



To contend for the faith: preserve and persevere

Sermon - Steve Stanis - 2 July 2023

Jude 1-25 / 2 Corinthians 3:7-18 / Zechariah 1:1-6

The words of Jude challenge us today to contend for the faith. Jude's words have to be part of my text, they are so compelling. Jude speaks to the people of the first century as clearly as he speaks to us today.

Verses 1-3: Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James, to those who have been called, who are loved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ:

Mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance.

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.

Jude is in a dilemma. There is a letter he wants to write, describing the salvation we share, but the letter he actually writes is urging his readers to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people.

This instruction is to God's people. It is each person's responsibility to 'contend for the faith', that is, defend the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Jude urges believers to take the initiative and contend for the faith. The word contend means to exert intense effort on behalf of something — 'to struggle for'... 'to encourage you to struggle for the faith'.

A faith 'once for all entrusted to God's holy people - 'once for all' is the phrase in the New Testament used mostly about the work of Jesus Christ. This 'once for all' reference is about revelation. Ours is a historic faith. We must preserve our faith. We look back to the 'once for all' salvation work of Christ and we go back to the Bible for the 'once for all' revelation. We derive our truth from past revelation. We are not being led into it sometime in the future. We are called to preserve our faith.

Why is the faith entrusted to God's holy people?

Verse 4: For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.

We have seen in the history of the church, and still today, we use the word heresy to describe any who deny the central truths of the Bible.

I recently attended the 'Faithfulness in Service' tri-annual compulsory training day for ministers. The theme focused on being entrusted to faithfully preserve the Gospel. Yet the majority of the training was about falling away from the truth as, within the Church, ministers must be held to a higher calling. What a shameful heresy... to speak the language but not apply it to our own lives!

The heresy here in verse 4 is even more alarming. This is deceptive heresy where you have the same words with different meanings. The key word here is grace - the grace of God... the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Grace transforms our desires from the inside out. We are led into righteousness by discovering that our life and joy are most full as we serve the One we most love.

But these false teachers are twisting the word 'grace' and using the term to mean 'excuse' and this takes them down the path of immorality. Grace permits and allows everything. You may do what you like. You are free to make your own choices because God is a God of grace and he will say, "Yes, yes, yes!" to absolutely anything and everything.

This attitude denies that Jesus is sovereign and Lord. Individually and corporately, we must contend for the faith. We must preserve our faith. Why must we do this? So that God's **grace** would lead people **to** him, not **from** him.

At this time in our world, it is so easy to close the door to conversation due to having the correct answers. This is a self-righteous and judgemental approach. To contend for the faith is not to act like a bouncer, keeping others out. We are called to share the grace of God, which opens doors and allows the Spirit to work in the hearts of others.

I am struck by the phrase *secretly slipped in*. What destructive behaviours and outcomes! Secrecy is a cover up and is a slippery slope to deception and division.

Verses 5-16 explain how we should do this. Jude explains a pattern, or a method, of how faith is preserved. Jude begins with some lessons from the past. This same problem has been happening throughout the generations of God's people. God's people are called to persevere.

Verse 5: The Lord delivered His people out of Egypt, but later destroyed those who did not believe.

Verse 6: The angels abandoned their proper home in heaven.

Verse 7: Sodom and Gomorrah gave themselves up to immorality and perversion.

Just as it has happened in the past -

Verse 8: They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire

The warning in Verse 9 is:

Don't slander celestial beings. Even the archangel, Michael, did not do that but said, "The Lord rebuke you."

Jude is showing how these Old Testament patterns are reflected in the reality of his own day. He is strongly exhorting his readers to persevere as the people of God.

Verse 10: Yet these people slander whatever they do not understand, and the very things they do understand by instinct—as irrational animals do—will destroy them.

Back to another Old Testament example in (Verse 11):

Woe to them! They have taken the way of Cain; they have rushed for profit into Balaam's error; they have been destroyed in Korah's rebellion.

Jude is saying, this is just like today. People of God, persevere as you contend for the faith!

Jude now sends a challenge.

Verses 12-13: These people are blemishes at your love feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm—shepherds who feed only themselves. They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; autumn trees,

without fruit and uprooted—twice dead. They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever.

What a warning! Be alert, but not alarmed. Be vigilant, but not despairing. It's all happened before, but God is the effective judge. Don't panic, God can deal with it. Equally, don't be lulled into a false sense of security. Keep alert, persevere in faith and do not be alarmed.

So how do we contend for the faith? We trust in the power of the God who is the judge. We don't have to judge. We don't have to solve the problem. God will do it, but we must 'contend for the faith' once and for all entrusted to the saints.

We can trust God because he has done it before. Also this current situation was prophesied by Enoch:

Verses 14-16: 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 the ungodly acts they have committed in their ungodliness, and of all the defiant words ungodly sinners have spoken against him." These people are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage.

If Enoch prophesied it, so did the apostles. In the last days, there will be scoffers who follow their own ungodly desires.

Jude is saying don't be so obsessed with those who are wrong, that you lose perspective and focus on the error,

the immorality, and not the true grace found in Jesus Christ. Preserve your faith and persevere.

Verses 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.

These verses give us practical examples of how to preserve our faith and persevere:

Look at the message on the screen behind me as it is our focus always. *[Pray, Connect, Transform - making Jesus known as we love and serve together]*

Firstly, focus on your own faith.

Be transformed by the Spirit. Remember God calls you into his own Kingdom and glory. We are exhorted to lead a life worthy of God. We have received Christ and the Spirit; so we are to live a life that is in harmony with what we have received.

Our KAC Vision - to be transformed and to connect harmoniously.

Secondly, pray in the Holy Spirit.

This prayer activity must occur in the name of Jesus and by the power of the Holy Spirit. This also is our KAC Vision.

The power of the Holy Spirit provides the catalyst needed to change our desires and aligns us with the desires and will of God.

Thirdly, keep yourself in God's love.

Patience provides the ability to wait upon God's timing and rest in his promise of victory and in his eternal presence. Patience is depending on the love of God.

Fourthly, wait with hope.

Jude knows that patience leads to hope. When we trust in the person, promise, and presence of Jesus Christ, then we know of the hope of the fulfilment of his kingdom... on earth as it is in heaven. These certainties open our hearts for hope to manifest, flourish and develop.

Again, how do we contend for the faith?

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.

Interestingly, we are called to win people, not arguments. Winning **people** is contending for the faith and that is much harder than winning an argument. Please notice, we are winning **people** with **mercy**. Be merciful to those who doubt. Be merciful to those who are about to sink.

Jude understood that believers must extend mercy to others because we receive and experience the mercy of God. When we extend mercy, we demonstrate a truth of the Kingdom of God and not the ways of the flesh. Mercy motivates us to illuminate Christ by showing his mercy through our words and actions toward others.

So fifthly, we are to be merciful.

How do we contend for our faith?

Verses 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! Amen.

Jude bookends his short letter with a statement about the power of God to save those whom he calls.

Verse 1: To those who have been called, who are loved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ: mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance.

Let's hold unswervingly to the truth of the grace of Jesus Christ. We can have confidence in our great and powerful God. He is faithful and he will do it.

So, a thought for us all to consider in regard to our Mission and Vision at KAC. Should we have these words from Jude alongside the magnificent glass tiled cross in the Church Point Centre visible to us every time we and others come in and go out of this building? Let me know what you think....

The cross of Christ at the centre!

Reread right now where ever you are!

Verse 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—²⁵ to the only God our Saviour be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.