

Looking in, out and up

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[0 : 00] Well, a very good evening to you all. Please do grab your Bibles and turn with me to Jude, the letter of Jude, which comes tucked away just before Revelation at the end of our Bible.

So please turn to Jude, which is page 1027 in the church Bibles. 1027. Now, this is the final installment in our time in Jude. We've had two Sundays already. This is our final Sunday.

And we're going to be thinking particularly about the last five verses of the letter. But to refresh us, I'll read from verse one for those that have missed perhaps the first two weeks.

So I'll start at verse one of the letter of Jude. Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James. To those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ, may mercy, peace and love be multiplied to you.

[1 : 16] Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

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 want to remind you, although you once fully knew it, that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe.

And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day.

Just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire.

[2 : 32] Yet in like manner, these people also, relying on their dreams, defile the flesh, reject authority and blaspheme the glorious ones. But when the archangel Michael, contending with the devil, was disputing about the body of Moses, he did not presume to pronounce a blasphemous judgment, but said, The Lord rebuke you.

But these people blaspheme all that they do not understand, and they are destroyed by all that they, like unreasoning animals, understand instinctively.

Woe to them! For they walked in the way of Cain, and abandoned themselves for the sake of gain to Balaam's error, and perished in Korah's rebellion.

These are blemishes on your love feasts, as they feast with you without fear, looking after themselves. Waterless clouds swept along by the wind, fruitless trees in late autumn twice dead uprooted, wild waves of the sea casting up the foam of their own shame, wandering stars, for whom the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever.

It was also about these that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, Behold, the Lord came with ten thousands of his holy ones to execute judgment on all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness that they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against him.

[4 : 10] These are grumblers, malcontents, following their own sinful desires. They are loudmouth boasters, showing favoritism to gain advantage.

But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. They said to you, in the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions.

It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit. But you, beloved, build yourselves up in the most holy faith.

Pray in the Holy Spirit. Keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.

And have mercy on those who doubt. Save others by snatching them out of the fire. To others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.

[5 : 23] 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, 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. Well, do please have the letter of Jude open in front of you as we spend these moments looking at verses 20 to 25.

Let me take you back to the 1950s for a moment, and to the United States of America.

In the post-war era, not all was calm as the Cold War began to bubble away. There was real and genuine concern about the influence of communism in some quarters, and at the head of that anti-communist charge was Senator Joseph McCarthy.

Now during the McCarthy era, thousands of Americans were accused of being communists or communist sympathizers, and they became the subject of investigations and questioning by the government.

[7 : 05] If you liked the color red, or even thought about liking the color red, you'd be dragged up in front of the House Un-American Activities Committee, headed by Senator McCarthy, and you would face serious questioning for a number of hours.

Now I mention this not to make some sort of political points, but to mention the phrase McCarthyism, which has now come to mean the practice of making accusations of disloyalty, subversion, or treason without proper regard for the evidence.

That's McCarthyism, bringing charges without proper evidence. But why mention this? Why bring up McCarthyism? Well, given the first two-thirds of Jude's letter, we might, without reading these final verses, come to the conclusion that Jude is calling us to some sort of McCarthyist response as he makes his plea for us to contend for the faith.

But as we will see, that is not the way we are to go about contending for the faith. So then, how are we to go about contending for the faith?

That has been the question in the back of our minds over these last couple of weeks. After the first Sunday together, we were eager to get to the how question. Jude sets out his central plea there in verse 3, which is, to contend for the faith.

[8 : 45] And his reason for doing so is there in verse 4. Unnoticed people have crept into the church and presents a very real and dangerous threat to the gospel.

Why do they present a threat? Well, because they are striking at the very heart of what it means to be a Christian. They pervert the grace of God, turning it into a license for immorality, and they deny the Lord Jesus Christ.

So we saw the need to contend. But how? That's the natural question, isn't it? We can see that the stakes are very high.

The very future of the church Jude was writing to is hanging in the balance. But Jude didn't deal with the how question straight away. He spends the large, central trunk of the letter going into real detail about the certain judgment and condemnation that these people, these unnoticed people face.

And he also goes into detail about what they are like. And so last Sunday, we saw that Jude was urging us to do two things. Remember that Jesus is judge, but also learn to recognize the danger signs.

[10 : 05] That's what we saw last week. And it was heavy going stuff, wasn't it? And as we come to these final verses in Jude's short letter, we are reaching not some sort of footnote to the letter.

It's not an aside. It's really the climax to all that Jude has been saying. Here, Jude gets to the very heart of how we are to go about contending for the faith.

If Jude had just stopped at verse 19, his readers and we would be at a bit of a loss, wouldn't we? He's issued his urgent appeal.

He's spoken at length about what these people are like and how we're to spot them. We've seen where they're ultimately headed. If he had just left it there, we'd be all over the shop in terms of how to respond to that, how to contend.

So for those who are naturally contentious and up for a good argument, they would approach the situation all guns blazing. Anyone who even comes close to what Jude is talking about would be getting kicked out.

[11 : 12] They would conduct some sort of McCarthyist witch hunt, interrogating people who don't quite toe the line on a minor point of theology. But that is not what Jude is calling for.

Other people who naturally do anything to avoid any sort of argument or dispute, they would put their heads firmly into the sand and hope that everything would just pan out in the end. But that is not what Jude is calling for either. He points us not to passivity, nor to mass excommunications of certain people. No.

Jude's approach is far more nuanced and gracious than all that. And tonight, Jude points us in three directions. He points us in, he points us out, and he points us up.

In, out, and up. So firstly, Jude urges us in verses 20 and 21 to look in. Look in and build yourselves up.

[12 : 17] Verses 20 to 21. Jude doesn't start where we perhaps expect him to start. We'd probably expect Jude to head straight into those people that are being sucked in by these false teachers.

But he doesn't begin there, does he? He begins by urging his readers to build themselves up in verse 21. Verse 20. But you, beloved, build yourselves up in your most holy faith.

Pray in the Holy Spirit. Keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. There are four things that Jude instructs his dear beloved Christians to do.

Building, praying, and waiting. Sounds a little bit like we have to do something here. And that's absolutely right.

Christianity is not for spectators. It's a faith which encourages us to be up and doing. Not that we earn anything by doing that, but our doing is in response to what Christ has already done for us and calls us to do.

[13 : 28] So then let's look at these four things. Firstly, building yourselves up. Jude urges us to build ourselves up. The image here is of the church in terms of the people.

The church as a building. And it's a building that is not going to be built up by doing nothing. Growing as Christians and growing more closely together as Christians are duties which the New Testament writers frequently compare to a building site.

Quite often they talk about this in terms of a building site. Effort is required. Build yourselves up, says Jude. But in what are we to build ourselves up in?

Does Jude just leave it? Vacuous? No, he tells us. We are to build ourselves up in the most holy faith. It's the faith that Jude has already mentioned right the way back there in verse 3.

It's the faith that's to be contended for. The once for all delivered to the saints faith. Build yourselves up in that faith, says Jude. It's not vague.

[14 : 42] It's not subjective. It's the one true faith that we're to build ourselves up in. It's the faith that is fully revealed in the Bible, God's living word to us.

So build yourselves up in that. And as my old minister from home says, we do that by studying the Bible, believing the Bible, and obeying the Bible.

Studying, believing, obeying. And this is to be done individually, yes, but really, Jude is addressing us as a congregation, as a community of believers.

Building up takes place in the context of the local church. It takes place as we sit under God's word week by week on Sundays. As we rub together, rub shoulders together after the services, talking and getting to know each other, encouraging one another.

And as we meet during the week in small groups or at the prayer meeting, we need to be all spiritually plugged in to the life of the church to ensure that we are growing up in the faith, being built up and building others up too.

[15 : 56] So the question is, are you being built up as part of the church community? It's vital if we are to contend for the gospel, says Jude. Build yourselves up, which is in stark contrast to what the false teachers are doing.

If you look back in verse 19, it is these who cause divisions. These people break down, they cause divisions. Jude calls us to the opposite.

Build yourselves up. So the plea to you is, beloved Christians, build yourselves up. That's the first thing. Next, Jude tells us to be praying in the Holy Spirit.

Jude urges us to pray. It sounds so simple and it is simple. He simply tells us to pray. That is how we speak to our Heavenly Father.

We do it by praying. It's a huge privilege and yet we so often take advantage of it. We spend so little time praying to our Heavenly Father who is able.

[17 : 05] How are we to pray? Well, Jude tells us we're to do it in the Holy Spirit, which perhaps sounds a little mystical, but it isn't at all. Praying in the Holy Spirit is the only way a Christian can ever pray.

Every time a Christian speaks to their Heavenly Father, they do so in the Holy Spirit. None of us pray without the prompting of the Holy Spirit. So Jude urges us to pray.

That is what Jude calls us to do in the face of dangerous people who threaten to undermine the very Gospel. Pray to Him who is able because He is able and we're to seize each opportunity to do so.

The prayer meeting here every other Wednesday provides us with an opportunity to pray together, to build each other up and to pray to our Heavenly Father. What's stopping us from coming along to that?

Build yourselves up. Pray. And then Jude tells us to keep yourselves in the love of God. Keep yourselves. Now this is the second side of the coin that Jude shows us there in verse 1 where he wrote, to those who are called beloved in God and kept for Jesus Christ.

[18 : 30] So there in verse 1 Jude reassures us of what God has done for the Christian. You are loved. You are kept. Says Jude. But here we see the other side of the coin which is our human responsibility.

Keep yourselves in the love of God. Yes, God keeps you but we are also to keep ourselves in his love.

We have a responsibility. But how are we to do that? How can we keep ourselves in the love of God? Well, in John chapter 15 Jesus tells us how when he says if you keep my commandments you will abide in my love.

if you keep my commandments. You see, obedience is the key. We are to obey our heavenly father. And that's the very opposite to what these false teachers have been doing.

They've been turning the grace of God into a license for sensuality. Denying the lordship of Jesus. Don't worry about obedience they say. That's old fashioned and restrictive.

[19 : 47] But Jude says that is not the way at all. Keep yourselves in the love of God which is the safest place you can be and we keep ourselves through obedience.

so building praying keep yourselves in the love of God and then lastly Jude says be waiting for the mercy of Jesus Christ.

Be waiting for the mercy of Jesus Christ. Now I don't know about you but I don't like waiting for things very much. Just ask my wife.

If we decide to go and do something I want to be there straight away and do it. We like to have things now don't we? New clothes I want it now.

The new iPhone I want it right now. Enjoyments I want it right now. And that is what these false teachers were doing. They were urging these beloved Christians to live for the here and now without regard for what is to come.

[20 : 54] Sensuality now. Pleasure now. Now God does give us goods and great gifts to enjoy now.

Don't misunderstand me. But Jude wants us to remember that biblical faith is a faith that is primarily fixed on the future. Biblical faith is a faith primarily fixed on the future.

That is where Jude wants us to fix our gaze as he speaks about the mercy of Jesus. Mercy is something to be experienced in the future says Jude. As Christians living now we wait for the mercy of Jesus Christ which is the salvation he promises for all who trust in him for the forgiveness of sin. It is a salvation that we have on the day he returns and it leads to verse 21 eternal life. This is something worth waiting for.

But the false teachers in the church who live only for today despite what they may say they have zero hope for the future. Wait for the mercy of Jesus Christ it is worth waiting for.

[22 : 14] So we have four things as Jude urges us to look in. Build, pray, keep and wait. But why does Jude do this?

Why does Jude focus his attention firstly on looking in? Why does he speak firstly to the Christians telling them to look in? Well the foundations of any community of believers has to be solid.

The building of the church must be on solid ground. the contending for the faith that Jude is urging us to do must have its roots in the firm concrete of building, praying, keeping and waiting.

Jude knows that without this the church won't be able to withstand the undermining gospel the undermining of the gospel threatened by these people these unnoticed people that he talks about. Look in build a firm foundation says Jude as we contend for the gospel. So that's the first thing.

Jude calls us to look in and secondly he encourages us to look out show mercy on those who are doubting verses 22 and 23 look in and look out.

[23 : 38] Our attention here is turned to others and Jude has in mind three types of people and these aren't hard and fast distinctions but they are sort of grades of people who have come under the influence of these false teachers people who are beginning to get sucked in under their dangerous influence.

So as we turn to these people who are being sucked in we might be feeling a bit sort of geed up by what Jude is being saying let's give them what they deserve they've been sucked in they used to be given the old heave ho don't they they've gone off track but that is not Jude's attitude at all he says show mercy show mercy to these people now I wasn't quite expecting that as I read through Jude for the first time after all the build up urging us to contend to fight for the gospel I was almost expecting some sort of rocky Rambo Sylvester Stallone type intervention but instead we are told to show mercy Jude's approach is gracious and we're told to show it in different ways depending on how influenced certain people have been by these false teachers so the very first group he mentions are verse 22 those who doubt they're in verse 22 these are people who are a bit unsure about what to believe perhaps they're intrigued by what these false teachers are saying and doing they think to themselves they might be onto something here they think that what they are peddling looks quite attractive but they're not fully convinced something is gnawing at the back of their minds warning them against following such people but they can't quite pin down their uncertainty their doubt they're doubting about the once for all delivered to the saints faith but they're not fully convinced by these false teachers either they are people who doubt and to such people Jude says we are to show mercy we're not to be hard handed or to condemn them remember that the Christian is a recipient of mercy and the Christian is to show the very same to those who are wavering in their faith says Jude we are to spend time with such people feel their genuine real questions talk through why the once for all delivered for the saints faith is the only faith and why these false teachers are departing from that and into destruction we are to show mercy for them if we are so driven to achieve theological purity that folk are unable to raise legitimate questions then something's quite wrong we need to show mercy to those who doubt that's the first group of people that Jude directs our attention to then there's a group who followed the false teachers a bit further down the road there in verse 23 save others by snatching them out of the fire that's the next group Jude talks about these people are more than just doubters they have dipped their toes firmly into the pool of the false teacher sensuality and sinful behavior for such folk Jude tells us to save them by snatching them out of the fire you see even for such people restoration is possible they've not gone too far Jude is taking this image of snatching from the fire from the prophet of Zachariah there in chapter three of Zachariah where he has this vision of Joshua being plucked from the fire and the point Jude is making is this in the same way that Joshua was plucked from the fire with his filthy garments and was restored such people in the church who have been sucked in with these false teachers can also be plucked from the fire and restored we are urged to save them because they need rescue they perhaps don't see how far they have strayed from the one true gospel their behavior flies in the face of all that

God has commanded his people and we are to pluck them out of the fire not to condemn them so we are to save others by snatching them out of the fire says Jude that's the second group that have moved under the influence of these false teachers and then there's a third group that Jude talks about there in verse 23 to others show mercy with fear hating even the garment stained by the flesh now Jude's final group are clearly up to their necks with these false teachers they followed in their doctrine and their way of living and it would be very tempting to think that these people are really beyond the pale these people have clearly abandoned the faith let them go we might think but no we're still to show mercy but Jude is very careful to add something he says mercy mixed with fear what is

[29 : 41] Jude talking about fear of what I think the very next sentence helps us hating even the garment stained by the flesh that is hating the sinful behavior itself we have to be very careful when we're dealing with such folk that we are not sucked in as well by their lifestyle and their living they've been drawn in so let's not be tempted to think that we're somehow above it all and immune to it it would be quite easy to be drawn into joining them in their belief and behavior but we are to try and bring such people back to the one true faith but hating the stained clothing that is their sinful activity we are to be crystal clear as we get alongside such folk that the behavior is unacceptable and is in reality a rejection of the lordship of Jesus and a denial of the grace of

God so as we look out to those who have been sucked in we are not to compromise on the truth remember Jude's plea to contend for the one true gospel we are not to compromise on that but that doesn't mean we are not to show mercy and love to those who have come under the influence of these dangerous people look out and show mercy urges Jude some people have come under the influence of these false teachers show mercy so we've looked in we've looked out to look to the only

God who is able Jude in this great climax to the letter ends with words that are quite familiar to us you often hear these words being read at the end of a church service but let's forget our familiarity for a moment and notice what Jude is saying and why he says it here he points us to our great father in heaven and says he is able he is able to do two great wonderful reassuring things for the Christian believer who is faced with contending for the gospel he is able to keep you from stumbling and he is able to present you blameless before his glory on that great day of judgment two great things he is able to keep you from stumbling firstly he's able to keep you from stumbling why does Jude remind them and us of this great truth well there is much that might trip up the Christian in Jude's letter certainly there was much to trip up his original recipients and there is much that might trip us up today as we go about contending for the gospel as we fight against false teachers who undermine the gospel there are trip hazards at every turn in this letter aren't there as we contend for the faith but we are reassured that as we undertake our responsibilities we can be sure that God is sovereign he is able he is able to keep us from stumbling and as we look in and build ourselves up and as we look out and show mercy on those who doubt we can be sure that he is there and he is able his keeping us from stumbling goes hand in hand with our undertaking of our responsibilities they go side by side

God's sovereignty and our responsibility we are not to see this reassurance that Jude gives us here at the end as a call to do nothing we're not to put our feet up and think God's got it covered not at all he keeps us as we work out our faith he will not let us go he is able he is right there beside us and we can echo the psalmist words he will not let your foot be moved he who keeps you will not slumber behold he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep this is the God who is able to help you to keep you from stumbling as we contend for the gospel be comforted by that it is a wonderful truth and

[35 : 03] Jude reminds us here at the end of this letter and secondly he is able to present you blameless that's the other thing that Jude reminds us of here he is able to present you blameless now after all his talk in the letter about the condemnation that faces these false teachers Jude provides great reassurance for his beloved Christian brothers and sisters and he does it for those original readers and for us now on that great day of judgment we will stand before him and we will stand before him blameless not because of anything we have done or can do but because we have a saviour in Jesus Christ a saviour who died in our place for our sin that is how we are able to stand there blameless on that great final day in stark contrast to these certain people that

Jude mentions these gospel underminers who as we saw last week are headed for judgment and condemnation Jude reassures his dear beloved Christians he can present you blameless and these wonderful and great truths that Jude reminds us of free us from anxiety and fear as we contend for the gospel we don't need to be anxious over our contending because he can keep you from stumbling we don't need to fear that great day of judgment because he is able to present you blameless great reassurance as we look up to the only God who is able so we have Jude's three how to's of contending for the one true faith look in build yourselves up look out show mercy to those who are doubting and look up to the only

God who is able Jude's plea is an urgent plea he is calling us to an urgent task because there has been and always will be certain people in the visible church who present a real and present danger to the church it's under threat from people who are undermining the very foundations of the faith the

grace of God and the lordship of Jesus Christ they are a dangerous threat says Jude because they are unnoticed Jude reminds us of the certain judgment and condemnation that these people face and he helps us to recognize the danger signs are we prepared to contend for the faith Edward touched on that this morning didn't he are you prepared to contend for the faith it is the question that

Jude is posing to us in this letter are we understanding of how we're to go about that task in these final verses are we not greatly reassured by God's sovereign keeping of us in that task what wonderful reassurance we have in our God who is able and that must lead us to praise so let me read Jude's closing verses which give us the vocabulary to praise him who is able look down at me at these last verses now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before his presence before the presence of his glory with great joy to the only God our saviour through Jesus Christ our Lord be glory majesty dominion and authority before all time and now and forever

Amen God Him God God God