

## Short and Sweet: Contending for the Faith

Jude 1:1-25

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on January 6, 2019

### Introduction

- ❖ It's my joy to introduce a new mini-series that we're calling "*Short and Sweet: A Brief Study of the Shortest Books in the NT*". It's a four-part series going over Philemon, 2 and 3 John, and this morning – the book of Jude. We've been in the OT for a while now going through Exodus and recently Jonah. We wanted to take a short break and study these short books that we tend to overlook. They may be small, but each of them contain a message about a great gospel and a great God. So our hope is that these little books – that pack a big punch – will be used by God to make a big impact on our spiritual lives.
  
- ❖ So this morning we are in Jude. This is a book that really gets history buffs excited. **If you are a strong proponent in learning from history, then you're going to resonate with Jude.** At the Dachau concentration camp near Munich, Germany, there's a museum that preserves the memory of the horrors that took place there during WWII. There were around 32,000 documented deaths at the camp and probably thousands more undocumented.
  - There's a sign by the door on the way out when visitors leave that reads: ***Those who do not learn from history are condemned to repeat its mistakes.*** That's a sentiment Jude would agree with. There is a refrain here in the book about remembering. Remembering the faith that was handed down to them (v3). Remembering the events in OT history and in Jewish tradition (v5). Remembering the predictions of the apostles (v17). There are so many references to OT stories and other events in the past. Some of them fascinating. Some of them strange. For some of these events we're not sure if Jude saw them as history or as just a good illustration. **Regardless, remembering history and learning from history comes across in this little book.**
  
- ❖ The reason for all this remembering is clear from the beginning of Jude. He tells his readers the exact purpose of his writing. In v3, he says that "*although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation.*" **So Jude initial intent for reaching out to these Christians** (contexts suggests they were part of a particular church but it remains unidentified) **is because he wanted to talk about their common salvation in Christ.** Maybe he was planning on writing out a theological treatise to rival the book of Romans.
  - But he heard news that certain people have crept into the membership of this church and were threatening the body with unhealthy, false teaching. Keep reading with me in v3, "*I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.*" Contend for the faith. There are those in the church threatening the faith, compromising the faith, denying the faith.
    - And it's the responsibility of every believer to contend. It's not just for pastors and elders and Sunday School teachers. **Every member's job is to contend for the faith.** And that's going to require – not just learning good theology – but learning from history to avoid repeating the same falsehoods.
  
- ❖ To help us walk through this little book, I've divided this into three sections. 1) The focus in vv1-4 is on contending with false teachers. 2) The focus in vv5-16 is on identifying the false teachers. 3) The focus in vv17-25 is on how we respond to false teaching in the church.

## Contending With False Teachers

- ❖ Let's focus first on contending with false teachers. This will cover vv1-4. Vv1-2 is the introduction where we learn that this letter is written by Jude "*a servant of Jesus Christ brother of James.*" Commentators tells us that this James is none other than the James who wrote the book of James, who is Jesus's stepbrother. Mary and Joseph had other biological children. So Jude is also a stepbrother to Jesus.
  - **But notice how a brother of the Lord Jesus Christ still preferred to identify himself as a servant of Christ** (*doulos*; which means slave). He could throw his weight around. "Do you know who my brother is?" But instead he humbly saw himself as Jesus's servant and appealed to this church out of that identity.
  
- ❖ Now what is he asking for them to do? We already saw in v3. Contend for the faith. Now consider with me three observations. **First, notice that there is a faith to contend for.** *The* faith in v3 could be understood as shorthand for the Christian faith. Contend for Christianity. **But more specifically it's referring to the apostolic faith.** To the teaching of the apostles that's found in Holy Scripture and summarized in ancient creeds like the Apostles' Creed we recited earlier. Those doctrines pertaining to the nature of the Triune God, the person and work of Christ and the Spirit, the way of salvation, and reality of final judgment. If you deny these doctrines, you deny the faith.
  - Notice as well that this particular body of teaching was delivered "*once for all*". That phrase implies that no new revelation – no prophet, no teacher, no preacher – can change or modify the faith. It was entrusted to the saints in its final form once for all.
  
- ❖ So there's a faith to contend for. **Secondly, recognize that that faith is always under threat.** From the early days of its establishment, the Church has faced attacks, and the most harmful did not come from Caesar. It didn't come from outside persecution. It came from false teachers leading people astray through falsehoods. The Church is called to contend.
  - **That word for “contend” in the original sounds like our word agonizing.** It conveys the image of an athlete straining, struggling, exerting every effort to win. As one lexicon puts it, the word suggests, “effort expended . . . in a noble cause.”
  
- ❖ **Let's be clear, when the Word of God calls us to “contend for the faith”, this is a call to an agonizing struggle to win.** But for a noble cause. It's not to win an argument. It's not to prove a theological point. To contend for the faith is to expend every effort in a noble cause to win souls from the clutches of false teaching. We want to win people back from falsehood into the life-giving truth of God. We care about people, about souls. That's why we contend.
  
- ❖ **Thirdly, notice in v4 how the falsehoods Jude was dealing with are serious because they promote a license to sin and a denial of Jesus's lordship.** "*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.*"

- ❖ Now I'm sure there are some false teachers who – with wicked intention – have snuck into the church and overtly try to pervert God's grace and outright deny the lordship of Christ. But I think, throughout the history of the church, these kinds of false teachers are in the minority.
  - **The usual suspects didn't come to a church with the intent to tear it apart from the inside out.** They have been individuals appointed by churches to lead and teach, and their heart is to help. They see Christians burdened by their sin, carrying around a heavy conscience laden with guilt and shame. The law of God seems to demand too much. Or they see non-believers repulsed by the moral teachings of Scripture. The Bible seems cruel and unloving. They want nothing to do with the faith.
  
- ❖ That weighs heavy on these certain teachers. They want to help people, whether inside or outside the church. So they begin to reinterpret Scripture and modify their theology. They begin to loosen the Law's demands. **They begin to teach a new interpretation of certain passages that has the net effect of abrogating the moral imperatives in those passages.**
  - "I know the passage says you shall not do that – or this kind of behavior is an abomination to the Lord – but that was written to ancient people from a totally different time period, living in a totally different culture. So it doesn't apply to us today." That's how it's often argued.
  
- ❖ **Or some teachers will see people burdened by their sin and try to assuage their guilty consciences by a misapplication of the gospel of grace.** A man is living in unrepentant sin – at peace with a pattern of sin in his life – and he's told that God loves him and isn't angry with him no matter what he does. As long as he made some faith decision in the past, then he's okay with God. That's what it means to "*pervert the grace of our God into sensuality.*"
  - That kind of error is what Dietrich Bonhoeffer described as offering people "cheap grace". This is how he defined it, "***Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance. . . . Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.***"
    - If our preaching and teaching of the gospel of grace encourages or merely enables others to live comfortably with unrepentant sin in their lives – if it gives them a license to sin – then we're giving them cheap grace. We've perverted the grace of God into sensuality.
  
- ❖ These certain teachers were essentially tucking people in after they've crawled into bed with unrighteousness. Whispering in their ears, "Peace, peace, when there is no peace." (Jer. 6:14) **There is no peace with God until we are born again and forgiven through the gospel of grace.** If cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, then genuine gospel grace is the preaching of *forgiveness through repentance and faith* – which are two sides of the same coin.

- ❖ **Imagine we're at war with God, which is not hard since the Bible describes us – in our sinful state – as enemies of God.** Now in spite of this war being so bitter, so drawn out, and so one-sided (we really have no chance of defeating God), the good news is that he's offering peace. We can have peace with God. But how his peace is offered makes a world of difference. **God could offer us peace – at the right price.** You have to pay for peace. Some amount of money, service, or devotion. Accept the cost and there's peace.
  - **But what if God offered his enemies peace – out of sheer grace.** There's no price. No payment. But as a result of receiving his peace, you have to lay down your weapons and pledge full allegiance. There's no price – but there's still a cost. **In the first scenario, it's a cost of purchase. But in the second, it's a cost of surrender.**
  
- ❖ And that makes a world of difference. That difference is what lies at the heart of the gospel. **The good news of Christianity is that our salvation was purchased in full by another.** Jesus paid it all. With his own life. He died and then rose again, demonstrating that God accepted his payment in our place. That's why we say salvation is free. It's without cost. That is, without cost of purchase on our part.
  - But then having freely received salvation, we're commanded to cast down our crowns – our claims of self-rule – and humbly follow a new “Master and Lord”. This is the cost of surrender. **King Jesus demands full control over all my decisions, full authority over all my relationships, full mastery over all my money, full lordship over all my life.**
  
- ❖ **These false teachers in Jude's day were teaching people cheap grace – grace that didn't include a cost of surrender.** So their followers still had crowns on their heads, trying to negotiate peace terms with Jesus, like two opposing rulers. “I'll be your follower *if*. I'll obey your commands *so long as*.” They're still holding onto a degree of authority. There are limits to how much they'll give up, how far they'll follow. **They don't recognize Jesus's absolute lordship.** Like Jude says in v3, they “*deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.*”
  - But friends, King Jesus has no needs that we can meet and he could easily and justly crush us if he so wills – **so a free offer of peace is extremely good news. And we're in no place to make demands or to draw limits.** There is no negotiating with Jesus. There's only surrendering.

### Identifying the False Teachers

- ❖ Now let me turn your eyes back to Jude vv5-16, and in this section we're going to focus on identifying these false teachers. This is the most fascinating portion of the book but also the hardest to understand. **His point in vv5-16 is that having to contend with false teachers should surprise no one since their coming was predicted long ago, and their presence shouldn't ultimately worry anyone since their judgment was also predicted long ago.** We can be sure of a just and final judgment of the ungodly because of the way God has operated in OT history. Jude is reminding us to learn from history.

- ❖ Now in vv5-7, Jude gives **three examples of certain judgment for the ungodly**. Notice how they have in common the denial of lordship – in that the perpetrators left their proper spheres, assigned by God, according to the good design of his created order.
  - **Jude starts by bringing up the history of Israel in the book of Exodus.** You can see his clear understanding of Jesus’s divinity in the way he identifies Jesus with Yahweh, the Great I AM, who delivered Israel from the land of Egypt. But his point is that they were created to worship God, but in the wilderness years, they rejected him and turned to idols. They denied Yahweh’s lordship and were swiftly punished.
  
- ❖ **Then Jude alludes to Genesis 6 and Jewish tradition** (likely referring to an episode described in a non-canonical Jewish book called *I Enoch*). It's about angels who left their proper sphere (heaven) and came to earth to have sexual relations with the daughters of man. Now some of you who are familiar with the book of Genesis are wondering, "Where is that?" You don't remember reading that anywhere.
  - Genesis 6:1-2 reads, "<sup>1</sup>When man began to multiply on the face of the land and daughters were born to them, <sup>2</sup>the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive. And they took as their wives any they chose."
  
- ❖ Jewish tradition interprets those "*sons of God*" as angels. I know to modern ears this all sounds hard to believe, but exegetically it's plausible. Some of you might be thinking, "Didn't Jesus teach that angels are asexual? Matthew 22:30 does say they don't marry each other and have baby angels. But when they come to earth (which is taught in Scripture), they likely take on real human bodies. So the idea that some could have had sexual relations is plausible.
  - Now if you're wondering if that can still happen today, I think the point of the imprisonment with eternal chains is to suggest that God prevents such unions from occurring anymore. But the point is that even angels won't escape judgment.
  
- ❖ **Now the third story Jude alludes to, in v7, is the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19.** This reference is emphasizing the sin of the men of the city. Like the angels in Genesis 6, they left their proper position in God's created order and "*indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire.*" They tried to commit homosexual acts against the heavenly visitors.
  
- ❖ Now even though he’s comparing them to these characters in OT history, Jude is not necessarily accusing his opponents of desiring sex with angels or with those of the same sex. **His point is that anyone who disregards the Lord's authority and trespasses the good bounds of his created order – will be judged.**
  - And he certainly thinks that’s the case for his opponents. Look at v8, “*Yet in like manner these people also, relying on their dreams, defile the flesh, reject authority, and blaspheme the glorious ones.*”
    - Here Jude mentions three sins for the which his opponents deserve judgment. **First, like those in the stories of OT history, they’re guilty of sexual sins.** They “*defile the flesh*”, which is a term related to sexual immorality.

- ❖ **Second, like those in OT history, they're guilty of rejecting lordship.** They “*reject authority*.” They deny Jesus as Master and Lord. **And third, they are guilty of reviling angels.** They “*blaspheme the glorious ones*.”
  - In vv9-10, Jude makes reference to a story from a 1st-century Jewish writing called the *Assumption of Moses*. It's about a dispute over the body of Moses between the archangel Michael and the devil. Jude's point is to set Michael as a contrast to these false teachers. It appears that they were so proud as to insult demons. But their pride is set in stark contrast to Michael who, though being so noble an angel, refrained from insulting the devil and left all judgment up to the Lord.
  
- ❖ **Now in v11, Jude continues to describe their errors.** They walk “*in the way of Cain*”, referring to the example he set in sin and envy. Then he compares them to “*Balaam's error*”, which refers to the prophet from Numbers 22 who was driven by the love of money. And he compared them to “*Korah's rebellion*”, which was the priest in Number 16 who rebelled against the authority of Moses and Aaron.
  - **If you keep your eyes in vv12-13, you'll see the dangers that these false teachers pose to the church.** Jude calls them “*hidden reefs at your love feasts*”. These false teachers shared in their *agape* feasts – the meal the church would eat together as part of their celebration of the Lord's Supper. These certain teachers appeared, on the surface, to be full of love. But like hidden reefs, right below the surface are their errors, which could lead people to shipwreck their faith.
  
- ❖ Jude goes on to list five more metaphors to describe the danger they pose. They're **bad shepherds** only interested in feeding themselves. They're **waterless clouds** that promise much but deliver nothing. They're **fruitless trees** in late autumn – meaning its so late in season and still no fruit. By their fruit (or lack thereof) you shall know them. They're **wild waves** washing up nothing valuable but the grimy sea foam of their shame. And they're **wandering stars**. Ancients didn't know the difference between stars and planets. So wandering stars likely refer to planets that “wander” in the night sky, which made them unreliable guides if you're trying to navigate by them.
  
- ❖ **Now the point of vv14-16 is to reinforce the main idea of this section that judgment is coming, especially for these false teachers.** Why? Because it was prophesied in the past. Now where Jude turns to for a source is interesting. He cites another non-canonical source. It's *1 Enoch* again. This quote is essentially a prophesy about the Lord coming with ten thousands of his holy ones to execute judgment on the ungodly – whom Jude identifies with these certain teachers threatening the faith.
  - Now I know it raises questions about the implications of Jude citing *1 Enoch*. **Did he think *1 Enoch* was the inspired Word of God?** I think it's plausible that Jude was citing one part of *1 Enoch* that he believed to be true. But that doesn't necessitate the entire book being divinely inspired. Paul quoted from Greek philosophers in Acts 17:28 and Titus 1:12, but that doesn't mean their books were inspired.

- ❖ **Just because Jude appropriated certain truths from Jewish tradition doesn't imply agreement with everything in that tradition.** Whether he believed these stories or citations to be true or he saw them as fitting illustrations from a pool of literature common to his audience – Jude's point was to warn his readers that you need to take these false teachers seriously. Because judgment is coming.
  - On one hand that should sober you if you've been tolerating these false teachers and imbibing their falsehoods. But on the other hand, it should bring comfort if you've been resisting these false teachers and contending for the faith. Keep going. And trust that the Lord is coming to execute judgment. Until then, contend for the faith.

### Responding to False Teaching

- ❖ Now let's conclude by looking at our last section. In vv17-25, the focus is on responding to false teaching in the church. Here Jude shifts attention away from the false teachers and onto his readers. And not surprisingly, he tells them to remember something. He's already told them to remember their history and traditions. Now he says to remember more recent teachings – to remember the apostles and their prediction about false teachers, who will come in the church like wolves attacking the flock (cf. Acts 20:29-30). The point is to be on guard.
- ❖ **Now in vv20-23, Jude explains how his readers can minister first to themselves and then to those affected by the false teachers.** His first word is to believers, and it's a command to *"keep yourselves in the love of God."* That's the primary command – **remain in God's love.** If you're going to be contending for the faith – if you're going to engage and confront false teachers – then you're at risk. You could fall for their falsehoods. You could grow cold hearted or condescending towards them. You could be mean and nasty in your contending. So to avoid these dangers, we need to keep ourselves in the love of God.
- ❖ Now that command is surrounded by three other verbs describing how we do that. **First, we keep ourselves in God's love by building ourselves up in our most holy faith.** That means every believer needs to grow in his or her understanding of the gospel, of the apostolic faith. If there are any concepts in that Apostles' Creed that you couldn't defend with scriptural support, then you should make it a goal this new year to build yourself up in the faith. Go check out our bookstall in the fellowship hall after service or look under the "Recommended Books" tab on our website. The goal is not to fill your mind with theological ammunition for a debate but to fill your heart with abounding love for God – to know that such a Holy God could love and save such unholy sinners like us.
  - **Second, we keep ourselves in God's love by praying in the Holy Spirit.** Love for God that rests in God's love for us is a fire that cannot be maintained apart from a daily communion with God through prayer. Praying in the Spirit is like throwing another log on the fire. If you go too long in seasons of prayerlessness, that love for God can easily extinguish.
    - **Third, we keep ourselves in God's love by waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus that leads to eternal life.** If you take your eyes off of your future hope in Christ, then it's easy for your love of God to wane in the present.

- ❖ So Christian, if you're going to contend for the faith, you first have to minister to yourself, and then, in vv22-23, you can minister to those affected by false teaching. There are three groups of people that Jude has in mind.
  - **First, have mercy on those who doubt.** This is v22. These are people in the church who aren't heretics – who aren't even under the sway of false teachers. But they're struggling spiritually – doubting what they grew up believing, wondering if God and his Word is truly good, tempted by the allure of sin and doubting whether holiness is worth it. People like that are targets for false teachers. If you have friends like that, don't judge them. Don't be harsh with them. Have mercy and minister to their souls.
  
- ❖ **Second, Jude says save those who are falling under the influence of false teaching by snatching them out of the fire.** We're talking about those who are starting to stray from the faith, entertaining false teaching, podcasting the messages of false teachers. This is for your friends who are rethinking the Bible's clear teaching on controversial issues like the ones dealing with sexual ethics and gender identity. These are passages that have deep roots in the history of faithful biblical interpretation – only to be reinterpreted and modified by false teachers in the last fifty years.
  - With the doubters in the first group, be gentle in your mercy. **But if someone is falling into a burning pit of fire, a gentle tug on their elbow won't do.** Sometimes love necessities you grabbing someone by the shoulders and snatching them back to safety. So that means a stronger word of warning may be necessary in this case.
  
- ❖ **Third, Jude has in mind those are already under the influence of false teachers.** If they're still in your church, then you're to show mercy as you seek to confront and call them to repentance – but do so with fear. Be careful that you don't get burned yourself and influenced for evil by the ones you're trying to restore.
  - That's why have to go back to our first responsibility – to keep ourselves in the love of God. But Jude doesn't leave us with a command. I love how he ends with a promise. It's found in this doxology in vv24-25, *“<sup>24</sup>Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, <sup>25</sup>to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.”*
  
- ❖ **The command is to keep yourself in God's love. But the promise is that God will keep you.** As you contend for the faith, as you try to snatch people out of the fire, remember that God will preserve and protect his sheep. No one can take them from his hands (Jn. 10:29). God will ultimately keep his people from stumbling and abandoning the faith.
  - If you're one of his, the Son of God will present you blameless, without spot or wrinkle, holy and without blemish – like a Bride in her splendor – on that last day (Eph. 5:27). I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. (Phil. 1:6)