

“Jude: What Can We Do?”

Jude 17-23

Baxter T. Exum (#932)
Four Lakes Church of Christ
Madison, Wisconsin
July 29, 2007

Introduction:

Over the past few weeks, we have been looking together at one of only 5 one-chapter books in the Bible. It is so short that it does not even need a chapter division—only 25 verses long—and yet I think we have found that the book is incredibly powerful. We are studying, of course, from the New Testament book of **Jude**.

We discovered that the book was written by Judas, the younger half brother of the Lord Jesus Christ. At one time, Jude did not believe his brother, and yet apparently at some time around the resurrection, there was a change that took place in his life.

Two weeks ago ****PPT****, we looked together at the first four verses of the book of **Jude**, and we discovered that Jude was getting ready to write on a very positive subject—he was getting ready to write an encouraging letter about **“our common salvation,”** and yet at the last minute (by the time we get to **verse 3**), Jude has changed his subject as he puts out a call for patriots—he puts out a call to defend the Lord’s church against a terrible threat, as he says, **“...I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.”** He goes on to explain that certain people had **“crept in unnoticed,”** men who had turned the grace of God into a license to sin.

Last week ****PPT**** we moved along to the next few verses, and we looked in greater detail at those who were threatening the early church. To give us some background, Jude gives several examples. He refers to the children of Israel in the days surrounding the exodus from Egypt. He writes about the rebellious angels. He refers to the residents of Sodom and Gomorrah. He writes about Satan himself. He then warns about those who have gone the way of Cain, those who have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam, and those who have followed in the steps of Korah. Jude then describes the current threat as coming from within the Lord’s church—certain people were like hidden reefs. They had no fear and were pictured as, **“...clouds without water, autumn trees, without fruit, doubly dead, uprooted,”** like **“...wild waves of the sea, casting up their own shame like foam,”** like **“...wandering stars, for whom the black darkness has been reserved forever.”** Jude then reminds us that punishment is coming.

Up to this point in the book, then, the picture has been rather bleak. The message has been rather negative. But this morning I would like for us to move along to what I like to refer to as the “So what?” section. This morning, Jude gets down to what we need to do about it. ****PPT**** Now that he has us scared, now that he has our

attention, now that he has warned us about what is going on, he brings us to a challenge. As spiritual patriots who have been challenged to fight, what are we now to do with this information? This morning, then, I'd like for us to look together at **Jude 17-23**, at the challenge that Jude presents to us...

17 But you, beloved, ought to remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, 18 that they were saying to you, "In the last time there will be mockers, following after their own ungodly lusts." 19 These are the ones who cause divisions, worldly-minded, devoid of the Spirit. 20 But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, 21 keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life. 22 And have mercy on some, who are doubting; 23 save others, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh.

This morning, as we think about how we are to meet the challenge of those who may threaten the peace and the unity of this congregation, I'd like for us to consider three very basic ideas as they are outlined here in the book of Jude.

I. First of all, we notice in **verses 17-19 that **WE ARE TO RECOGNIZE THE THREAT ACCORDING TO HOW WE HAVE BEEN WARNED IN THE SCRIPTURES.** ****PPT******

In **verse 17**, we have the first imperative in the entire book—the first command—the first thing that we need to do—the first action item, and the command is to **"remember,"** as James says, **"But you, beloved, ought to remember...."** Today, when we use the word **"remember,"** we normally think about it in terms of the opposite of forgetting. We say, **"I can't remember where I put my car keys,"** and that kind of thing. But in the Bible, the word **"remember"** usually is not used like that. But instead, it is an action word—it is a decision to think about something. It is a decision to put a thought in our minds. We have an illustration of how God uses the term in **Hebrews 8:12**, where God says, **"FOR I WILL BE MERCIFUL TO THEIR INIQUITIES, AND I WILL REMEMBER THEIR SINS NO MORE."** In other words, it's not that God accidentally forgets our sins, but He makes the decision not to remember them. And in a similar way, Jude tells us in **verse 17** that we are to remember something—not the opposite of forgetting, but an intentional decision to think about something.

In **verse 17**, he tells us that we, **"...ought to remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ."** Jude is telling us, first of all then, that we are to be aware of the threat.

As we consider the words of the apostles on this issue, we are reminded of numerous warnings in various letters. We remember how Paul warned about false teachers in **2 Timothy 4:2-5**, as he wrote to the young preacher Timothy, telling him to,

"...preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. [And there is a reason for this preaching!] For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry."

We remember the warning given by the apostle Paul to the church in Corinth in **2 Corinthians 11:13-15**, where he said, **"For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds."**

We remember the words of the apostle Peter in **2 Peter 2**, basically a parallel to the book of **Jude**. We remember the words of Jesus Himself in **Matthew 7:15**—in the middle of one of the most positive sermons ever preached, Jesus said, **"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves."** Over and over again, the Bible warns about the danger of those who would try to change the message of the Scriptures.

According to Jude (in **verse 19**), one special danger of false teaching is division in the Lord's body. Several months ago, we looked at a passage in **Proverbs 6** where we found a list of six things the Lord hates, even seven that are an abomination to Him. You might remember the grand finale of that list—above everything else, the Bible tells us in **Proverbs 6:19** that the Lord hates, **"...[any]one who spreads strife among brothers."** The Lord hates those who would cause division among His people.

Jude, then, after telling us how bad false teachers can be, gives us a plan of action, and the first thing we are actually told to do is to recognize the danger by remembering the many warnings given in the Bible.

II. As we continue looking at verses 20-21, we see a second strategy as Jude tells us to KEEP OURSELVES IN THE FAITH. **PPT******

I find it interesting that this far into the discussion, Jude has still not told us to do anything to the false teachers! But instead, he tells us to be aware, and then he tells us to take care of ourselves. In **verse 20**, he tells us to build ourselves up in our most holy faith. In other words, Jude is telling us to look to ourselves first. And I also find it interesting that this applies to each and every member of the congregation. This is not addressed to the preacher, or the elders, or the deacons. Sometimes we think that maybe a leader of the church will be dealing with the problem, but often a false teacher will not start with the leadership of the church—he will start with those on the fringe. And so Jude tells us that each individual Christian

is to start by looking inward. Before we go out and battle false doctrine, we make sure that we ourselves are strong.

In **verse 20**, Jude tells us that one way of building ourselves up is by praying in the Holy Spirit. I do not know exactly what that means. We know from **Romans 8:26-27** that, ***"In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God."*** I'm assuming that Jude was making a reference to the Holy Spirit's role in our prayers, but whatever it means, he reminds us that we need to be praying. And again, the emphasis here is on all of us as individual Christians.

At the beginning of **verse 21**, we are told to keep ourselves in the love of God. A lot of people might be shocked by that—that we have to keep ourselves in the love of God. We might wonder: Doesn't God love us no matter what? And in a sense, that is true. But it is also possible to avoid the love of God. We can turn His love away. We can choose to accept other offers. We can stay away from God. Maybe we can compare the love of God to the rain from a summer storm. This past Thursday morning, my son and I went on a quick bike ride downtown, and on our way back through campus, the sky opened up and we got dumped on. We were on the bike path just west of Willy Bikes on West Wash, so we took one of the exits and stopped under an overpass for a while until the storm passed by. I know we needed the rain, but we decided not to personally experience the rain at that moment. The same is sometimes true of the sun. We love a sunny day, but sometimes we block it with a hat, or with a long-sleeved shirt, or with a dose of sunscreen. And I think in a similar way, people often choose to avoid the love of God. Jude, though, tells us to make a point of keeping ourselves in the love of God. We have to put ourselves out there and make ourselves available. Thankfully, Jesus Himself told us exactly how to do this in **John 15:9-10**, where Jesus said, ***"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love."*** We remain in the love of God, then, by obeying the commands of Jesus Christ.

And so the Lord's little brother tells us, first of all, to recognize the threat. And then secondly, he tells us basically to take care of ourselves—to keep ourselves spiritually strong.

III. As we look at verses 22-23, we come to the third and final action point, as Jude tells us to TAKE APPROPRIATE ACTION. **PPT******

After recognizing the threat and keeping ourselves strong, we finally get to do something. And we find here that Jude outlines three basic categories of those who need to be rescued. As one translation puts it, ***"Some of them you must argue out of their error, while they are still wavering. Others you must rescue by snatching them out of the fire. Others you must pity and fear at the same***

time, hating the garment stained by the flesh.” As Christians, then, we have an obligation to win people back, but it is very important that we understand that we are dealing with people in three very different categories.

First of all, there are those who are flirting with a particular false doctrine. They are on the edge. They are wavering. They are perhaps still asking honest questions. They have not yet taken the final step, they have not yet thrown in their vote with the false teachers, but they are right there at the point of going either one way or the other. Perhaps they have gone a little way down the trail, but they can still look back and they can still see the fork in the road. These people are still undecided. Perhaps these people do not really understand the seriousness of what is being taught. Perhaps they have not yet been able to consider the logical and practical consequences of a particular doctrine. Perhaps they are immature in the faith and have merely been won over by an outgoing personality. Jude tells us (in **verse 22**) that we are to have **“mercy”** on these people. We are to treat them with tenderness. We are to explain the way of God more accurately to these people. And hopefully with some gentle persuasion they will come to see the error of what they have been led to believe.

Secondly, though, Jude tells us that others need to be saved, snatching them out of the fire. Those in this second category are even further down the road. In fact, it seems that the flames of hell are licking at their feet. They have gone farther than questioning. They are playing with fire. They are hanging over the edge. Like the cartoon situation, they have fallen over the cliff, but they managed to grab a twig or a root on the way down. They are basically gone, but there seems to be at least a little hope left. James tells us that those in this category need to be snatched out of the fire. The word **“snatched”** refers to grabbing something quickly—just in the nick of time. Sometimes we see something falling out of the corner of our eye, and almost by instinct we reach out and catch it as it falls. We are talking here, then, about a more forceful approach—quick and decisive. The rescue effort is more drastic and more dramatic. These people need to be warned. In some cases they need to be threatened—“This doctrine will not be taught here at this congregation! We are not headed down this road!”

And then Jude describes a third category (in **verse 23**), as he says, **“...and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh.”** We find, then, that for those in this final category, we must combine mercy with fear. If you have had a swimming class, then you know how dangerous it is to rescue another person who is drowning in the water. So often, someone will swim out to help a drowning man, and both men will drown. There are special techniques for swimming up behind someone, because it is so dangerous to do a rescue in the water. Jude is saying that the same thing is true in a spiritual sense. When we go out looking to save a false teacher, we must be so incredibly careful!

When he refers to **“hating even the garment polluted by the flesh,”** Jude is most likely referring to the passage in **Leviticus 13**, where the garments worn by someone with leprosy had to be burned in the fire. Those garments were contagious. Those garments were dangerous. Someone has said that when a child puts on gloves

and plays in the mud, "...he never gets the mud glovey; he always gets the gloves muddy." As parents, we know how true that is, and in a similar way, false doctrine is also dangerous. False doctrine is very contagious. Jude says that we need to have mercy, but we must show mercy "**with fear.**" There is an urgency here. This is not a matter to be taken lightly, but it is incredibly serious, and we may need to act immediately in order to save the rest of the congregation from the infection that spreads so quickly.

Jude, then, gives us three categories:

- Some are merely doubting, and they need to be approached with mercy—our hearts should break on their behalf.
- Some are in deeper and need to be snatched out of the fire—quickly and decisively, if possible.
- And then there are the leaders—the false teachers themselves—Jude tells us that we need to approach these people with mercy and fear—realizing the danger of the threat they pose—dealing with it swiftly and appropriately.

Conclusion & Invitation:

This morning, then, we have looked together at a course of action—what we need to do:

- We need to recognize the threat.
- We need to keep ourselves strong.
- And then, we need to take appropriate action, depending on the category of those who have fallen away.

I am so thankful for your kind attention during this series of lessons. Lord willing, we'll be able to close the series next Sunday morning by looking together at the last two verses.

The gospel is the good news that Jesus Christ came to earth and died so that our sins could be forgiven. The free offer is open to everyone, but in order to accept the offer, we must be willing to make some tough decisions and a lifelong commitment. We must turn away from sin, doing whatever it takes to turn our lives back toward God. We must put our trust in the power of God by allowing ourselves to be immersed into the death of Christ for the forgiveness of our sins. And then, as we come up out of the water, we start the Christian life and face the new challenge of remaining faithful for the rest of our lives. If you have any questions, please ask. But if you are ready to obey the good news right now, you can let us know as we sing the next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: church@fourlakescoc.org

Four Lakes church of Christ website: <http://www.fourlakescoc.org>