

Contending for the Faith

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Preacher: Tim Walker

[0 : 00] I believe you've been tracing the downhill decline of Israel in the book of Judges, and you'll get soon to that refrain that becomes a repeated refrain.

In those days, Israel had no king. Everyone did as they saw fit or what was right in their own eyes. It begs the question, who is the authority in your life?

Who do you follow? Or to put it another way, who do you give the right to be believed and the right to be obeyed to? Well, I think Jude is in many ways about living with how you answer those questions, what that means for your life now and for your eternity later.

Now, it's not often that we tackle a whole book of the Bible in one go, so I think we've got our work cut out for us. And I think the most helpful thing to do at the start is to give an overview of the whole book.

So please have it open there in front of you. It's on page 1234. I think it's easy to get overwhelmed by the detail in Jude and all of the Old Testament references, but the big picture, I think, is pretty clear.

[1 : 10] In verse 1, we see that Jude is writing to those who have been called, who are loved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ.

In other words, Christians, those who believe in Jesus. You notice immediately Jude likes to say things in threes, called, loved and kept.

And he does the same thing in verse 2 in this kind of mini prayer. Mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance. Notice too that Jude has already mentioned love twice.

And then again in verse 3, he addresses them as his dear friends, or more literally, his beloved. He gives his reason for writing in verse 4, because certain individuals, ungodly people, have secretly slipped in among them.

And because of this, he urges them in verse 3 to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people.

[2 : 19] Then in verses 5 to 19, more than half of the letter, he tells them about the reality of these ungodly people, what they are like and where they are headed.

In these sections, Jude is blunt, bold and brutally honest in his description of them. As far as I can tell, he makes no concessions for political correctness, he's not worried about causing offence, and he advocates for discerning discrimination in response.

And given the length and the content of these sections, it's easy to think of Jude as just being a letter full of negativity. It's just a list of don'ts, and a description of things and people to avoid.

But then in verse 17, we see another, dear friends, beloved. And again in verse 20, dear friends, beloved. And Jude urges them to positive action.

In these verses, I think Jude returns to his opening appeal, but now he says, to keep yourselves in God's love, as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.

[3 : 36] So Jude tells them in verse 1 that they are kept in Jesus, for Jesus, but because of their situation and the people among them, in verse 21 he says, they must also keep themselves in God's love.

And he concludes with this famous doxology, I'm sure many of you know it by heart, which I think is not just an add-on at the end of the book, but actually undergirds the whole letter and presents us again with a question.

So while at first it may look like an all negative letter, I think Jude is instead a letter wrapped in love, bookended in love.

It's motivated by love, even if it's not a popular message. Now I did ask Andrew if I could speak for 90 minutes today. He said 120 is the usual, but no, no, no.

We won't get to touch on everything today, but do feel free to ask me about it afterwards. Well, we've seen already in verse 3 that Jude is writing to urge them to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people because of these certain individuals that have slipped in. [4 : 49] And verse 4 I think is Jude's summary of them. They are condemned people. That is, they do not share in God's salvation. They are ungodly.

That is, they don't fear God or seek to live their lives by his laws. They pervert God's grace into a license for immorality. That is, they change God's gracious forgiveness of our sins from a saving gift into a license to sin even more.

And they deny the sovereignty and lordship of Jesus Christ. And in verses 5 to 19, he unpacks the reality of where they're going and what they are like, their destiny and their character.

In verses 5 to 7, he reminds them of three examples from the Old Testament, examples his readers would have been very familiar with. And verse 5, the exodus or desert generation of Israel were God's people who he decisively delivered or saved from Egypt.

But an entire generation were destroyed in the desert without entering the promised land, except for Caleb and Joshua, who did believe. Because they all failed to trust in God to give them victory.

[6 : 09] Then in verse 8, the second example is probably from Genesis 6. Sorry, verse 6 is probably from Genesis 6. And the stunning point of this example is that if even some angels, who are God's holy messengers, and who disobeyed God, if they are kept in darkness, in other words, being punished, and are subject to final judgment, well, these individuals will be judged too, if even angels are.

And finally, in verse 7, Sodom and Gomorrah were cities who, in worldly terms, had it all, but they failed to acknowledge God and thank him.

And here Jude emphasises that they gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. You might remember this from the story of Lot and his visitors. And so God destroyed the cities, and now, as Jude says, they serve as an example of those who suffer punishment of eternal fire.

Well, in verse 8, Jude applies these examples to the ungodly people from verse 4, who've infiltrated the church. In the very same way, on the strength of their dreams, these ungodly people pollute their bodies, reject authority, and heap abuse on celestial beings, he says.

In other words, these ungodly people among you who pollute their bodies, they're like the angels and sodomites who did the same by their sexual perversion. These ungodly people among you who reject authority, they're like the desert generation, the angels and the sodomites who refuse to follow the Lord's directives.

[7 : 51] And these ungodly people among you who heap abuse on celestial beings, are like the sodomites who treated the angels with disrespect when Lot visited.

And these ungodly people among you will be judged, just like the examples were. That is their destiny. That is where they are headed. To put it another way, the salvation we share, from verse 3, they are not part of it.

And notice in verse 8, on what basis these ungodly people do all this. On the strength of their dreams, Jude says.

Well, I think the idea here is brought out well in the reading from Jeremiah. Later in that chapter, the false prophets say, I had a dream, I had a dream. But they're really speaking lies in God's name. They're not real prophets, but pretenders. It also says, they speak visions from their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord. And worse, they preach false security.

[8 : 59] They keep saying to those who despise me, the Lord says, you will have peace. And to all who follow the stubbornness of their hearts, they say, no harm will come to you.

And so what's happening in this chapter as people follow that teaching, ungodliness has spread throughout the land, but it won't go unpunished. It says, I will bring disaster on them in the year they are punished, declares the Lord.

They are like Sodom to me. The people of Jerusalem are like Gomorrah. In other words, these ungodly people may appear on the surface to follow God, but in reality, they've rejected his authority.

In reality, they have created their own imaginary stories to follow. If we have more time, there's lots more in these verses about rejecting God, blaspheming his authorities.

Notice that they're even making judgments that the archangel Michael doesn't dare to. But Jude's point is clear. They've rejected God's revelation of himself in his law and his prophets and his son

and they have instead made themselves their own authority.

[10:17] And the result in verse 10 is ignorance, irrationality and destruction. Yet these people slander whatever they do not understand and the very things they do understand by instinct as irrational animals do will destroy them.

We saw in verses 5 to 7, this salvation we share, they are not part of it. And here in verses 8 to 10, this faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people, they do not follow it.

And then just to top it off, Jude, the man who loves his three, gives, you guessed it, three final examples. In verse 11, woe to them.

They've taken the way of Cain. They've rushed for profit into Balaam's error. They have been destroyed in Korah's rebellion. If you read the stories of each of these characters in the Bible, a common pattern emerges, which I think is one reason Jude has chosen them.

None of them were in doubt about what God wanted them to do and how to follow him. All of them were warned against disobedience, but each of them ignored God, stopped believing, chose their own way and were judged.

[11:45] Compare that with just one of their counterparts, Abel, the brother of Cain. Listen to the description of him in Hebrews 11. By faith, Abel bought God a better offering than Cain did.

By faith, he was commended as righteous when God spoke well of his offering. And by faith, Abel still speaks even though he is dead. I think Jude shows us clearly the three great errors of anyone who does not continually put their faith in God for salvation and follow him.

Firstly, they ignore God's clear revelation of himself and his law. God hasn't really made it clear how we should live. We can just follow our own ways.

Secondly, they ignore God's warnings and think that he won't do anything about it. There's not really going to be any judgment or reward or punishment of the wicked.

And thirdly, they trust in themselves instead of him. They might acknowledge God's demands and judgment but say to his grace and salvation, no thanks, I'll get there myself.

[13:01] Well, I think Jude uses the examples of Cain, Balaam and Korah because in early Jewish thinking of his readers, they are kind of archetypal false teachers. But I think we can take it back even further.

Listen to what the serpent, Satan, says in Genesis 3. Did God really say you must not eat from any tree in the garden? Was he clear?

Does that command apply even today? Haven't we moved on now? And then in verse 4, you will not certainly die. You won't be judged.

A loving God wouldn't do that. And then in verse 5, your eyes will be opened and you will be like God. You don't need him. Do it yourself.

These infiltrators, these ungodly people may think they're following a more sophisticated or deeper version of God's love, free from the burdens of the law, full of new revelation and insight, accepting and open to a diversity of ways to God, but really they're following the same lies Satan has always told.

[14:14] Well, how else is this shown? What else should we look for? Jude continues in verses 12 to 13 with even more illustrations of what these people are like. Blemishes at their communal meals to celebrate the Lord's Supper.

Blemishes is probably better translated as hidden reefs. Shepherds who feed only themselves.

It's a great test of Christian leadership if someone is self-interested or they seek the good of others first. Clouds without rain. Ancient Israel is a very dry place.

A cloud without rain gives false hope. It promises much, but delivers nothing. Autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted, twice dead.

I think fruit means righteousness and fruit should have come by autumn, but none has come. And twice dead, not only are they fruitless, but subject to judgment.

[15:23] They are wild waves of the sea, full of action and excitement, but afterwards all that's left is empty foam. They are wandering stars.

If you use them to try to navigate home, you will never get there, arriving instead in blackest darkness. Then in verses 14 to 15, Jude reinforces all that he's been saying about them by using a quote from one Enoch, a kind of spiritual book of the day.

And the thing to notice here is the repetition of the words all or everyone and ungodliness. Each of them occur four times in these verses. It's kind of like Jude wants to hammer home his point just in

case they're not getting it.

And then in verse 16, look at Jude's summary of the inner life of a false teacher. What you see when you peel back the facade. Imagine this as your personal summary.

How would I describe Tim? Well, he's a grumbler and a fault finder. He follows his own evil desires and he boasts about himself and flatters others for his own advantage.

[16:36] Shall we have him in our Bible study? What is Jude saying about these ungodly people? This salvation we share, they are not part of it.

This faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people, they do not follow it. Instead, their captives to the original lies. God hasn't been clear.

We can follow our own way. We can do it ourselves. God won't judge. It doesn't matter what you do. Let me show you. And so they downplay obedience and judgment but flatter others for their own advantage.

They pretend to believe in God but twist his gracious salvation into a license to sin even more. They may promise much and look exciting but feed only themselves and they seek to lead others astray for profit.

2 Peter 2 describes them as false teachers who exploit you with fabricated stories. One commentator says this about souls and their attitude to them.

[17:46] Souls are a precious commodity. Christ thought them worthy of his own blood. But these seducers count souls as cheap wear. For their own gain and worldly interests they do not care how they betray them.

And so Jude appeals to his beloved, his dear friends. Contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people.

Fight for it. The stakes are high. The consequences are great. So contend for it. Well I said at the start that Jude is blunt, bold and brutally honest in his description of these false teachers.

But also that this is a letter wrapped in love, bookended in love. And in verse 17 he addresses his beloved again. To tell them, as one commentator put it, to be forewarned is to be forearmed.

He reminds them that the apostles always predicted that false teachers would be a common feature of the last times. These are the last times which continue even today and will continue until Jesus returns.

[19:00] Which means we need to heed this warning as well. We need to be forewarned and therefore forearmed. Now I don't think that there are any secret ungodly false teachers at Holy Trinity.

Thank God for that. But certain individuals will come and in the wider church have come. And so Jude's appeal to his readers in these verses is what I think we should be doing too.

Each of the verbs in these verses are second person plural, meaning use. It isn't just something we do as individuals but corporately, together, with and for one another.

They're also continuous verbs, meaning we don't just do them once, but day in, day out, year after year in these last times. I think in verses 20 and 21, Jude mentions three things, three ways that we are to keep ourselves in God's love.

He says, but you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith, I think that's one, and praying in the Holy Spirit, two, keep yourselves in God's love as you wait, three, for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.

[20:21] The first one, building yourselves up, I don't think that means constructing childcare centres and more and more buildings, although God willing, those things are helpful for our ministry here.

No, the images of the people of God as a building and the foundation is the most holy faith. This is the faith about Jesus entrusted to the apostles and recorded in scripture.

Notice that the faith isn't a starting point and then we move on to something and that faith isn't one foundation and then we add another. I think the examples that Jude has used in this letter teach us some important lessons about this faith and particularly to not go looking for more outside of what God has already given us.

At times it's tempting to think if God gave me a greater experience of his power I would trust him more when I'm uncertain. But the Exodus generation walked on dry land through walls of water.

They saw the glory of God and the signs he performed in Egypt and the wilderness first hand and then they turned from trusting God to gold and they stopped believing the promise God had made

on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob of the promised land.

[21 : 45] Or sometimes it's tempting to think if God gave me a greater experience of his presence my faith would be stronger and I'd trust his love for me more. But the angels knew the presence of God and abandoned their proper dwelling.

or to think if I had greater material security and blessings I'd trust him with more of my life and what I have. But Sodom and Gomorrah didn't.

No I think from God's perspective he's given us enough to go on, enough to follow Jesus and to obey him. We contend for the faith by continuing in faith, in trust and obedience and supporting each other in that.

Not by looking outside of what God has already given us for more. Well next is praying in the Holy Spirit. I don't think this means some kind of special prayer but simply Christian prayer.

Christians have been given God's spirit to pray. And prayer is itself an act of faith. If we don't pray then what does that say about our trust in God's control and in his goodness?

[22 : 59] And about our dependence on him. I know that many of you use the monthly prayer sheet and also are now praying for our new incumbent. That's wonderful. This dependence is also shown clearly in the third action, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.

In the last days our salvation is both now and not yet. Trusting in Jesus our sins are already forgiven. But continuing in faith means continuing to acknowledge our dependence on his death on the cross for us.

Christian faith says my hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. And as soon as we think that we don't need that mercy, well then we've broken our relationship with God and in Jude's words, are headed for the fire.

If we're to contend for the faith, these are the things we should be actively, continually and corporately doing. Now I have to just step aside and make one quick comment if I can about grumbling and edifying.

I'm blessed many people come up and tell me things before and after services on Sundays and occasionally they say I don't mean to grumble. I don't think what they're doing is grumbling.

[24 : 21] They're often highlighting an issue about how we can better get along with one another and glorify God. The grumbling that I think is referred to here is more like Exodus in the desert.

We want to be back in Egypt, why have you brought us here God kind of thing. So please keep on telling me about things. Verses 22 to 23 gives us instructions I think on how to respond to one another.

Often when we think of contending for the faith we think first of being against outsiders or people who attack it but I think Jude's saying here the first priority in contending for the faith is to be for one another.

He mentions three groups and the actions we're to respond with. Firstly be merciful to those who doubt. Well all of us doubt from time to time and we're not to condemn people.

Be quick to condemn people when they do. Instead we should deal with them gently. Allow questions to be asked and prayerfully lead them back to the truth.

[25 : 25] Secondly he says save others by snatching them from the fire. If we see people going down the path of the false teachers then we're not to sit back.

The word snatching here means to take something suddenly even violently even if you have to drag it away. And thirdly to show mercy to show to others show mercy mixed with fear hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.

I think Jude's probably referring here to the false teachers themselves. Notice that it isn't our place to condemn them. God will judge. And notice that by God's grace there's hope even for them.

But when we're responding to them we must be careful to not tolerate or get sucked into their sin and corruption. Well it's been a lightning tour of Jude.

There's a lot to take in. I said at the start I think Jude is a letter wrapped or bookended in love. It's motivated by love even if it's not a popular message.

[26 : 35] I also said I think this famous doxology undergirds the whole letter and presents us again with a question. The false teachers follow their dreams to destruction.

They rush for worldly status and profit forgetting that they will be judged. And they exchange faith in God for reliance on themselves.

But in verses 24 and 25 Jude reminds us that there is only one God and one Saviour. He is the source of all glory, all majesty, all power and all authority.

He was and is and is to come. And if you trust in him then the greatest salvation awaits you because he is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy.

So the question is do you believe it? If not, why not? And if you do then contend for the faith and for one another.

[27 : 51] Let's pray. God we thank you that you are able to keep us from stumbling and to present us before your glorious presence without fault and with great joy.

we long for that day. Until then strengthen us to contend for the faith you have entrusted to us and for one another.

As we do may those we love come to see that to you belongs all glory, majesty, power and authority through Jesus Christ our Lord before all ages now and forevermore.

Amen.