

# Contend for the Faith

INTRO: This morning we begin a new series. Before I introduce the series, I want to explain to you how I arrived and doing this series. As I was considering what to do after the series called “I Have A Dream.”

My first thought was to do a series on grace - what it is, what it is not, examples from Scripture and from life. But then it dawned on me grace would be an excellent topic to begin our Life Group ministries with. With that in mind, I chose to pursue a different series, and push a series on grace until later in the fall.

So then next idea that dawned on me (Which is to say I think God led me to) was to cover the book of Jude. It is a short book, which would fit the timetable. It is a book that is chocked full of good advice. And it is a book that is so practical and so applicable to life today. So for those reasons, I chose to for us to study the book of Jude.

TRAN: Our study in Jude will take us six weeks to get through. At the beginning of any study of a book, we need to understand the background of the book, and the time in which it was written.

## I. Background to Jude

### A. The Author

1. “Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James.”
2. The name Jude is actually an English rendering
  - a) The name is actually Judas
  - b) It was probably shortened by translators due to Judas Iscariot’s betrayal of Jesus
    - (1) Let’s face it, even today you do not find many kids named Judas
    - (2) The name fell into disrepute
3. The next question is, which Judas are we talking about
  - a) Jude took care of that for us by saying he was the brother of James
  - b) But which James?
    - (1) With the death of the apostle James in Acts 12, there really is only one James that would be so famous in the Christian world that just the use of his name would suffice in conversation
    - (2) That would be James, the leader of the church in Jerusalem - later known as James the Just
  - c) If our identification of James is correct, then Jude is one of the brothers of Jesus
    - (1) “Isn’t this the carpenter’s son? Isn’t his mother’s name Mary, and aren’t his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas?”<sup>1</sup> Matt. 13:55

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<sup>1</sup> *The New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011) Mt 13:55.

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4. Some argue against it begin that Judas because the language used in the passage is heavily Greek, and more intellectual
  - a) The problem with that argument is the Galilean world was heavily influenced by Greek culture
  - b) And we have no idea how learned Judas was - so there is no reason to discount him as the author on these grounds

## B. The Date of the letter

1. The date of the letter is complicated by two things
  - a) First, the letter is so short as to make it difficult to draw out a possible date from the topics covered
  - b) Second, 2 Peter and Jude are very similar
    - (1) Scholars debate if Peter borrowed from Jude
    - (2) Or did Jude borrow from Peter
    - (3) Or did they write completely independently
  - c) If Peter borrow from Jude, Peter died around 65 AD which would date the letter between 60-65 AD
  - d) If Jude borrowed from Peter, the letter could have been written between 65-80 AD
2. Which is correct will be debated by scholars until we meet Jesus
3. Does it really matter which is correct?
  - a) This is one time that, no, it does not really matter
  - b) The issues each author addressed were similar in nature, but the exact date does not have a strong bearing on understanding the content

## C. The recipients

1. The book is not specific enough to know for sure
2. He could be writing to Jewish Christians or Gentile Christians, or both

## D. The purpose of the book

1. Because this is the strong theme of a short book, I will not go over the purpose in detail here - that is what the sermons series will be for
2. In short, the purpose is to help the readers contend for the faith against the false teaching that had slipped into the church

## II. The opening of the letter - Jude 1-2

### A. We have already identified the author - Jude, most likely the half brother of Jesus

1. Why did he not identify himself as a relative of Jesus?
  - a) He probably did not want to exploit that relationship
  - b) Also, because he did not believe his half brother before the resurrection he may have felt as if he was just like many others that believed after the miracles of God
2. He calls himself a servant of Jesus Christ

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- a) Which puts him in good company - Moses and David were both called servants of God
  - b) The word he used is actually a little stronger than just servant
    - (1) In Greek the word servant is “diakonos” - it is the same word we get our word deacon from - deacons are servants
    - (2) The word Jude uses is “doulos” which means slave - the obvious emphasis is on submission to the Master
    - (3) It may also be that Jude introduced himself this way to emphasize that what He was about to say was coming from the Master
  - c) The other thing about this phrase is that usually it is “servant of God”
    - (1) Jude is communicating something very significant
      - (a) That Jude has a relationship to Jesus much like David or Moses had to the Lord
      - (b) The other thing that it implies is that Jesus is God
        - i) While by no means a definitive proof text for Jesus being God
        - ii) It certainly is a great reminder of Jesus exalted nature
        - iii) Too often we take Jesus exalted nature for granted
3. Then Jude identifies himself as the brother of James - which we have already talked about that
- B. Jude now addresses his readers
1. The key word in this description is “called”
    - a) This word reflects the conviction that the NT describes the relationship between God and us as one of us being called by Him
      - (1) He reached out to us
      - (2) He was gracious to us who were helpless sinners
    - b) This word is not the same as saying we are “invited”
      - (1) To invite makes it sound as if we are asked if we would like to go to a party
      - (2) It makes it sound like we have the right to accept or decline
    - c) To be called carries the idea of choosing, or selecting
      - (1) And when God chooses, it is effective
  2. Then Jude describes them with two other designations
    - a) “Loved in God the Father”
      - (1) That is a completely appropriate translation
      - (2) It emphasizes the place in which the love takes place - in relationship with God
      - (3) However, it does not indicate who is doing the loving
      - (4) A better translation, and the most widely used, would be “loved by God the Father”

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- (a) This tells us that God is doing the loving
- b) “kept for Jesus Christ”
  - (1) This is also a difficult phrase to translate but is most likely correct on theological grounds
  - (2) In other parts of Scripture we are kept by God (the implication of the text) for His Son Jesus Christ
    - (a) Like a bride being kept for the bridegroom
  - (3) This really is a significant issue
    - (a) Often we think about God’s role in salvation, and we look forward to the day we go to heaven and meet Him
    - (b) We can too often forget about God preserving us here
      - i) He is at work in us to change us and conform us to the image of His Son
      - ii) Peter tells the believers he is writing to that are under persecution “that by faith they are shielded by God’s power...”
  - (4) There are many things that we can get anxious over in life
    - (a) But God faithfulness in maintaining our faith is not one of those things

C. Jude in these opening verses groups things into three

1. Christians are called, loved, and kept
2. Now he desires mercy peace and love for them in abundance
  - a) Mercy is usually not found in these greetings in NT letters
  - b) Usually it is grace, peace and love
  - c) However, mercy and grace are such similar ideas that the affect is basically the same

III. The purpose statement of the book is found in verse 3-4

A. Jude skips over any thanksgiving section (a common section in NT letters) and gets right to why he is writing

B. Before we jump into the purpose, let me say a word about the style of the book - it is rhetorical

1. By that I mean that the style is designed as a persuasive speech
2. I hate to say this, but much like a political narrative
3. This is important to keep in mind because Jude is about to use a lot of strong words meant to evoke an emotional response
4. That is completely on purpose, and in keeping with the situation: the danger of false teaching and lifestyle of these men
5. In fact, Jude does not hold back his opinion of these false teachers
  - a) He runs them over the coals pretty hard - even condemning their teachings

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- b) If there is one thing that frustrates me about modern Christianity is that we have almost “niced” ourselves to death
  - (1) We act as if we say any negative thing we are not being loving like Jesus
  - (2) Please keep in mind that what Jude is doing is no different than what Jesus did with the Pharisees - false teaching and false living is just that, false - and needs confrontation
- C. Jude says that he wanted to write about their common faith
  - 1. The picture is one of Jude sitting down to write about one topic, the faith they share, but then feeling strongly that he needed to address other topics - namely this false teaching he mentions in verse four
  - 2. In case anyone thinks that Jude is being negative here, the end of verse three covers that - he is urging them to contend for the faith
  - 3. Normally, the word for faith in v. 3 is used for the act of believing
    - a) However, in various places in the NT it came to be used for the body of content that we believe
    - b) That is the meaning here as well
    - c) So they are contending not for an act of believing, but for the whole of what they stand for as Christians
    - d) This body of content is not open for debate or interpretation
      - (1) Jude says it “was once for all entrusted to God’s holy people.”
      - (2) But this faith is coming under attack and the readers need to contend for it
        - (a) The word contend is a strong word
        - (b) It carries the idea of the strains of an athlete - similar to the word Paul used in 1 Cor. 9 about everyone goes into strict training
        - (c) Paul used the same term to describe his co-worker’s energetic defense of the gospel
      - (3) So Jude is not just urging resistance, but active fighting against these false ideas
- D. Jude then addresses why they need to contend so hard - certain men
  - 1. The designation “certain men” has an ominous ring to it
    - a) Jude never names these people
    - b) He does not even number how many there are
  - 2. What he does say is that these men have slipped in among them
    - a) The implication is that they are crafty
    - b) And that those he is writing to may not have noticed them because they hide their true nature and purpose
- E. The false teachers - Jude describes four things about them

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1. "Their condemnation was written about long ago"
  - a) The writings that Jude is referring to are most likely those with which he will prove his case in the rest of the letter
  - b) Trying to establish exactly what Jude had in mind apart from the letter is foolishness
2. "They are ungodly people"
  - a) The word for ungodly or godless carries the idea of one that is "without religion" or "fails to worship"
  - b) The term is broad and covers all kinds of sins
  - c) But Hellenistic Jews used it especially in an ethical sense - these folks had no sense of ethics
3. "They pervert the grace of God into a license for immorality"
  - a) The word for immorality focuses on sins of the flesh: sexuality, drunkenness, gluttony, etc.
  - b) They are taking God's free forgiveness and using it as an excuse to sin
4. "They deny Jesus Christ, our only Sovereign and Lord"
  - a) How exactly they were denying Him is not clear
  - b) Because the phrase is pointing to Jesus' authority to demand obedience, it may be a practical denial of Christ, meaning in how they live out their faith, not in an understanding of who He is

## IV. Applications

A. Aside from preaching schedule, part of the reason I chose this book is because it sounds as if it could be ripped from the headlines today

1. You have people and their ideas that have infiltrated the church
2. These ideas in Jude seem not to be centered around theological truths as much as they are about how life is lived out in light of those truths

B. So I want to apply this passage in two particular ways

C. First, the revival of creeds

1. Creeds in many ways have fallen into disuse, or disfavor in the church
  - a) In part because the very word, "Creed" seems stuffy, and something left over from a by-gone era
  - b) Many churches nowadays were not raised with the tradition of a creed
2. The problem with creeds is that they can be narrow and divisive
  - a) Some people created creeds with specific doctrines in mind at the expense of others
  - b) The other difficult task is to boil down the faith to the essentials and not petty arguments
3. With that said, there does seem to be a set of beliefs, based on the teaching and work of Jesus Christ that is nonnegotiable
  - a) When you cease to believe these, you cease to be a Christian

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- b) Some people find that statement harsh, but there is only one category of Christian, and God defined it in His word
  - (1) Our trick is to keep ourselves out of adding to, or subtracting from God's definition
- D. The problem the false teachers had is they attempted to separate truth and practice
  - 1. If you have been here long enough to remember the series in Hebrews, you will remember that we talked about truth affects practice
  - 2. What Jude tells us is that the false teachers perverted the grace of God into a license to sin
    - a) That is truth, run amuck, which leads to bad practice
  - 3. One of the verses that runs through Proverbs and helps to make sense of the book as a whole is this, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but the end leads to death."
    - a) That would be our false teachers here
    - b) The way seems right to them
      - (1) To redefine God's grace seems right to them
      - (2) But the fact is that the end leads to death
        - (a) Watch that phrase closely
        - (b) The end is death - just because someone is on the path does not mean they could not be won over and head back to life
  - 4. This issue of the false teachers perverting the grace of God into license to sin is as current an issue today as back then
    - a) We see people taking sin lightly in their lives
      - (1) I have mentioned from the pulpit before things as seemingly small as swearing
        - (a) That is one too many Christians think that God does not care about
        - (b) But it is about your holiness - therefore God cares
        - (c) Is that to say that one swear word condemns you to hell?
          - i) Certainly not
          - ii) But maybe we should not be making excuses for our use of language
      - (2) It would be easy for me to take sin lightly when it comes to lust
        - (a) I'm old - I'm still single
        - (b) I'm owed this one little pleasure
        - (c) Besides, its not like I'm sleeping with anyone
      - (3) Pick your sin, and I promise you that there have been brilliant justifications for why its okay that we let that slide in life

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- b) There are some in churches today that are using the fact that God is love, and that God is gracious to declare sin okay
  - (1) Suffice it to say that God has not changed His mind on what He defined as sin
    - (a) Yes, the OT law has many laws that we don't follow
    - (b) But God declared those parts no longer in affect because of what Christ did on the cross
      - i) So twice in the NT we are told that the dietary laws were lifted
      - ii) Lifted by God, not man - lifted because Christ fulfilled those parts of the law
  - (2) Whenever we attempt to redefine sin for God we run into numerous challenges and pitfalls
  - (3) The fact is that we cannot try to take one aspect of God's character and and forget about other parts of His character
    - (a) The reason any sin is wrong is because it goes against the nature of who God is
    - (b) The reason God asks for faithfulness between a husband and wife is because God is faithful to His bride, the church, and all its individual members
      - i) We are imitating God in our marriage when we are faithful
      - ii) Whether we realize it or not
  - (4) Is God gracious? No doubt!
  - (5) Is God also just? No doubt!
- c) There are so many ways we can look at how the grace of God is abused - we could be here all day
- d) The fact is, we need to be eternally thankful for God's grace
  - (1) For the fact that He revealed Himself to us
  - (2) That he revealed what right and wrong are so we know how to please Him
  - (3) For the fact that because He is so gracious, those times when we have abused God's grace - He still extends grace to us!