eternal life. So Jude is saying that God will keep us. But he also says that we ought to keep ourselves in His love.

And it sounds like he's giving us mixed signals. As though he's contradicting himself. But of course that's not the case. And I think the easiest way to understand this.

Is that if we are visibly trying to keep ourselves in God's love. If we are seeking and desiring to live in a way that honors the living God.

[16:06] If we're desiring to be faithful to Him despite the pulls of the world. Despite the temptations that surround us. Then that itself is evidence that we are being kept by Him.

The only way that it's possible for us to truly desire to live as God's people in this world. Is if we are in His grip. If He is keeping us from stumbling.

It's similar to what James writes in his letter. He says that we know our faith is genuine. If it is visible through our works. Well here we know that we are truly being kept by the living God.

If it is visible through how we live. And the fact that we even desire to stay in His love. Is evidence in itself. That He is keeping us.

And the reason that He is keeping us. Is that He wants to present us blameless. Before the presence of His glory. Which actually is the opposite.

[17:11] To what these false teachers desire. They want to lead people astray. They want to lead them to an eternity. Without Jesus.

But we see here that God's desire. Is to present us blameless. To welcome us into His presence. Without spot or blemish.

And He will surely do it. Because it is Him who is able. Through what the Lord Jesus has done. For us on the cross. Where He was the blameless one.

Choosing in a sense to take our blame upon Himself. Taking our filth and giving us in return His righteousness. It is through that reality. That we can stand before God.

That we will one day be presented blameless in His presence. On account of the work of our Savior. And it will be an experience of great joy.

[18:12] For us. But also for God. We will experience joy like we have never known before. I have been trying to think of a way to illustrate the kind of joy.

But even the greatest joy that we experience in this life. Is not comparable to the joy we will experience on that great day. On that day we as God's people will be made perfect. Sin will be no more. Every sinful inclination that we have. It will be gone. It will not exist. In this life. Sin really is at the root of all evil.

All that is wrong in this world. Finds its root in sin. But when we are presented blameless. Before His glory.

There will be no more sin. There will just be pure joy. On our part. And on God's part. As He delights in presenting us.

[19:11] Blameless. Before His glory. So we are able to contend. By looking to Him. He will keep us. And He will present us blameless.

Before His presence. And it will be an occasion. Of great joy. Secondly. Verse 25. Because God promises.

To do this. For us. There is a correct way. For us to respond. And I think that is through praising. And worshipping God. We contend.

By looking to Him. And secondly. We respond. By worshipping. Him. Jude moves from focusing on. What God is doing. And what God will do.

For us. By bursting. Into praise. After penning these. Incredible words. In verse 24. He simply cannot. Contain himself.

[20:09] He goes on to declare. God's character. And His worthiness. To the only God. Our Savior. Through Jesus Christ. Our Lord. Be glory.

Majesty. Dominion. And authority. Before all time. And now. And forever. Amen. To the only God. There is only one.

And it is Him. Who is able. To keep us. These false teachers. They have it all wrong. Jude knows. The only God. And he points his readers. And he points us.

To Him. And he then uses. One word. To describe. God. There is countless words. That we can use. To describe God. But the one that Jude uses here.

Is Savior. To the only God. Our Savior. Acknowledging God. As our Savior. It encapsulates. An immense amount. Of who He is.

[21:06] But also. Of who we are. We are. In need. Of being. Saved. And He chooses.

To become. Our Savior. Through Jesus Christ. Our Lord. By sending Him. To die. In our place. What a Savior. What a committed.

Savior. A Savior. A Savior. That deserves. Our praise. And our worship. And He declares God. To be our Savior. Through Jesus Christ. I don't think we can help.

But have the cross. On our minds. Because it was at Calvary. It was on that rugged cross. Where Jesus hung there. As our Savior.

And it was as He was hanging there. That we so clearly see. These attributes. That Jude goes on. To write down. As He hung there. As He hung there. Dying in our place.

[22:01] We see God's glory. His majesty. His dominion. His authority. Any selfless act. That we do.

In this life. It is given. Honor. And glory. And so how much more. Glory. Does God deserve. As a result. As a result. Of selflessly giving.

His own son. In the place. Of sinners. At the cross. We see His majesty. At His beauty. And the selfless use.

Of His sovereign power. We see that He has complete authority. Over all things. But. Namely. Even over death. Itself. As He rises.

To new life. He has complete dominion. The earth. Is His. Footstool. And one day. Every knee. Will bow. And every tongue. Will confess.

[22:56] That Jesus Christ. Is Lord. To the glory. Of God. The Father. These attributes. Are rightly. Ascribed. To the only God.

Our Savior. Through Jesus Christ. Our Lord. In response. To all that He's done. All that He's doing. And all that He. Will do. This doxology.

At the end of Jude. It's not. Just. Beautiful words. It's. Essential. To the message. Of Jude. And when. I read. And understood. In the context.

Of Jude's letter. And the weight. Of these words. I think. Has. So much harder. If Jude. Called upon. His readers. To contend. For the faith. And then.

Reminded them. Of. How hard. It is. To contend. Faithfully. In this broken world. And then. Just finish. His letter. There. Then. There would be. No encouragement.

[23 : 52] For us. As believers. But no. These closing verses. Are essential. In light. Of what was said. Of what He has laid out. In His letter. They are the perfect way.

To end. After highlighting. The reality. That we live. In a broken world. He doesn't place. The emphasis. On our ability. To contend.

Because He knows. That like the scorpion. It is our nature. To sin. And to rebel. Against the living God. That as humans.

That is just. What we do. And so. What He does. Is He takes the emphasis. Away. From ourselves. He says. That we have to fix. Our eyes.

Upon Him. Who is able. To keep us. From stumbling. On Him. Who will present us. Blameless. Before His glory. With great joy. And so.

[24 : 46] As His people. Today. In the 21st century. We can take. Confidence. That as we. Venture. Into the world. And we're pulled. This way.

And that way. He. Will keep us. As we face. Hard times. When we feel weak. He. Will keep us. When we're low.

He will keep us. And as He keeps us. We will be empowered. To keep ourselves. In His love. As we. Live out.

Our salvation. For all around us. To see the work. That the Lord Jesus Christ. Is doing. In our lives. So may each of us. Always.

Look away. From ourselves. And fix our eyes. Upon. The one. Who is able. To keep us. From stumbling. Let's pray together. Father God.

[25 : 46] We give you thanks. For your word. We give you thanks. That. You've given it. To us. For the privilege. We have. This evening. To have. Spent some time.

Thinking about it. Together. We thank you that. Salvation. Is completely. A work. Of you. That Jesus. Is. A complete.

Savior. That we do not. Add or contribute. To our salvation. We only. Receive. From you. And we thank you. That you. Promise. To bring to completion.

The work. That you've begun. In us. We pray that. As we go through. This life. At times. Finding things difficult. Struggling. Would you help us.

To. Be encouraged. By the truth. That. Those. You have called. You will. Keep. For eternity. Help us to.

[26 : 41] Look away. From ourselves. To look to you. And to trust. In you. And in your word. And as we do so. Would you help us. To live lives. That are faithful.

And that we. Might. Yeah. Hold out the gospel. To others around us. Through the way that we live. And conduct ourselves. Would your spirit. Lead us. And guide us. Each day.

That we might glorify you. Our savior. And whose name we pray. Amen. We're going to finish. Our worship service. With a song.

That really picks up. On that theme. Of. Not us. But looking to God. And so. I will finish by singing together. Yet not I. But through Christ.

And me. And we'll stand to sing this.