

The Church in Jeopardy

Jude 1-4

Clearcreek Chapel, **Pastor Tim Nixon**

September 10 and 11, 2011 Jayne and I were passing through New York City. If that date isn't familiar to you, it was the 10th anniversary of the World Trade Center attack. The city was on high alert. We sat at an outdoor café eating supper as we watched police with bomb sniffing dogs walk up and down the street inspecting every parked van they came across.

Terrorists have the attention of the world. The world has changed because of their conviction. They are dangerous for at least three reasons:

1. They are driven by something religious and something deep in their heart.
2. Secondly, what makes them so dangerous is that they are hidden. They are among us and we don't know them until it is too late.
3. Finally, they are willing to sacrifice everything for their cause, and therefore, no threat against them has any power. They have no fear of giving up their lives.

And so our only hope is to discover them before it is too late.

This is especially true in America because we have been so open-minded, and open bordered. And so we are in a state of constant vigilance in the United States.

This is also true in today's church. For many years now a liberalism has been sneaking into our churches.

- It shows itself in doctrinal shallowness.
- They are more concerned with style than substance
- They are more concerned with acceptance than accuracy
- They are more concerned with popularity than with the power of the Word
- They are more concerned with newer ways and their badge of honor is that they have no concern for the truth and faith of the past.

So, when the Son of Man returns, will he find faith on the earth?

Peter just a few years earlier in 2 Peter chapter two warns of false teachers. Peter says they **will** come, **shall** come, **are** coming. Now just a few years later, Jude writes' "They're here!" There is no future tense in Jude. And 25 years after Jude, we have Revelation 2-3 where six of seven once faithful churches have been affected and are full of people who think they are Christians but are not.

Jude lived at a time when Christianity was under severe political attack from Rome and aggressive spiritual infiltration from apostates and people who behaved without any moral principles.

Except for John, who lived at the close of the century, all of the other apostles had been martyred, and Christianity was thought to be extremely vulnerable. Thus, Jude called the church to fight, in the midst of intense spiritual warfare, for the truth. Even though this book was written nearly 2000 years ago, the letter speaks of our day and time as if it was written last week.

Turn in your Bibles this morning to the book of Jude.

We will be spending the next three Sunday mornings working our way through this letter.

Let's read through the first 4 verses as our text for this morning.

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:

2 May mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you.

3 Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. 4 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.

There's only one Jude in the New Testament who has a brother called James, and the two references to him in Matthew 13 and Mark 6 make it clear that the two men were half-brothers of Jesus and the sons of Mary and Joseph. This is our author. Jude does not claim his earthly relationship with Jesus, but his heavenly relationship.

Called, Beloved, and Kept (1-2)

The letter is addressed to Christians who are called. Every Christian has been called by God, and one of Jude's key ideas is that God will continue to call us home until we join him in heaven. Yet it goes deeper even than that. Jude writes to Christians who stand in the line of succession which stretches back to God's call of Abraham, through today, to a wonderful future in glory.

A second foundational truth is that Christians are loved. Jude here is saying something more profound than that Christians are loved by God, although that is true, because he says literally that Christians are beloved in God. What does Jude mean? It is a double guarantee that God's love will not fail us, protecting us from the outside and strengthening us from within. We will understand this greater as we look toward the end of this letter, for in verse 21, Jude instructs them to keep themselves *in* the love of God.

Not only are Christians called and loved, but they are kept. This means that Christians are secure for the future time when Jesus comes again. This verse doesn't promise prosperity, but it reminds us that God *has* not let go of us and *will* not let go of us. In this particular context, Jude wants us to know that when we see church's flooded with wrong teaching about God, Christ will keep a firm hold on his people.

The Puritan commentator, Thomas Manton, says that “Jesus Christ is the cabinet in which God’s jewels are kept; so that if we would stand, we must get out of ourselves and get into him, in whom alone there is safety.” This is an important concept to grasp right off the bat in Jude’s letter..

And so in verse one we see the gospel. Dick Lucas says it well:

“You: called effectually by God because of sovereign grace, before the foundation of the world, and because of the work of the Spirit of God who activates that sovereign grace in a specific calling that you cannot resist and yet, is not apart from your will, you come in faith and embrace Christ.”

And you then become beloved in God the father and kept secure for eternity in Christ. You are the recipient of mercy and peace and love multiplied.

The Jeopardy Facing the Church (3-4)

In verses three and four we began to see the problem which this letter addresses. Jude has wanted to write a letter to his dear friends in this church for some time, but circumstances have come about which now demand a greater urgency than he intended. He’s had to alter his plan. He has changed his mind. Although he had initially wanted to write to them about their common salvation, he has found it necessary to write appealing to them to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

Salvation is a great biblical word. Wonderfully, every Christian is qualified to share in this salvation. Jude emphasizes here that the offer of salvation is wide-open, for it is a common salvation, and open to every person, even those who are denying it to others.

Contend – compulsion, constraint, wrestle, there is distress involved with this word. Jude’s will was literally conquered by an agonizing compulsion to wrestle for the faith.

This is not the kind of wrestling we watch on TV where the participants are merely actors upon a canvas stage. This is the real deal.

And this is not a popular teaching today. People are tired of fighting between churches. Why can’t we just all get along?

- We are encouraged to come alongside the Church of Rome and put aside our differences.
- We are encouraged to be tolerant of other faiths, including mainstream denominations.

But this is a very important thing. Are the historical fundamentals of the faith worth fighting for or are they cultural differences only? Is unity worth fighting for? Or is this unity just like TV wrestling?

Not faith, but **the** faith - the once for all, delivered to the saints, redemptive gospel of Jesus Christ.

Jude is telling us that we need to contend for those truths the Scripture teaches. Those foundational truths on which the gospel is built. And we get a glimpse of what Jude is talking about in verse 4. In fact, sixteen verses (4-19) of this letter explain the problems we contend against. But verse 4 gives us a great beginning.

Four Reasons to Contend for the Firm

And so Jude gives four reasons why we should be uncompromising in our defense of the Christian gospel.

First the faith is closed in its content. Faith in this context means the *things* we believe not the *fact* that that we believe them. It is objective rather than subjective. These are the Scriptural truths that save us. The defense here is against those who want either to supplement the gospel or to dilute it.

As we study the Bible we speak about “staying on the line”. The line is the truth of the Scriptures in which we entrust our lives. Those who go above the line, or add to the Scriptures, add requirements based on their own presuppositions or beliefs. Those that go below the line, or take away from the Scriptures, are very liberal with the teaching of Scripture and become licentious in their lifestyle.

The same debate continues today. We often see teachings in churches that remove what they feel are culturally embarrassing. This would be below the line. We also see churches today that add to the line by adding requirements for salvation and/or godliness that are not there. Paul dealt with this in Ephesians but especially in the book of Colossians in chapter two. We see this in churches today that add to the teaching of justification by faith alone in Christ alone. These churches teach Jesus and something else. They teach Jesus and church attendance or Jesus and your own merits, or good works.

Second, it is a faith that is closed in its authorship. Jude says that the faith was *delivered* to us. The ultimate responsibility for the gospel lies with God, which is why it is such a terrible thing to change it. And so we can see Jude’s concern. If God has given us the gospel, and if he is not going to give us another one, we must guard it as highly precious.

Thirdly, the faith is closed in its historical setting. The faith was entrusted, once for all. The phrase has the meaning of finality and definiteness. There is no room to think that God grants extra insights or additions through the years of Christian history.

Number four, the faith is open to anyone. Who are the saints? They are all those who are Christians; those who have been declared righteous by God. In the New Testament, saint is the definition of a Christian, and the writers would have found it strange that we tend to identify sainthood with a few special people. The term saint tells of God’s high calling and exhorts us to live up to that calling and it reminds us of our shortcomings.

Those Opposing the Gospel

And then in verse four Jude identifies opposition that we should expect. Jude doesn’t tell us to believe in the gospel, to spread the gospel, or to live the gospel, although all those imperatives would be appropriate. Instead he tells us to contend for the faith, a much harder task and a

very strong word. The evidence throughout the Bible is that being faithful to God's word means bringing hard, unpopular warnings as well as hopeful promises.

The word crept is an interesting Greek word. It is only used here in the entire New Testament. It is used a couple ways in the Greek:

- It speaks of a clever lawyer who, by his cunning, gets into the mind of a juror and affects their thoughts.
- It speaks of a criminal who was exiled and has secretly snuck back into the country.
- If you break the word down into its components it means to go down into and alongside.

They snuck in. They weren't overt but they were covert. And this is very relevant to the church today. But Jude tells us how to recognize them:

1. **They are ungodly people.** They are sexually perverse. They are antinomian. The word antinomian comes from two Greek words, anti, meaning "against"; and nomos, meaning "law." Antinomianism means "against the law." Theologically, antinomianism is the belief that there are no moral laws God expects Christians to obey. They are licentious. Licentious people "take license" with things they have no right to take license with – they lack restraint. They sin that grace may abound. And they advocate this for other people. We will see that as we go through this letter. They are teaching poor moral behavior that the Scriptures have never taught!
2. **They deny our only master and Lord Jesus Christ.** While the first may be more moral, these are more theological. This is an interesting phrase we will look at later in as we go through the letter. It is interesting that a form of this began many years ago in New England when some pastors began to question the validity of the trinity. They began to form their own churches known as Unitarian churches (as opposed to Trinitarian). And upon abandoning that Scriptural truth, the slippery slope became a slide. Today those Unitarian churches don't really believe anything.

In a very real sense these people are spiritual terrorists.

Although these people no doubt used Christian phrases and quoted the Scriptures and maybe knew all the new songs, they were not to be taken at face value. I imagine Jude's readers were shocked at such allegations. We must be careful ourselves as we listen to Christian radio, attend Christian conferences, and read Christian books. Jude was denouncing their friends and their heroes, and therefore perhaps some of our friends and our heroes, as anti-Christian pagans or those teaching heresy.

And it was a sensual opposition. One of the first questions the early church had to face was the issue of, shall we go on sinning, so that grace may abound?

To a skeptical Jew, it looked as if the Christian gospel turned God's generous gift of the law into an opportunity for sin.

To a skeptical Greek, the gospel could seem to offer total freedom today on the basis of total forgiveness tomorrow.

Jude uses the word sensuality to cover a full range of debauchery and sexual permissiveness, all of which were being offered in the name of the gospel of free grace!

There is one more characteristic I want to examine this morning.

Jump down to verse 17. Look at 17-19 with me.

Scoffers – they are cynics. They don't produce arguments, they just laugh at you for believing something.

- You don't really believe that do you?
- Come on...
- Really?
- You're the only person in this class that believes that.

They follow their own desires and then they classify people. They cause divisions.

This is hard hitting stuff! Jude, and all the NT apostles, have taken off the gloves.

Conclusion

So what are we supposed to do? Verse 20 – build yourself up in the faith. The most holy faith! That word, holy, is almost always reserved for one being, but here it is used to describe faith. The faith is strong and holy. Those who abandon the faith don't collapse the faith, they collapse themselves.

So what kind of Christian are you? Do you understand the holy faith that leads to eternal life? Do you wonder if you can ever contend for it?

Be hopeful today. There is a little 4-letter word used a couple times in this letter that will give you hope. It appears at the beginning in verse one and at the end in verse 24. It is a key word in this letter.

Verse one - A Christian is not one who always holds onto Christ, but Christ keeps a hold of him.

And then verse 24 near the end. To keep you from stumbling. To keep you from stumbling into what? To keep you from falling from the faith and into immorality. He is able to keep you.

Does that mean I can do anything I want and God will keep me? Look at verse 21. He will keep you. Keep yourself.

No true Christian can be naive about this. It is too important. I hope you will feel yourself lifted up to a new level in the battle that must be fought. If we don't rise to fight the battle the truth of the gospel will continue to be lost. And so we must contend so that the truth exposes the counterfeit.

