

“Contend for the Faith” Jude 3-4 Sermon

Jude sets forth in these two verses the reason why he wrote this letter. This very short letter was written and sent to the churches to address a specific problem. The problem is specified in verse 4. He says certain men or people have crept in unnoticed. That is to say there are people in the midst of the church, false teachers namely, who do not belong.

Somehow Jude found out about the presence of wicked people among them. He also knew that the church was unaware of them so he felt compelled to warn them about their presence. To put it using the images that Jesus used, there were wolves dressed in sheep's clothing in the flock that the flock was unaware of.

And the way that the church was going to identify them was look at their behavior and lifestyle. This aspect of the false teachers' lives is what Jude emphasizes throughout the course of the letter. There is really nothing explicit here about the doctrine of the false teachers. But what is clear is that they are rebellious at heart.

They reject authority and are therefore dangerous. They pose a threat to the Christian faith. Jude, as a servant of Christ, and leader in the church, after having learned of the false teachers' infiltration, was compelled to take action by writing a letter to his beloved congregation, to warn them and to urge them to contend for the faith; *“I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints”*(v.3)

Jude begins this portion by addressing the members of the church as beloved; *“Beloved...”* (v.3) He would use this endearing designation again in verses 17 and 20; *“But you must remember, beloved”*(v.17) and then in verse 20, *“But you, beloved...keep yourselves in the love of God”*

Jude as a faithful servant of Christ, did not set out to simply impose his authority on the congregation, by issuing commands to the flock. This was something he could have done. He could have been harsh. Jude could have approached this problem differently. He says here that he had intended to write about something else, something that concerned what he calls their common salvation.

But the news of the presence of these false teachers forced him to change his plans. Instead of putting time and energy into what he originally wanted to do, he set this aside for the moment to address this issue. This also would take time and energy. For Jude to set out and write this letter meant he must engage in spiritual conflict against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

It was not going to be easy. He could have let this frustrate him. Rather than shepherd the flock willingly he could have written this letter begrudgingly. He could have been curt, letting his annoyance at having to do this thing permeate the tone of the letter. Jude knew eventually he would have to give specific commands to them, which he begins to do in verse 20.

He could have given a sharp command and be done with it so he could return to what he really wanted to do. But as a servant of Christ he does not do this. He knows these false teachers were without love, they were devoid of the Spirit (v.19). This lack of love would have been felt by the congregation which may have caused them to feel unloved or even unlovable.

When we suffer we can often feel this way. There are in fact false teachers who teach this. That God's love for you is evidenced by how much He protects you from suffering. Sickness, poverty, and trials of various kinds are always and everywhere the consequences of something lacking in the faith of the

believer experiencing these things. This is how Job's friends interpreted his time of severe suffering. God was punishing him for his sins. Certainly we can bring upon ourselves immediate consequences because of our sins but this is not always the case when we suffer.

In fact, the Bible teaches that precisely *because* God loves us He brings us through the fires of trial, to refine our faith.

We are told that when Jesus found out about Lazarus' illness He waited two days before He left to go see him. Why did He do this? "*Now Jesus loved Marth and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was*" (Jn. 11:5)

It was because Jesus loved them that He allowed Lazarus to die and Mary and Martha to grieve for a time over his death. How is this love? Because Jesus knew that through raising Lazarus from the dead, after he had been dead for 4 days, the Son of God would be glorified before this Mary and Martha and Lazarus whom he deeply loved.

Jesus knew that through their temporary suffering the power of the Son of God would be manifested in much greater way and thus they would all the more be drawn to Him. Could Mary and Martha and Lazarus fully understand that Jesus was the resurrection and the life if they had not experienced the momentary suffering they went through?

Can we truly understand our Master Jesus Christ as the resurrection and the life if we are not brought through trials? This was what was happening in Christ's church during Jude's day. Because of God's love for them he was bringing them through this trial, to draw them to Christ, where true love is found. This is what he gets to eventually, "*keep yourselves in the love of God*" (v.20).

But he first reminds them they are loved by God. As God's mouthpiece at this time Jude addressed the church as God's "*beloved*". Jude next reveals the occasion of this letter; "*Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation I found it necessary to write (for another reason) to appeal to you to contend for the faith*"

If there was a time that you were eager to call someone you loved to say hello to them but put it off, and then some new event, like the death of a loved one, forced you to contact them immediately, you will probably say something like, "*I had wanted to contact you just to say hello but this happened so I need to talk to you about this*"

Close friends do both, call to check in and call to communicate hard things. Here we see the two sides of Jude's responsibilities as an ordained servant of Christ. He was called by God to build up the church in knowledge of Christ. Here he calls this work "writing about the common salvation". This was part of Jude's work as a minister of the gospel and ambassador for Christ.

He was to build upon something that they shared, or something that was "common" to all of them. And this common thing in which they shared was "salvation". They shared in the accomplishment of salvation done by Christ through His death and resurrection.

Just as Jude say in verse 5 that Jesus *saved* a people out of the land of Egypt, so too Jesus redeemed us and saved us by His resurrection from the dead. He has led us out of the realm of sin and slavery and He has caused us to share in this redemption by working faith in us by His Spirit. By faith we are united to Him so that fellowship with Christ and this salvation is something we share *in common*.

We come to know about Christ and this salvation through the doctrine of salvation that has been given to us through the apostles. The apostolic teaching of the gospel of God, written down in Scriptures is also

something we share in common. It is through the faithful teaching of apostolic doctrine that we grow in our knowledge of Christ, which is why we have been saved, to know Him and love Him. Jude mentions the teaching of the apostles in verse 17, *“But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ”*

In this letter Jude draws them to the apostolic foundation of teaching about Jesus Christ. This is what the New Testament church did at the beginning of her existence. In Acts 2, we are told that the new converts, after having been baptized, devoted themselves to the *apostles’ teaching*, i.e. the doctrine of salvation that the church had in common.

We also see there that as a result of their devotion to the teaching of this common salvation, the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being *saved*. So their salvation and the apostolic teaching coincide. Part of Jude’s work was to build upon this foundation.

This was his earnest desire, through writing a letter, to build the saints up in the faith. He says *“I was eager to write to you about our common salvation”* (v.3)

This eagerness was a character trademark for a true servant of Christ. But another part of Jude’s work as an undershepherd of the flock was to be a watchman. A watchman on a tower on a city’s walls would diligently watch for coming invasion from the enemy. If the watchman saw a threat he was to report that to the people in the kingdom.

He was to blow the trumpet and warn the people. Ezekiel as a prophet of God and servant of His Word, was given this role; *“so you, son of man, I have made a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me”* (Ezek. 33:7)

Jude as a minister of God’s Word eagerly wanted to build up the saints in the common salvation but he was forced to exercise his role as watchman and warn the saints about the sins of these false teachers and the threat they posed to their faith.

Jude calls them to engage in an intense struggle, like that of an athletic contest, for the faith. What did this look like? For Jude it meant that he had to put off, for the time being, what he had planned to do and give his attention to writing this particular letter.

The arrival of these false leaders awakened him to the necessity to warn the church and urge them to fight. So in a word, Jude focused on doing his job. What then did the church need to do? What was their job? Jude tells them that the arrival of these ungodly people should awaken them to contend for the faith. Later, Lord willing, we will see that this meant they were to pray in the Holy Spirit, build themselves up in the faith, be patient and show mercy.

But for now he just says they are to contend. Jude took action, and now the rest of the members of the church were to take action. He would elaborate later on *how* they were to contend but for now he focuses on *what* they were to contend for, and this is *“the faith”*, which is just another way of referring to their *“common salvation”*.

Jude uses the word “faith” here to refer to the body of teaching given to the church by God through the apostles and prophets. Listen to how the apostolic preaching and “the faith” are used together by Paul in Galatians.

Paul was giving a summary of his travels and he said, *“and I was still unknown in person to the churches in Judea that are in Christ. They were only hearing it said, ‘he who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy’”*

And so “the faith” is the gospel, the substance of which was taught in the OT, through types and shadows, but now fully revealed in Christ and set down in the writings of the NT. Jude says that this faith has been delivered to the saints.

The saints are the end time people of God made up of *Jews* and *Gentiles* who believe in Christ and devote themselves to the apostles’ teaching. In fact later Jude shows that the presence of the ungodly people in the flock was proof that the apostles’ teaching as true. This trial also proved that the church was living in the last days; “*But you must remember beloved the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. They said to you, ‘In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions’*” (v.17-18)

The gospel friends with all of its teachings and implications, is something that the church has been entrusted with. The church did not create it, it is not even something the church approves, we have *received* it, it is God’s gospel.

He has delivered it to the church through the apostles and prophets, and in His Word He tells us that He has spoken finally and definitively in His Son Jesus Christ; “*Long ago, at many times and in many ways God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by His Son*” (Heb. 1:1)

The Word of God contained in the Old and New Testaments are to be received not because men say so but because it is God’s Word. God has delivered His gospel from Heaven to His church on earth. It is the way of salvation therefore by God’s grace we are to guard it and contend for it against the attacks of Satan.

This once for all delivered faith is not to be supplemented in any way, nor is anything to be taken away from it. The church is to keep it pure in all ages. This doesn’t mean that certain people will not try to pervert it. They will. This is why Jude wrote this letter.

So Jude appeals to the church to contend for the faith, he sounds the trumpet, and then tells them why this warning has been given, “*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*”

Satan crept into the garden of Eden under the guise of a talking snake. He appeared as an angel of light, but was there to destroy. These certain people have infiltrated the kingdom. They are inside its walls already. They are disguised as sheep but inward they are ravenous wolves. Jude says they feasted with them in verse 12. Therefore these are people they knew.

Judas Iscariot feasted with Christ, ate of his bread and dipped in the dish with Him, then Satan entered Judas. Jude says their arrival was foretold long ago. God ordained that the betrayer Judas would hand his Son over to sinners. He ordained the infiltration of these ungodly people.

In fact Jude says their entrance into the fellowship of the church to try and defile it, was the first stage of their condemnation. “*for certain people crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation*” Satan’s intention to destroy Adam and Eve and thwart God’s plan was the first step toward his own destruction.

Jude would use this letter to unmask the perpetrators. Jude brings very serious charges against them and they are all focused on the morality of these people. He says they are ungodly people. That is, they do not walk in the ways of the Lord.

They interpret the grace of Christ revealed in the gospel as a license to live grossly immoral lives. Here sensuality most certainly includes at the very least some type of sexual immorality.

“Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies or drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling or jealousy” (Rom. 13:13)

Later Jude says these people defile the flesh and reject authority. People who confess Christ, who gain access to the church and commit all kinds of vile and wicked acts. Jude says their immoral behavior shows that though they confess Christ with their mouths they deny Him by their lives.

By their immoral lives they deny Christ as their Master and Lord. *“they deny our only Master and Lord Jesus Christ”* Their behavior shows that they served another Master. Jesus said no one can serve two masters. Beloved, the Christian faith once for all delivered does not simply consist in believing in Christ for the forgiveness of sins *only*. We do not have the privilege to say let us sin all the more so that grace may abound.

The faith consists in embracing Jesus Christ as our Savior *and* our only Master. This means our lives will be marked by grace filled repentance. There was no evidence of repentance in the lives of these people. And the threat they posed to Jude’s hearers was that their sensuality would influence the church, tempting them to do the same kinds of things.

Jesus said if anyone causes one of the little ones in the kingdom to sin it would be better if a millstone were tied around the neck of that person and he was thrown into the sea. These people cause damage but that damage is not insurmountable. In fact God uses what men intend for evil to bring about good.

Judas Iscariot’s wicked act resulted in the crucifixion of the Son of God which brought about the salvation of a countless number of saints, including us. So God tells us in the midst of our trials to continue to contend for the faith. How is this done?

By doing what we’ve been called to do, keep ourselves in the love of God, obey Christ. When Christ was being crucified He was contending for the faith. He struggled intensely against the terrors of Hell and the malice of Satan. Satan tempted Him to deny His Father when the Jews said, *“if you are the Son of God, bring yourself down”*. But Christ would not. We are tempted to give in at times beloved, but God through His Word appeals to us to contend for the faith by the grace our Master supplies us.