

A Fight for the Faith

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- [0 : 0 0] Good day again everyone. It would be great to keep your Bibles open. You'll find an outline on the church website, asha.org.au on the live stream link under the 5pm stream.
- If you'd like to follow along, that will help you. There's a bunch of headings. It will help you work through with me. I'm going to step through that as we go. So how about I pray and ask for God's help.
- Gracious Father, we thank you for your word and we thank you that you speak to us through it. We ask, Father, that you would quiet our minds from the busyness of life and from potentially the distraction from screens in front of us.
- And soften our hearts so that we might be moulded into Christ's likeness and shaped by this passage so that we might become more like you.
- Amen. Amen. Well, have you ever been under attack? In about mid-high school, there were some guys in my grade who were into Staxon.
- [1 : 2 9] Was that a thing at your school? One sorry soul at the bottom and 20 people jumping on top. Staxon wasn't too bad if everyone was friends.
- Well, there was a period of time when these bored punks were just taking it way too far. And instead of just playing with each other, their mean ringleader decided it would be more excited if the group of them just shouted, Staxon!
- And they charged at a random person and just piled on them. Most of the guys who did this, they were pretty popular guys and so they got away with it.
- Mostly people laughed. But after a while, their boredom and their hunger increased. They didn't only pile on, but they also put a few knees and fists in, just for good luck, you know.
- Because with all those people stacking on, you know, you can't really see that much. I took care where I went during lunch and recess. Fearful of the dreaded call.
- [2 : 4 6] These were early grown young blokes in mid-high school. I was a scrawny little kid, not yet grown. I did whatever I could to avoid any rough and tumble when I was at school.
- These guys were out for blood, ready to attack. In today's passage, we see some dangerous people of a different kind, but still out to attack the Christian community in Jude's audience.
- Jude's an interesting little letter and quite distinct from the rest of the New Testament letters. And Jude as an author is also quite different.
- While he was very close to Jesus and the apostles, he wasn't one himself. We're going to spend a few weeks here and I hope you're ready because Jude is pretty intense.
- What do I mean? Jude is written to warn and challenge his faithful readers to take up arms against the evil, slippery and doomed to darkness heretics and false teachers who are living among them.

[3 : 57] They are living in a dangerous place and a dangerous time among dangerous people. And without vigilant attention to word and prayer with each other, in the power of the Holy Spirit, they might find themselves corrupted by the ungodly desires of the people who live among them.

Jude only tells us a bit about himself. Verse 1, you can see it. Servant of Christ, brother of James. What's interesting is that if he's the brother of James, it's likely that he's also the brother of Jesus.

But instead of calling himself brother of Jesus, he calls himself servant. That says something about him, doesn't it? Unlike Paul's letters, we don't know who Jude is writing to.

We may gather from places throughout the letter that his audience are Jewish because of certain references commonly known to Jewish readers, but he doesn't say.

What he makes clear is that their relationship with God is sure and that it is completely dependent on God and not on them.

[5 : 17] Look in verse 1. He says to those who have been called what God did in them before birth. To those who are loved what God is doing now despite their frailties and failures.

Those who are kept for Jesus Christ. Protected, held. Not something they can stuff up or lose. What a comfort to the saved.

And more than that, we know slightly more about the relationship between Jude and his audience. He greets them in verse 3, doesn't he? Dear friends.

It's easy to read this and not think much, but it's a pretty affectionate greeting. Some of your Bibles might say beloved. And while that has love in it, to be honest, it doesn't really feel like a word that I'd use very much unless I was mocking Mark or trying to be posh.

Basically, it carries the idea of deep, caring feelings. Like you parents might feel or say towards your kids or you youth leaders might say towards your youth kids or you Bible study leaders might say towards your groups or feel towards your groups.

[6 : 37] You desperately desire for their good and for their protection. And so what does Jude want to tell his dear friends? Well, it was one thing until he had a change of heart.

Point one. Look at verse 3. Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt compelled to write an urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people.

It makes sense that someone with affectionate care for Christians would want to write a letter about their shared salvation, doesn't it? What an encouraging way to be in touch.

Just think of all those other letters that have been circulated around the churches from Paul and Peter and James. Though, here's a way better, he thinks, because sibling rivalry, you know.

I'll write to encourage my brothers and sisters about what we have in Christ, especially because I don't see them anymore. That'll be swell. But that's not what he does, is it?

[7 : 54] He has a change of heart, a rather urgent one. It's kind of like when you're aggressively arguing a point only to discover that you may, in fact, be wrong on one or two of those points that you're arrogantly pressing.

Yeah, well, I have to go. Jude was set in one direction, but he was compelled to write about something else.

Less so the happy, encouraging, shared salvation letter, but something more pressing. I can imagine everyone leans in.

He says, I felt compelled to urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people. This is a new direction, isn't it?

It's as though Jude wants them to pick up weapons and fight. And this is what it means, not so much the weapons, but absolutely the fight. Jude is telling them to fight for the faith that God has given them and to do so urgently.

[9 : 16] This is the challenge to all who've been called, who are loved in God, kept for Christ. There's a danger in this Christian community and it's their responsibility to take up arms and contend for it.

What does contend actually mean? Well, for starters, you need to know the faith that was entrusted. You need to be equipped in it, always prepared to give an answer.

And in light of this challenge, a person contending the faith will be ready to argue about the truth contained in Scripture and to oppose those who hold and propose contrary views, even to struggle against them.

Jude doesn't give the impression of a cakewalk, does he? But a wrestle. What's interesting about contending here in Jude compared to many other letters is that contend is active.

So often, the Christian churches are encouraged to stand firm. At least 15 times in the New Testament, the apostles tell the churches to stand firm.

[10 : 43] But contend or fight is a very forward-moving word. It takes courage and equipping and community. And so I wonder, would you?

Would you take up arms? Would you fight? Would you be ready if you were called as these people were? The question that might be on your mind right now is why?

Why the change of heart, Jude? What's got you so riled up? Well, it's because of a dangerous, ungodly people.

Point two. I'll read again from verse three. Dear friends, although I was eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people for or because certain individuals whom whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you.

They are ungodly people who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only sovereign and Lord.

[12 : 13] Some of your Bibles might say certain men have slipped in, but the truth is much more indiscriminate than that. There are absolutely both men and women who find their way into Christian communities and gain trust and deny the truth about the Lord.

Jude's point is that these people have come in secretly into the Christian community and they may very well not know who they are.

They may have pull or position of some kind and they abuse the grace that God has freely given.

And yes, they will suffer judgment. In fact, their condemnation was written about long ago. But the danger is very real because they are among you.

people if I was saying this to my group of year eight boys from HTY, they'd be giggling and saying a mole gus.

[13 : 32] There are some similarities between among us and this and these individuals. Like among us, you don't know these certain individuals and they are dangerous.

but unlike among us, it's not over in moments and the danger is far greater.

Why? Well, because they don't just kill you while you're fixing some wiring. That's way too sus. Plus, that wouldn't really damage the kingdom, would it?

It would be sad though. Instead, do you see what the passage says? They pretend to be free. And so on the surface, they look like you and me.

They very likely thank and praise God for his grace and salvation, but they are not godly people. Jude calls them ungodly at least four times in 25 verses.

[14 : 41] Why? Why? Because they use grace as a license for immorality. This is just what both Paul and Peter tell the Galatians and the scattered Christians not to do.

On the next slide, you can see the references. to use their God given freedom as a cover up for evil. people. I don't mean to trivialize, but this sort of reminds me of re-gifting, at least from someone that you care about.

They've gone to a great deal of effort to get you something that really fits your personality and they're not going to ask you what you want because they don't want to ruin the surprise.

They think they've really nailed it and when you open, you have to pull that face. You know the one. Oh, thanks.

Oh, no. Oh, yes. I love it. Thank you. And then you secretly hold on to it for a few months to avoid any suspicion and respond positively when asked about it.

[16 : 01] Oh, no, it's great. I love it. You really nailed it. And perhaps after everyone has forgotten, you give it to someone in a different group of friends, hoping nothing will be ever revealed.

It's a bit of a dog act, isn't it? I've never done it, despite how I've told this story. I've considered it, but my conscience has gotten the better of me, thank God.

it kind of makes me think of these people who pervert the grace of God into a license for immorality. They take what they've been graciously given and use it for their own evil desires.

How? Just think about Jude's language, a license for immorality. Think about a vaccine passport, because we're thinking about them all the time at the moment.

They allow you to see a friend. Soon they'll allow you to sit in a cafe or a restaurant. It's like a pass. Isn't grace a little bit like that?

[17 : 08] It frees us from sin, opens up a pathway and a relationship with God, and also particularly in a Jewish context, frees from the law.

Now in Christ, a new covenant Jew can say, I'm free to make my own rules, my own traditions. But these evil people are using grace, this same principle, to say, I can do whatever I want, and you can too.

I ain't bound by no law, I ain't got no rules, I'm free. Try and tell me otherwise, for freedom Christ has set us free.

It's a compelling argument, isn't it? Maybe particularly for a post-Judaistic religious Christian community, but also very dangerous, hence Jude's change of heart.

Because while the law doesn't save and rules and works for salvation are not what God desires, just as Jude knows well, and we do too, that freedom in Christ doesn't mean we can do what we want.

[18 : 50] And when you look closely at the New Testament, you see that it's full of rules for God's people, not for salvation, but because of it, for the saved, in direct opposition of this kind of perversion.

Their claim is, I'm forgiven now and in the future, therefore I'm free, I can do as I please. the real danger comes from the elements of truth in their message and the temptation to take part, to catch on to those truths.

But the reality in their lives is no love of Christ, no knowledge of his lordship, no handing over control of their lives to their God and saviour.

And it's in that, in these, that they deny Jesus Christ as their only sovereign and lord. This is such a great danger and truly the reason for Jude's change of heart.

because with their mouth they claim to know and have the grace of God but with their lives they say Christ has set us free, so let's indulge.

[20 : 24] How desirable. And so in light of this danger, Jude reminds them what happens to the rebellious.

Point three, look from verse five, though you already know this, I want to remind you that the Lord at one time delivered his people out of Egypt but later destroyed those who did not believe.

And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their proper dwellings, these he has kept in darkness bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great day. In a similar way Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion.

They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire. These three examples are striking reminders of God's judgment towards those who rebel.

Moses led a miraculous victory for Israel by God's powerful hand. They praised and danced and sang but none of that generation except Caleb and Joshua entered the promised land because they turned their back on God.

[21 : 53] Brendan so helpfully read it for us before didn't God can turn the Nile to blood, call fire from heaven, open the sea plus all the other things that he did but he can't defeat a scary army.

Idiots. Even angels who rejected God kept in darkness till judgment day and of course those in the towns of Sodom and Gomorrah who gave themselves over to sexual immorality because they didn't listen to Lot's warning.

these examples Jude reminds them serve as a warning of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire. Would it be nice to do as you please with the expectation of complete forgiveness regardless?

Possibly. But it's a denial of Jesus' lordship. It's abusing grace and it makes a mockery of his sacrifice.

So what should our response be to a passage like this? The New Testament is full of warnings about people who might lead believers astray. So while Jude isn't writing this letter to us, it's wise to ask, are they among us?

[23 : 24] The difficulty of course is their secrecy. They aren't wearing name tags or purple hats. They very likely claim to know and accept God's grace in Christ. And it's possible that they may be even harder to identify certainly than the Staxon Brigade, but likely even harder to identify than what my explanation implied about them earlier.

I suspect that they would be just more stealthy, more like us. I've been thinking that they may well be here among us at HTD.

And they may also be in positions of authority in a broader church system, like in the Australian evangelical tradition, for example.

I can think of some, or perhaps the Anglican church. In places like these, they might be in leadership, and I reckon we'd be less likely to hear things like, I ain't got no rules, I can do whatever I want.

But maybe see someone who uses their freedom to maybe hold their position, a misuse of power, controlling people maybe, or maybe protecting a tradition, a certain reading of scripture, or perhaps trying to change the definition of the word love.

[25 : 13] it's possible that identifying these people would take time and prayer and thoughtful consideration in community.

But like we've seen from Jude, the right response is more than just recognition. In fact, if we do identify these people, it's just as much our responsibility as it was Jude's readers to take up arms and fight.

But what does it look like to fight? Whether these people are in leadership or not, fighting sounds pretty odd, doesn't it? love.

So if you think you've identified a certain individual, I think the first thing to do is not nothing.

Doing nothing is just a danger to you and your fellow Christians. I think, secondly, pray. God wants to sustain you in his love and your Christian community.

[26 : 28] Pray that he would. Pray that these people would lose their influence and their position. Go to prayer. Thirdly, prepare.

Know the faith that was entrusted to you. Know what it means to live as a free person under God, a life as a forgiven servant.

under grace. And finally, and I think this is where the rubber hits the road.

Ask, does that align with the freedom that we have in Christ? Is that for the good of all God's people?

people? Is that God honoring? Does that serve the kingdom and the king? God God are confronting questions?

[27 : 39] And asking a person these questions can be hard. and those of you who have will know how hard it can be. But if we don't, these people and their practices may come to influence our Christian community and our culture even.

And before long, perhaps our own freedom and culture may become perverted. question. And so I think it's wise before we finish to ask one more person, one more group of people questioned like these and that is ourselves.

Because if we have been or are being influenced without having asked these questions, it's possible that when someone comes along with a refining fire and some truth bombs from scripture, we may not like it too much because we've become accustomed to the new and the fresh and the updated.

So we ought to ask ourselves, is it God honoring or am I protecting idolatry and selfish behavior? Am I loving and serving the body or only myself?

Think about your actions today. am I using my freedom, freedom one at the cross? Am I using my freedom for Christ's service to indulge myself?

[29 : 15] Friends, don't be led astray by people who tell you under grace you can do whatever your heart desires. It's just selfishness, it's just sin.

it's rejecting Jesus who died for you, it's denying Jesus your only sovereign and Lord. But I want to remind you like Jude reminded his readers, we do not have an angry God watching over us because his anger was dealt with at the cross.

And while we do struggle with sin and we will give into temptation, we have a loving Father who loves to forgive. And he will not do to us what he did to the generation in the wilderness because Jesus has taken our punishment.

You might be thinking, what if it's me? What if I'm one of those whose condemnation was written about years ago? I don't think you need to worry because these people don't think like that.

These people don't put their trust in Jesus like you do, like you worry about. Is your trust in Jesus? Is he your saviour and your Lord?

[30 : 39] Make sure that today, as long as it is called today, your trust is in Jesus. And verse one will be true for you.

Dear friends, ungodly people who pervert the grace of God into a license for immorality are very likely among our 21st century Christian communities.

It's up to us to fight for the faith that was entrusted to us. How would I pray that God will help us to do it? Our Father, we give you thanks for our saviour and Lord Jesus who died so that we could live.

We thank you for the grace which was freely given so that we could live in relationship with you and put our life of sin behind us. Would you give us eyes to see those who seek to destroy this new life you have given us?

And Father, give us strength from your spirit to contend for the faith that was entrusted to us so we do not fall to their temptation and so we can read our communities of their presence.

[31 : 54] Amen.