

Against Perverters of Grace

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Preacher: Paul Barker

[0 : 0 0] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 6th of June 1999. The preacher is Paul Barker.

His sermon is entitled Against Perverters of Grace and is from Jude verses 1 to 7. Almighty God, we pray that you will speak to us now through your word, write it on our hearts, that we may live in your grace for Jesus' sake.

Amen. You may like to have opened the passage from Jude on page 993. What is truth?

Pontius Pilate's words have become renowned and famous in history. What is truth? But today, if you were to ask that question, I guess a common response would be, does it matter?

Who cares what truth is? Because these days, a commitment to truth seems to have become lost in a morass of relativism and nowhere more so than in the religious or theological sphere.

[1 : 2 6] Yes, it's true that spiritual interest is on the rise, but a concern for and commitment to spiritual truth is not. I think people are becoming more and more pragmatic.

So spiritually speaking, they look for what seems to work for them, what seems to deliver the goods, whatever gives them a calm peace within or some warm experience.

For some, it's whatever makes the church grow. That's what matters. For others, it's whatever is tolerant and therefore loving. That's what matters.

And in each of those three cases, it doesn't really matter whether anything is true or not. It's what seems to work that counts. I could ask you the same sort of question.

When you go from here today, will you be concerned about whether what I preach is true or not? Or are you more concerned with what might give you a warm feeling or not?

[2 : 3 7] All around us, I think, in the Western modern world and post-modern world, Christian churches are showing more and more disdain for truth.

And now, sadly, they're reaping the rewards of that. Churches of decline, purposelessness, immorality. It's not a new problem.

It's the issue that Jude addresses in his letter. And today, in the next two weeks, I imagine that we will find some challenges here and a clear relevance here for us as well as some warm reassurance as well.

Strictly speaking, the letter of Jude is the letter of Judas. That was his name. But whoever would read a letter called Judas these days? Nobody calls their children Judas ever since the famous Judas betrayed Jesus.

But this Judas, or Jude, was in fact a brother of Jesus, it seems. We know that Jesus had a number of brothers, including a man called James, and this Jude, we're told, is the brother of James.

[3 : 57] And it seems probable that he is a brother of that particular James and therefore the brother of Jesus. Yet he introduces himself at the beginning of the letter, not by name-dropping and calling himself Jesus' brother, but rather by saying, Jude, a servant of Jesus.

Literally, it's a slave of Jesus. What he's saying there is that his spiritual relationship to Jesus is more important than his physical relationship to Jesus as his brother, the son of Mary and Joseph.

It is better, you see, to be Jesus' slave than it is to be his physical brother. Jesus himself acknowledged, didn't he, that his real family was not his physical parents and siblings, but rather those who followed him and kept his commandments.

That's Jesus' real family, the family of faith. And Jude acknowledges that and describes himself in spiritual terms as the slave of Jesus.

To be a slave is to be at his beck and call, to be at his disposal, not unlike Jeeves in the P.G. Woodhouse novels or Bunter is Lord Peter Whimsey's servant in Dorothy Sayers' novels and so on.

[5 : 35] That's what it is to be a slave of Jesus as all Christians ought to be, to be at his disposal, to go where he sends, to do what he commands.

Well, Jude, having said who he is as the author of the letter, following ancient practices of writing letters, then describes who his readers are.

They're called by three terms, striking terms really. It's the first of many groups of three. So,