

STUDIES IN JUDE – 1

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Scripture: Jude 1:1-4

The epistle of Jude is an itchy-bitsy book that is tucked away towards the end of the Bible. It is an interesting letter. You can read it very quickly because it's all of one chapter and 25 verses. and as you read it, you get these words: fight, contend, battle. When do you do that? When apostasy arises, when false teachers emerge, when the truth of God is attacked. Then it is time to fight for the faith. And only believers who are spiritually in shape can actually answer the summons.

At the beginning of this letter, Jude wants to focus on the believers' common idea of salvation. But then he tells us that he feels compelled to challenge them to contend for the faith. The danger, he says, is real. False teachers have crept into the church, turning God's grace into unbounded license to do as they please.

Jude reminds such men of God's past dealings with:

1. Unbelieving Israel,
2. The disobedient angels,
3. Sodom and Gomorrah.

And in the face of such danger, Christians should not be caught off guard. The challenge is great, but so is the God who is able to keep us from stumbling. All of these is caught up in this pithy book of one chapter. And if you were to look at it and try to see if you can divide it up, it falls very easily into 4 divisions.

Verses 1-4: tells us the purpose of this letter and why Jude is writing it.

Verses 5-16: gives you some kind of idea about the false teachers, past judgment of false teachers, present characteristics of false teachers, and then the future judgment that can come upon false teachers.

Verses 17-23: he looks at the defense that we must have against false teaching.

Verses 24-25: the doxology.

Verses 1-4 The Purpose of the epistle of Jude.

¹Jude, a bond-servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James,

To those who are the called, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ: ²May mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you.

³Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith that was once for all time handed down to the saints. ⁴For certain people have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Jude addresses this letter to believers whom he calls 'beloved' and tells them that they are kept, and wishes for them the threefold blessing of mercy, peace and love. And we find that in vs. 1-2. However, we see that grim and sad news about the encroachment of false teachers in the churches have compelled Jude to put aside his commentary on salvation, and write this timely word of rebuke and warning that is seen in vs. 3-4.

And in view of this, the apostates or the apostasy have turned the grace of God into licentiousness, and who deny Christ. He says that it is crucial that believers must contend earnestly for the faith. That's actually a packed couple of words: contend, which is to fight, to defend, to do battle. Then he says do it earnestly. Don't just do it, earnestly contend for the faith.

And he says in the very 1st verse as he identifies himself as a bondservant of Jesus Christ and as the brother of James. Interesting! Because both Jude and James were brothers of Jesus. While James had a larger role to play in leading the Jerusalem church, we know that both of them, the family at least, came into the full knowledge of who Jesus was only after His death and His resurrection. But you can see that James grew exponentially, and so also Jude. But James went on to lead the Jerusalem church and was in a strong position of leadership.

We see this in Matthew 13:55 where the people there reject Jesus. They were astonished at His wisdom, but ask the question in v.55 "Is not this the carpenter's son? Is His mother not called Mary, and His brothers, James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas?" Jude and Judas were used synonymously and interchangeably at that time. You can see the humility of Judas, not referring to himself at all as someone who was connected with Jesus, but talking about the connection with Jesus as Jesus' bondservant and a slave. And then talking about himself more in relationship with his brother, elevating Jesus as the anointed One, the Messiah.

Then, I love the way he refers to the people. He says, "Beloved," showing how much he cared for them, how much he wanted to protect them and equip them as we shall see in the coming weeks. But along with his endearing term, he has two words to describe these believers, and us as well. He says that we are 'called' and we are 'kept people'. We are called by God of God, and we are a kept people. And that's how we ought to look at ourselves as well, ones who are called and ones who are kept.

What does it mean to be a called-out people? Paul tells us in Romans 1:6 that we Christians are "the called of Jesus Christ". What does this mean? The Greek word for church is *ecclesia* which comes from the verb meaning 'to call out'. So this verse means that God's people have essentially been called out of the world system that is hostile to God. In fact, Jesus Himself said in John 15:19 "If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this, the world hates you."

And then he refers to the believers as those who are kept for Jesus. What a wonderful thought for each one of us – believer, that we are kept, sustained, protected and held so that we will finally meet our risen Savior face to face. What a glorious moment that will be when we see Jesus face to face. Much has been written about that moment and how we respond to it.

E.E. Hewitt wrote in 1898 –

When we all get to heaven,
What a day of rejoicing that will be!
When we all see Jesus,
We'll sing and shout the victory!

Carrie Breck wrote –

Face to face with Christ, my Savior,
Face to face, what will it be?
When with rapture I behold Him,
Jesus Christ who died for me.

Face to face shall I behold Him,
Far beyond the starry sky;
Face to face in all His glory,
I shall see Him by and by.

Face to face, oh, blissful moment!
Face to face, to see and know;
Face to face with my Redeemer,
Jesus Christ who loves me so.

Have you ever thought how you'll respond when you see Jesus face to face? What would you say? What would your posture be? would you have enough words to say to Him? What would you do? Thank God that He has called us out and that we are kept ones, safe kept ones.

Then in v.3, he says, "Beloved, while I was making every effort to write to you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith that was once for all time handed down to the saints."

What kind of faith? What is this faith that he is asking us to fight for, contend with? The faith that was once and for all delivered to the saints. So we ask the question: What does he mean by contend earnestly for the faith? And then the corollary question: What does he mean that this faith was delivered once for all? Contend to fight for the faith or defend the faith.

So as we look at what this faith entails, we see that this faith that he is talking about is not faith in something – I have faith in this bridge, or I have faith in that. But it's a faith that encompasses all that we believe. It's a reference to the basic Christian doctrine and Christian truth that we ought to contend for. Notice that it is the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. Nothing more can be added to it. it is fully delivered. This body of doctrine is complete and must govern the meaning of the terms in which doctrine is defined and discussed. So this faith that we have is this whole body of doctrine that we stand by, that we base our belief system upon.

1 Corinthians 15:1-4 says –

"Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, ²by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

³For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.

Paul is commenting on what has been delivered, the faith considered and described as the basic content of the gospel. These things are statements on which we have built our life and our faith and our belief system. He says in 1 Timothy 3:16. This text is a message to a young minister, Timothy. But he says what follows is what many think is hymnic in structure:

God was manifested in the flesh,
justified in the Spirit,
seen by angels,
preached among the Gentiles,
believed on in the world,
received up into glory.

These are confessions that must be the bedrock of the Christian doctrine and belief that we must contend for, as Jude invites us to do.

The church has over the years, put this irreducible core of the gospel into creeds, creeds that we hold dear to us. That's why, when we look at churches, we find that although we may be theologically different, we always find that our orthodoxy is one. orthodoxy has to do with doctrine, the irreducible core of the gospel which, if you take out even a single statement, makes it heretical, and makes that particular belief system a cult. That's how we know what cults are. if they can't subscribe to the Apostles' Creed which all our confirmation kids have to learn to know that this is the irreducible core of the gospel.

From that, we take the theological stances that help us to understand who we are in the context of that doctrine. But doctrine is sacrosanct. From that we say, because of this we believe this about baptism, for example. You look at how baptism is looked at across the world in churches – there's infant baptism, child baptism, adult baptism, all kinds. That's how people interpret. But baptism is something that is a must for the church, however churches may do it. Why? Because Jesus Himself was baptized.

So we look at these tenets of this irreducible core of the gospel and then listen to what Jude is saying. "Be careful. There are people who are coming into the church who are eroding these irreducible parts of the gospel message. And if you take them out, then you're diluting the gospel message."

Today, actually last June, the United Methodist Church in the US and its affiliates in Africa, Philippines, Indonesia split over the whole issue of gender. This battle was to bring homosexual priests, pastors into the denomination, ordain them. There's a battle that's been going on from about 1970. And it's getting more and more bitter. I remember when we were in seminary in 1990, meeting a pastor who had just come back from General Conference, and he was talking about how they had to fight. There was such a strong lobby within the United Methodist Church saying that it was time to ordain homosexual pastors, both men and women who were practicing homosexual behavior. And he was just so wiped out, crying. He said, "I don't know. We fight so hard. When I go up to heaven and meet my Lord, I'll say, 'Lord, I fought for what I believed in. that's all I could do.'" But that whole issue came to a head in the last couple of years when the body inside the United Methodist Church realized that they couldn't do anything to change that stance. It was too powerful a lobby. And so the Global Methodist Church was formed in June with the articles of John Wesley as its charter. And a lot of the Methodist pastors and churches out of the United Methodist denomination have left to join the Global Methodist Church. At last count, I think there was something like 8,500 churches that have now become a part of the Global Methodist Church.

That's what Jude is talking about – how people can quietly get into a place and then slowly bring everything to this head where there has to be some kind of a split. And he says, "Watch out. Contend for these truths. Fight for these truths." He gives us two reasons to fight for them

1. Because of false teachers who are coming in the church,
2. Because Satan's strategy is always to counterfeit the faith.

As we look at scripture, we see so many reminders that we are going to be in a place where we'll have to be careful of people who can masquerade as ones who know the gospel and celebrate and come to cause division.

Paul says of false teachers in Acts 20:29-30 "I know that false teachers like vicious wolves, will come in among you after I leave, not sparing the flock. Even some men from your own group will rise up and distort the truth in order to draw a following.

Colossians 2:4 "I am telling you this so no one will deceive you with well-crafted arguments."

1 Timothy 4:1 "Now the Holy Spirit tells us clearly that in the last times, some will turn away from the true faith; they will follow deceptive spirits and teachings that come from demons."

2 Timothy 4:3 "For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to sound and wholesome teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever their itching ears want to hear." What a damning statement. Not only will people who have itching ears want to stay there, but they will also go and find people who will authenticate the way they want to live their lives. What a classic example to be able to have pastors who are homosexual in their behavior, to be pastors of congregations so that people in the congregation who are like that will be able to say, "That's okay."

There's so much happening in the world today. When we look at some of the gender identity issues that are coming. It's out in the world, and it starts to creep into the church. And unless, beloved, we are careful and we know the truth of the gospel, then we won't know when it has come in until it has started corrupting the belief that we have.

I was reading about a man whose mother worked as a bank teller. Day in and day out, she was giving out notes to people. And he asked her, "How do you know when a counterfeit note comes?" and she said, "We are given no training. It's just that we are so used to the true notes that the moment a counterfeit comes, we recognize it." What a wonderful metaphor for us in the church, that we ought to recognize what is true in the Word of God so that we don't fall for what is false. The onus is on us because Satan's strategy has always been to corrupt and to counterfeit the Word of God right from the very beginning. "Did God really say...?" Is it really in scripture? Show me where it is in scripture. No, it's not there. And if we don't know where it is in scripture, then we'll say, "Maybe it's not."

Jude is saying, "Be very, very careful." It's amazing that he can start a letter wanting to talk about something and then feel compelled by the Holy Spirit to change and say, "Here's something that is far more important – that apart from just enjoying salvation, you need to be able to guard that salvation as well, so that nothing comes to dilute it."

I remember some years ago, meeting somebody who had a lot of stuff going on in his life, stuff that was not right. He said, "I'm so thankful for the grace of God. I know that even though I'm doing all this stuff, God's grace covers me." And I said, "What a travesty to imagine that God's grace is there to cover this licentious behavior that you have. How false, how demeaning of God's grace. How can you cheapen the grace of God like that?"

Paul himself, pre-empts that question in Romans 6 where he said: "So should I continue to sin that grace may abound. God wants to give grace; grace covers my sin. Let me sin all the more and God will be happy giving more grace." Then he said, "God forbid, may it never be that you think like that." How can you even think about cheapening the grace that comes to us because of Jesus on the cross at Calvary? It cost so much. How dare you cheapen it by saying that the cross and the grave covers my licentious lifestyle? May it never be.

That's what Jude has in these first 4 verses. As he begins this letter, he says:

- Be careful.

- I want you to contend for the faith.
- Watch out for this grace that can get cheapened.

Which is where I believe we need to land today, to just leave the first century Christians that Jude was writing to there, and do the following:

- Ask the question of each one of us: Do I know enough about my faith to be able to recognize things that are coming against it so that I can contend with it, that I can defend it? Do I know enough of the Word of God? Do I know where I stand? What I stand for? What are things that we cannot every compromise on? Do I know them?
- Invite the Holy Spirit to turn the spotlight on our lives and say, “Lord, is there any way that I am cheapening the grace that was so costly for You to give? Am I cheapening that grace? Is there something in my life that is consistently against You and Your will, and yet, I’m walking through with it, carrying it with me, thinking that Your grace will cover it? We ask Your forgiveness for doing that Lord. help me to contend for the faith. Help me to have better love. Look at the word he used – that you. May earnestly contend. How important it is for us to know the Word of God, to know the things that cannot be reduced from the Word.

Amen.
