

Jude - Contend for the faith  
Tim Anderson 21/11/21

We're having a look at another little letter today.

The letter from Jude.

Unlike John, Paul, Peter and James,  
we don't know lots about the life of Jude.

He introduces himself as

'a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James'.

Most people take that to mean that he's a brother of James  
who was a half brother of Jesus,  
the leader of the early church in Jerusalem  
and the author of the epistle called James.

It makes sense.

In that time

you would normally introduce yourself by whose son you were.

You would only mention your brother  
if he were someone particularly famous.

And hence, James the half brother of Jesus  
and the leader of the Jerusalem church fits the bill.

And in the gospels where Jesus' half brothers are mentioned by name,  
one of the names is Judah which Greek speakers would call Jude.

But of course that begs the question,

If you want to take note of your famous brother,  
why not introduce yourself as a half brother of Jesus?

Because if James was a half brother of Jesus, Jude was too.

But neither James nor Jude introduce themselves  
as half brothers of Jesus.

It would seem to be claiming a bit too much.

They know their half brother is the eternal Son of God.

They know that they are merely humans the same as you and me.

So we have a letter from Jude,

the half brother of Jesus,

though too modest to claim that much.

Who's he writing to?

1:1 "To those who have been called,  
who are loved in God the Father  
and kept for Jesus Christ."

Sometimes people ask me,

"When did you know you were called?"

They mean called to ministry in the church.

Let's be clear,

the Bible never speaks of Christians being called to ministry.

The language of calling is restricted to our calling to be Christians.

This letter is written to Christians.

Christians are those who have been called.

They are those who are loved in God the Father

and those who are kept for Jesus Christ.

So this is a letter to you,

if you are a Christian.

Jude is writing his fellow Christians a letter.

But it's not the letter he wanted to write them.

1:3 "Dear friends, although I was very 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."

He wanted to write them a letter about the wonders of the cross,

about the forgiveness of sins,

about the glories of heaven.

That's what he would have liked to have done.

That would have been an encouraging letter to write and to receive.

But unfortunately urgent circumstances have meant

that he can't write that letter.

He has to deal with a pressing threat to the church.

So that tells you what the key theme of this letter is.

This is a letter urging Jude's readers to contend for the faith.

"The faith" is the body of Christian teaching.

It's what we believe.  
 And it was under attack in the church.  
 So Jude is telling Christians to contend for it.  
 This letter is written to all who have been called to be Christians.  
 It's not just written to Christian leaders.  
 Now this is a key point.  
 Christians are to contend for the faith.  
 Some would expect to hear  
 that ministers or bishops are to contend for the faith.  
 In my ordination service, I was asked this question,  
 "Will you be ready, both in your public and private ministry  
 to oppose and set aside teaching that is contrary to God's word?"  
 And I said, "I will by God's grace."  
 And I ought to do that.  
 But so should you.  
 If you are a Christian,  
 then Jude is calling you to contend for the faith.  
 If you haven't been contending for the faith,  
 then you should repent of that sin  
 next time you confess your sins.

So what's been going on,  
 that Jude feels he needs to write to this church to contend for the faith?  
 1:4 "For certain individuals  
 whose condemnation was written about long ago  
 have secretly slipped in among you."  
 The church has been infiltrated.  
 When it says their condemnation was written about long ago,  
 it's not saying there was direct predictive prophecy.  
 It's more like,  
 things that happened long ago and were written about in the Scriptures  
 gave a pattern that is the same pattern that is going on here.  
 Jude goes through and lists the kinds of writings that he is alluding to.  
 God rescued his people from Egypt.  
 But some of them didn't trust his promise

to take them into the Promised Land.  
Caleb and Joshua contended for faith in God's promise.  
But many failed to trust and died in the wilderness.  
The people who lived in Sodom and Gomorrah were sexually immoral.  
And God brought destruction on them.  
Jude says  
that God has written about the condemnation of these individuals  
who have slipped into the church when he wrote about those situations.  
Even angels who did the wrong thing  
have been given over to destruction.  
The Bible doesn't need to make a direct prediction  
for it to be writing about our situation.  
And guess what?  
It's because those parallels between their situation and our situation  
keep recurring,  
that we can see the Bible speaking directly into our own lives.

So certain individuals have slipped into the church Jude is writing to.  
Their condemnation was written about long ago  
because they are no different from the Israelites  
who failed to trust God's promises,  
no different from the angels who rebelled against God's commands,  
no different from the people of Sodom and Gomorrah  
who sank into immorality.  
But what are these individuals actually doing?  
1:4 "They pervert the grace of our God into a licence for immorality  
and deny Jesus Christ our only Saviour and Lord."  
You might argue with me,  
but I think grace is possibly the most beautiful word in the Bible.  
It has some strong competition.  
Love is beautiful word too.  
Peace, Joy, they are all beautiful.  
But grace is a particular favourite.  
Grace means God giving us blessings we don't deserve.  
Grace means that while we were still his enemies

God sent his Son to die for us.  
Grace means that we don't need to earn God's approval.  
That God regards us as a precious treasure.  
That we are worth saving  
even when there's nothing about our behaviour or our attitudes  
that would make you think that.  
And importantly God's grace to me  
means that I need to be gracious to you.  
If God has been incredibly gracious and patient towards me,  
I would be an awful hypocrite if I didn't extend grace towards you.  
Grace is beautiful.  
But doesn't that make perverting grace particularly ugly?  
But that's the awful thing about sin.  
It doesn't waste time spoiling stuff that's average.  
It seeks out the most beautiful things and spoils them.

How can you pervert grace and turn it into immorality?  
Easy. It's still happening today.  
You just take your favourite piece of immorality.  
It doesn't actually tell us in Jude what kind of immorality  
that Jude is contending against.  
And that makes it all the more applicable across the centuries.  
In different eras, you will have different immoralities.  
But let's say for the sake of argument  
I want to have an affair with my secretary.  
That would be difficult because I don't have a secretary.  
And I don't know why secretaries always get picked on.  
Sorry to all those who have worked as secretaries.  
But we are pretending I want to have an affair with my secretary.  
That's immorality.  
God says that affairs are wrong.  
They are sinful.  
But you see if I want to justify my sinful immorality,  
what do I say?  
God is gracious.

He knows how much I'm suffering terribly in my marriage.  
Because of his grace, he wants me to be happy.  
He's being gracious to me by giving me a second chance at happiness.  
You see how easy it is.  
You can pervert the grace of God  
and turn it into a licence for immorality.  
It was probably slightly different to that in Jude's church.  
I don't think they had secretaries either.  
But the basics are the same.  
You talk about God's grace and kindness  
and use it as a justification to excuse sin  
or to actually say that sin is not sin, it's actually something good.  
That was what was going on in Jude.  
And it still happens today.  
Nothing new under the sun.

OK so we need to contend for the faith  
because there are false teachers who pervert God's grace  
who have slipped into the church.  
But how do you go about contending for the faith?  
The first thing to notice is verse 14.  
1:14 Enoch the seventh from Adam prophesied about them:  
"See the Lord is coming  
with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones  
to judge everyone,  
and to convict all of them of all  
of the ungodly acts they have committed  
in their ungodliness,  
and of all the defiant words ungodly sinners have spoken against him."  
We'll think about what Enoch said in a minute,  
but you may well have the question,  
"How does Jude know that Enoch said that?"  
I don't remember reading it in Genesis.  
It turns out it's not in Genesis.  
It's in the book of Enoch which isn't in the Bible.

Is Jude allowed to quote from books that aren't in the Bible?

I guess he is because he just did.

And we don't get to tell the Bible writers what they are allowed to quote.

So whatever else it says in the book of Enoch is not inspired by God.

But this little bit is because Jude quoted it.

And what does it tell us?

That we can trust in the power of God to judge.

God is going to sort things out.

Evil is going to be punished.

You see when we come across situations

that require us to contend for the faith,

sometimes we descend into a state of almost perpetual outrage.

But that forgets that God is actually going to judge.

We can contend for the faith calmly.

We don't need to get wound up like a spring loaded toy.

God's going to sort things out

and so we contend for the faith with quiet confidence.

How do we go about contending for the faith?

The second thing to notice is in verses 20-21.

1:20-21 "But you dear friends,

by building yourselves up in your most holy faith

and praying in the Holy Spirit,

keep yourselves in God's love

as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ

to bring you to eternal life."

That is, keep your eyes fixed on the main game.

It's possible when you are contending for the faith

to get so wrapped up in the issue that is in dispute,

that you forget about the basics.

Build yourself up in the faith:

read the Bible, go to church, join a home group.

Pray in the Holy Spirit.

That's not a special type of prayer.

All prayer is in the Holy Spirit,  
 if it's true prayer to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.  
 Jude calls it praying in the Holy Spirit  
 because he wants to describe the building up of your faith  
 in a complete Trinitarian package.  
 Pray in the Holy Spirit,  
 Keep yourself in the Father's love,  
 wait for the mercy of Jesus Christ.  
 It's not a special type of prayer but it is prayer.  
 So pray.  
 It can be easy to lose perspective.  
 You get so obsessed with what is wrong,  
 that you forget the basics of building yourself up in the faith.  
 But it is the basics that will give you the resources to cope  
 when the storms of life buffet you and the church.

How do we go about contending for the faith?  
 The third thing to notice is in verses 22-23.  
 "Be merciful to those who doubt;  
 save others by snatching them from the fire;  
 to others show mercy mixed with fear -  
 hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh."  
 It would be easy to get the impression from the phrase,  
 'contending for the faith' that it is a robust, pugnacious activity.  
 Well it is robust.  
 It takes a lot of courage to stand up and be counted.  
 But it's not pugnacious.  
 You don't need to be contentious to contend for the faith.  
 It's about winning people not winning arguments.  
 We need to be merciful to those who doubt.  
 When the false teachers who pervert the grace of God slip in,  
 there are going to be people who are swayed by them.  
 There are going to be people who can't make up their minds.  
 We can't go around treating people as enemies as soon as they waver.  
 You can't bully people into accepting the truth.

You might be right,  
but if people feel talked down to  
or like their doubts and queries are not respected,  
then you aren't going to convince them.  
Being merciful to those who doubt  
means considering that God loves them  
and he would have you take the time to be patient with them.  
There's another group  
that Jude would have us show mercy mixed with fear.  
These are ones who have been more influenced by the false teaching.  
They aren't just doubters.  
They are doubters  
who have gone some way to embrace the false teaching.  
Their clothes are stained.  
Even when people have made some wrong choices,  
we still want to be merciful.  
But at this point it's a cautious mercy.  
You realise just how much harm can be done  
by what these people have toyed with.  
This is not turn your brain off mercy.  
We have to take great care that while we are being merciful,  
the corruption doesn't spread to others.

How should we contend for the faith?  
Trusting in God to be the judge.  
Don't focus on the problems,  
focus on building up your own faith.  
Contend with mercy, winning the person not the argument.  
And finally contend confident in God's power to save.  
1:24-25 "To him who is able to keep you from stumbling  
and to present you before his glorious presence  
without fault and with great joy,  
to the only God our Saviour be glory, majesty, power and authority  
through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
before all ages, now and forevermore."

Anyone who attended a church service in the 70s has sung the song.  
"Now unto him, who is able to keep, able to keep you ..."

In some churches it was so popular  
it was sung at the end of every service.

But I wonder how many of those singing realised  
that this lovely blessing at the end of the letter has a context.  
Jude is telling them that God is able to keep them from falling  
because of the threat of the immoral individuals  
who have slipped in amongst them.

You might think that you are in danger of stumbling.  
There are dangers inside the church and outside the church.  
The devil wants nothing more than for Christians to stumble.

I've just written you a letter  
to tell you about the threat posed by these characters.  
These 'shepherds who feed only themselves' in verse 12.

But you know what?  
We can trust in the power of God to keep you from stumbling.  
We can trust in the power of God  
to present you in his presence without fault.  
None of the warning about the shenanigans of the false teachers  
should in any way be taken  
to undermine your trust in the power of God to save.

And you think about that 2000 years later,  
isn't it just the truth?

The church has always had problems.  
In every era, there have been dreadful problems in the church.  
There's always some false teaching or other,  
some gross immorality or self interested greed.  
There's never been a time when these things haven't been present.  
Sometimes present in a depressingly overwhelming abundance.  
And yet, God still saves.

He still plucks his holy people  
from amongst the burning ruins of the church  
and brings them before his glorious presence

without fault and with great joy.  
No doubt some of his joy comes  
from having his dearly loved child in his presence.  
But some of it probably comes  
from how dire the situation was that he saved them from.  
You could imagine the doctor looking fondly at the patient  
living their best life  
when they had been fighting for their life in intensive care  
some time earlier.  
That would give a doctor joy in their heart to see a job well done.  
How much more the joy in God's heart,  
when the fruits of his mercy are presented before him.  
Truly indeed may glory, majesty power and authority be his!

Do you want to join me in singing the song?  
Now unto Him  
Who is able to keep  
Able to keep you from falling  
And present you faultless into the presence of His glory  
With exceeding joy  
To the only wise God our Saviour  
Be glory and majesty  
Dominion and power both now and forever.  
Amen