

A reality worth contending for

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[0 : 00] Good morning. We're back in Jude. We're on page 1, 2, 3, 3 of the Church Bibles. And we're reading all of Jude.

Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James, to those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ.

May mercy, peace and love be multiplied to you. Beloved, although I was eager to write to you about our common salvation, I find it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

For certain people have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were designated for this condemnation. Ungodly people who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

[1 : 18] Now, I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it, that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterwards destroyed those who did not believe.

And the angels, who did not stay within their own position of authority, but kept their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day. Just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire.

Yet, in like manner, these people also, relying on their dreams, defile the flesh, reject authority, and blaspheme the glorious ones.

But when the Archangel Michael, contending with the devil, was disputing about the body of Moses, he did not presume to pronounce a blasphemous judgment, but said, The Lord rebuke you. But these people blaspheme all that they do not understand, and they are destroyed by all that they, like unreasoning animals, understand instinctively.

[2 : 51] Woe to them! For they walked in the way of Cain, and abandoned themselves for the sake of Gain to Balaam's error, and perished in Korah's rebellion.

These are blemishes on your love feasts, as they feast with you without fear, looking after themselves. Waterless clouds swept along by winds, fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, uprooted.

Wild waves of the sea casting up the foam of their own shame. Wandering stars, wandering stars, for whom the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever.

It was also about these that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, Behold, the Lord came with ten thousand of his holy ones, to execute judgment on all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness, that they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against them.

These are grumblers, malcontents, following their own sinful desires. They are loudmouth boasters, showing favoritism to gain advantage.

[4 : 19] But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. They said to you, In the last time, there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions.

It is these who cause divisions. Worldly people, devoid of the Spirit. But you, beloved, build yourselves up in your most holy faith.

Pray in the Holy Spirit. Keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, that leads to eternal life. And have mercy on those who doubt.

Save others by snatching them out of the fire. To others, show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.

Now to him, who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you blameless, before the presence of his glory, with great joy, to the only God, our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time, and now, and forever.

[5 : 39] Amen. Well, good morning. My name is Benji. I'm one of the assistant ministers at Grace Church. Allow me to pray as we start.

Father in heaven, we thank you so much for this letter of Jude. We thank you for its honesty about what it looks like to follow in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We pray this morning that you will prepare our hearts to see what it means to contend for the one true faith, and that we would have ever before us the eternal reality of standing before your throne with great joy forever.

And we ask this in your precious son's name, by whom and through whom and in whom this is all possible. Amen. Jude, as we've seen, is a letter all about authority.

We remember back to week one, that was the big theme that we kept seeing, that God is king. Jude is a man under authority. Yes, he's the brother of Jesus himself, but the only way he chooses to identify is Jude, a slave.

[6 : 50] But we've also seen that God's authority is being denied by false teachers. Verse 12, shepherds feeding themselves. They're leaders. They look like leaders. They're actually self-serving.

But now we come to the great climax of the Christians' combat and contending. And if this series has felt a little bit like a clickbait silver bullet holding back the application until now, apologies, but we are finally here.

What does it mean to actually contend for the one true faith as a Christian? What does it mean to uphold the faith once for all delivered by the apostles? How do we contend?

What is a Christian supposed to do? What is it supposed to look like? And that leads us to our first point, which will come up on the screen, and then we'll be on the back of your handouts together.

The ordinary Christian experience, painful scoffing.

The ordinary Christian experience, painful scoffing, verses 17 to 19. Have a look down with me and we'll read that together. But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[7 : 56] They said to you, in the last time, there will be scoffers following their own ungodly passions. It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, the void of the Spirit.

Now Jude is a master logician. As we said, reading Jude is like drinking a double espresso. It's short, it's sharp, and it's effective. And he doesn't mince words.

If he can use two words instead of ten, he will. And he expects us to do the hard work to work out what he means. And so we're going to try to pay careful attention to basically the flow of Jude's argument throughout this letter, culminating in our verses.

But the core of Jude's argument is this. The core is this. God's authority is being denied because his faith is being denied. God's authority is being denied because his faith is being denied.

Therefore, Christians who are under the authority of that faith are urged to defend and contend for the faith that we see. Or I could put it another way. We submit to God's authority whether or not we submit to his faith once for all delivered.

[9 : 07] Allow me to give you an illustration. I used to consider myself a bit of a Shakespearean sonnet writer. And in my youth, these poor ladies that I thought would obviously be thrilled at me courting them.

I would write these very eloquent and beautiful sonnets or so I thought. And back in the days, young teenagers, I don't know if you knew this, but text used to cost 10p. Can you believe that? So I would obviously take great pains to make sure that my words was not too verbose, that it was beautifully written, that it articulated exactly how I felt about this young Christian lady.

And then because it was going to cost me 10p, I would really kind of... Anyway. And then I would send the text and whether or not, this is a ridiculous illustration, but whether or not the lady accepted the text is a representative of whether or not she accepted me.

She wasn't rejecting the text in and of itself. She was rejecting the sender. In other words, what she did with my words, as wonderfully put together as they were, represents what she thinks about me.

In the same way, whether or not we contend for the faith shows what we think about God. God has delivered the faith once for all to the saints. What we do with the faith shows what we think about

him.

[10:23] But here we see that the ordinary Christian experience will be to be surrounded by those who reject the faith. Verse 19, sorry, verse 18, in the last time there will be scoffers following their own ungodly passions.

But here comes the next step in the logic. This is why we need to pay attention. If you deny the faith, you deny God. But now we need to see that there are many ways to deny that faith. There are many ways to deny that faith. Back to our silly illustration. Some of the ladies, and it wasn't many just before you think, rejected my advances by just ignoring me. Now that was very painful but that's one form of rejection.

Others would send a nice apologetic 10p text back. That was another way of rejecting me. And others, mortifyingly so, would laugh, tell their friends and they would tell me that my advances have been rejected.

So we see that there are multiple ways to reject and we've been seeing throughout Jude that some have been rejecting by ungodly living. Some have been rejecting by blaspheming. But here, and this is what we need to see is absolutely key for Jude's letter and for us to understand this morning.

[11:30] Some will reject the faith by scoffing at those who fight to follow that faith. So you see verse 18. The apostle said to you in the last time there will be scoffers following their ungodly passions.

It is these who cause division. In other words, there is a dagger in the dark for the Christian. We are, I suppose you could say, collateral damage.

The faith will be rejected, yes, but it will be done so here, Jude wants to say, at the expense of the Christian. In other words, we could say, Jude could say, reject the Christian, scoff at the Christian, you reject God.

Because if you scoff at the Christian following the one true faith, you reject the one true faith. If you reject the one true faith, you reject the God who gave it. It's a chain, do we see. If we reject the Christian, we reject the one true faith.

And we're used to thinking in terms like this when we think about the ambassadors. So the greatest film that was ever made, and it is not up for discussion, is 300, obviously. And the very famous scene at the beginning, well, we all know it, don't we?

[12:38] And the men in the room can feel the testosterone rising. When the ambassador comes and he has a chain of skulls hanging from his right hand and he stands before Gerard Butler and says, I'm an ambassador of the Greek king.

Kneel to the king and you will live. And the brilliant line, and he scratches his knee and says, I have a problem with kneeling. And then kicks him in the chest and falls into a pit that seems to never end. In other words, it's a silly point, but the point is clear that if you reject the ambassador, it is not just the ambassador you are rejecting. It is the king that he represents. If you reject the Christian, it's not just the Christian that you are rejecting.

It's the king he represents, do we see. And Jude, you could say, Jude wants to prepare the Christian to be an ambassador for the one true faith and that we are to contend in the words of verse three.

The Christian is the ambassador of the one true faith. If you reject the Christian, if you scoff at the Christian, will you reject the one the Christian serves? Now, scoffing, and this is really important for us to understand because scoffing is really painful.

[13:50] It's really painful. I had to look up what the word scoffing actually means in the Oxford Dictionary. And the Oxford Dictionary describes it as contemptuously ridiculing or mocking someone or something.

And that captures perfectly the false teachers in Jude, doesn't it? Because it's more than just a laughing at, it's more than just a snide comment. There is a hard, cutting edge that comes to their scoffing at the Christian, at their contempt for their holy living.

And we're used to this in our everyday lives, aren't we? I don't know how many times I've spoken to a member of JAM, our youth group, about how difficult it is to be a Christian. Many stories of friends looking at them and saying, oh, you don't believe in sex before marriage.

What a prude. Oh, you won't get drunk at the Christmas party when everybody else is. What a loser. But of course, for us in the workplace, that's not actually that far from our own experience, is it?

The Christian who only has one and a half pints at the office Christmas party and inevitably will have the eye rolling and the, oh, Johnny the Christian, well, he's a bit of a bore, isn't he?
[15 : 02] Or the mum at the school gates who's like, you go to church on Tuesday evening and Sunday morning. Bit weird. And it's just that gentle scoffing, isn't it? We're used to being made to feel uncomfortable.

But that is expected. If someone isn't a Christian, why should we expect them to hold the same moral values and the same attitude to our faith that we do? But it is much more disconcerting, much more painful, much more divisive when it comes from inside the church.

We expect scoffing from people who don't follow Jesus. We don't expect it from those who claim to do so. Two illustrations for us. I myself, when I was a 14-year-old lad, our school would occasionally get clergy members from local church to come in and give RS lessons.

Didn't have dedicated RS teachers, so that's how they worked around that. I remember very vividly, one reverend came in and he sat down and he gave a whole lesson to us as 14-year-olds, which I hope we wouldn't get away with now, on essentially that the Bible doesn't teach anything about sexual purity.

Now I just had my youth equivalent of jams weekend away all about sex and relationships literally that month. So I remember being somewhat disconcerted to then see a chap called Reverend with a dog collar saying the exact opposite and it was deeply disorientating.

[16 : 25] I remember vividly having to go back to my dad that evening to say, Dad, I do not understand. A man who leads a church has just come in and said this. I thought we believed this. I don't understand.

It was deeply disorientating. It was deeply damaging. And that is a personal example, but recently, this has massively come to the fore. In the Church of England, there's been a whole suite of prayers commended that is redefining what constitutes faithful marriage and union between one man and one woman.

And Ed Shaw is a pastor in Bristol who would describe himself as a gay Christian. And he had this to say when these prayers were passed. where are the crumbs of comfort for me as a gay man watching the church seemingly abandon the teaching and discipline I have found so life-giving and affirming.

I've yet to find a crumb of comfort in these proposals. At this time, I am walking away perhaps forever with no crumbs of comfort at all. There are no crumbs of comfort for me and many like me in this church.

And we can hear the pain, can't we? It's deeply painful to be told by someone who is supposed to be within the church, supposed to be on your side, scoffing at you, telling you that the teaching that you are following and have found in the words of Ed Shaw so life-giving, irrelevant, and bigoted in places.

[17 : 58] And that is why I think Jude uses the word and is so clear in verse 19 that it is these who scoff who cause divisions. Worldly people devoid of the spirit. When I first read this, I think I read myself into the text.

I thought Jude was reassuring us that don't worry if you teach the Bible, yes, you're going to be divisive, but don't worry, it's really them out there. And be reassured, it's okay for you to be a bit combative. But I don't think that is what Jude is saying.

Jude is making clear that there is one true faith, it is that one true faith that brings salvation. And it is the scoffing, it is the scoffing of these leaders that will bring people out, that will make a divide, tear the church apart down the middle.

And I think that's why he uses the language in verse 19 of they are worldly people devoid of the spirit, as opposed to the one true faith, which is the Lord's faith, and will result in the words of verse 24 to present you blameless before him in the presence of his glory with great joy.

In other words, we as a Christian need to understand that the ordinary Christian experience is not just going to be scoffing from without, but scoffing from within. And it's painful.

[19 : 13] It's really painful. And it causes divisions. So if we return to the logic that we were trying to lay out at the beginning, if we are ambassadors of Christ and we receive that scoffing, there's going to come a live question for us of are we going to be willing to keep going?

Are we going to be willing to keep contending? Because it's painful. It causes division. It hurts. We are slaves who represent the king, but the ordinary Christian experience, scoffing.

That's point number one. Point number two, the ordinary, extraordinary Christian living. The ordinary, extraordinary Christian living, verses 20 to 23.

Again, Jude covers vast distances in just a few clauses. There's much debate over how the clauses of verses 20 to 21 relate to one another. Do come and speak to me afterwards if you have questions.

I'm very happy to field questions on things like that. But I take it, just for the sake of time, that these clauses work as follows. Verse 20, but you, beloved, building yourself up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, therefore do these things so that you might, verse 21, keep yourself in the love of God until when?

[20 : 30] Waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. In other words, you, beloved, build and pray so that you keep yourself until Jesus' return.

Build and pray so that you keep yourself until Jesus returns. Now, an enormity of meaning is encapsulated in that word build.

It is in your holy faith. This is the faith that we saw once for all delivered to the saints in verse 3, delivered in the scriptures. And it is a holy faith that is repeated over and over in these verses.

So to build, I take it, will mean to saturate yourself in the scriptures and then to live them out. That is building work. The content of your holy faith is the Bible.

The product of our faith is holy living. In other words, this is ordinary Christian living. And so for us, as we were thinking, oh gosh, Jude is maybe going to give us this wonderful silver bullet of what it means to contend and we're on tenterhooks and Benji's really built this up with a kind of click-bait, wait till the third week.

[21 : 36] Sounds an awful lot like what Jude has just said is read your Bible and live it out. Sounds an awful lot like what Jude has just said, which is probably something that we're quite familiar with as a point of application.

But if we are ambassadors of God and Christ, which is also to say if we are ambassadors of the one true faith, we need to know it and live it. But wonderfully, the very next clause reassures us whose work that is.

So you are to build yourself up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. It is that we must pray. So yes, of course, we must do the building work, but it is his faith and his power.

We've seen that the threat is real and grave. Scoffing is painful and dangerous. We must build and pray. I take it, therefore, we can also work out what some of the application points for this is going to be for us.

It's therefore to be in the words, live the words and pray for God's help to do so. That means, therefore, that it will involve things like time in the morning, building ourself up in our quiet time in God's words.

[22 : 48] It will mean in growth group, helping our brothers and sisters in Christ be built up in the words. It might mean accountability triplets where men and women get together to help one another live out their holy faith.

It might mean carving out early time in the morning, so that we can pray and ask for God's help, so that when scoffing hits, which it will, we can withstand it. Now, I wonder if you're feeling mightily underwhelmed.

I wonder if you're feeling that this is the great climax of Jude, contending for the faith, and it sounds an awful lot like what Jude is saying is, read your Bible, follow what your Bible says, and pray.

And we might be left thinking, oh, come on, dude, is there not, is there not just like a little kind of twist, a little bit of exciting advice that we haven't heard before, maybe a bit of novelty?

But this is why I think verse 22 to 23 is so extraordinary. But here we see the result of our contending.

[23 : 55] Have a look down with me at verse 22 to 23. And have mercy on those who doubt, save others by snatching them out of the fire. To others, show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.

In other words, do we see what this is saying? That as the saints build their life, lives out their faith, prays, doubters will see it. They receive mercy and love from us.

The power of God through our prayers works mightily in their hearts and saves them from eternal judgment. It snatches them, in the words of Jude, out of the fire. If we think that prayer and Bible study and godly living are dull, well, Jude wants to raise our gaze to see the outcome of such living,

the consequences of such building and praying.

I want us to pause for a moment as a thought experiment and think about the Christian or Christians that have had the most impact in our Christian life. It might be a parent, it might be someone who read with you at university or school, it might be a Christian friend.

Think about that person in your head and now think to yourself, what was it that they did so consistently and so well that had such a big impact on me?

[25 : 19] And when we have that thing in our mind, I would imagine that it was one of these three things. I would imagine that it was opening up the scriptures with you and building you up in it.

I would imagine that it was helping you understand what it means to live a holy and Christian life. And I would imagine it's that they prayed for you over and over and over again.

In other words, as we think about that person that we love and feel such an enormous debt to in our Christian life, we think carefully, well, is it one of these three things that's meant that you have gone from death to life, from an eternity cut off from God to an eternity with him?

It is these three ordinary things. And it would be quite something, wouldn't it, if when we got to glory, we had many a saint come to us with tears of joy in their eyes to thank us for doing what we, right now, will certainly be tempted to think is ordinary and painful.

That would be quite something, wouldn't it, for a saint to come to and say, thank you for praying for me. It was the Lord's prayers through you that's meant that I'm here. Thank you for opening the Bible with me. It's because the Lord used you that I'm here.

[26 : 37] Thank you for showing me how to put that particular sin to death. It is because of that that the Lord used you to bring me here. But there's also, I hope, great comfort in this.

And for those of us who think that perhaps things like living out the Christian faith in a radical way or evangelism is just for the super Christian and that we are just struggling to get to growth group, struggling to say a prayer in the morning, or perhaps we live with a non-Christian partner and we think, gosh, how can I share my faith in a loving and non-judgmental way which is enormously difficult to do?

And we might be thinking, how am I supposed to be a Christian in those contexts? Well, do we see that Jude is saying, build yourself up in the scriptures, pray, and live an ordinary, extraordinary, godly life?

That's it. You don't have to have a PhD. You don't have to have all the answers. You don't have to be a wonderful street preacher. You build. You pray. And finally, we wait.

How long are we supposed to do this? Verse 21, keep yourself in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ. And that brings us to our final point, an extraordinary god kept for eternal joy.

[27 : 56] We might be tempted to think at the moment, and I think fairly, that this sounds quite hard. Scoffing is painful and the means of persevering through scoffing are the means that we are very familiar with and perhaps tempted to be over-familiar with.

We would be tempted for thinking that this is hard. And it is a lifelong work, but it is a work that has a certain and glorious end.

A certain and glorious end. Jude has flagged his letter with the utter authority and sovereignty of God.

Have a look back at Jude chapter, sorry, Jude 1, Jude verse 1. Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James, to those who are called, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ. And then flick back to verse 24. Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy.

[29 : 06] Do you see that Jude wants to make absolutely clear to us that yes, of course, we are to keep ourselves in the love of God, but ultimately this is God's work. He keeps. He's sovereign.

He loves. He will present you. And one day we will no longer ever have to build again. Do you know that? That as a Christian there will come a day where you'll never read the Bible again. You might be thinking, I can't wait for that day if we find reading the Bible hard.

But one day you won't need to read the Bible because you'll be presented before the Lord himself. One day you won't need to close your eyes to prayer because you'll be able to open them and see him before you and speak to him directly.

One day we won't have to build anymore. And it's certain, it is as certain as God's conviction that he will keep those in judgment who reject him.

But for the Christian God wants to make clear that he will do it. Have a look down with me again at verse 24. Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy to the only God our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord be glory, majesty, dominion and authority before all time now and forever.

[30 : 22] one word, there's much that we could unpack there but one word to draw our attention to as we close and it is that word joy. Now there's an enormity of Old Testament illusion and weight in verses 24 to 25 that don't worry we won't be diving into but I want us to just think back to the Garden of Eden and I want us to think back to that moment when Adam and Eve had eaten of the apple where they'd looked at each other and seen that they were naked and that they ran and hid themselves ashamed from the presence of God and God came down and he asked that question didn't he he said Adam and Eve where are you and they said we hid from you because we were naked and we were ashamed in other words they hid from the presence of God because they were full of shame and full of guilt now compare that to what Jude says will belong to the Christian in verse 24 now to him who's able to keep you from stumbling and present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy in other words from one end of the

Bible to the other we've gone from fleeing from the presence of God with great shame to standing in the presence of God blameless with great joy that is what the one true faith achieves that is why Jude is at such lengths to encourage us to contend for it and for those of us who wouldn't call ourselves a Christian in the room isn't that not what we ultimately long for it is a wonderful thing to know that when we perish we don't really perish it's a wonderful thing to know that when we die we'll stand before the Lord in great joy is that not ultimately what we want certainty in the face of death in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus that is why this faith is worth contending for that is why Jude is at such pains to tell us as ambassadors of Christ that we must contend so as we close our time in Jude we must build ourselves up in the holy faith we must live out the holy faith we must pray yes we must do all of these things but let us never lose sight of where that faith leads presented before the Lord himself perfect with great joy why don't I lead us in a final prayer Lord we thank you that because of the Lord Jesus Christ death and resurrection we can have certainty that when we meet you in glory we will get to stand before you with great joy Father please in the meantime help us as a church family to build one another up to live out our Christian faith and to do so all in the power of your spirit by prayer Amen Wow That person for reasons through and in Jesus God I will to you I will you can listen to if God you can if God You can do best I can say