

An Urgent Task

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Preacher: Paul Brennan

[0 : 00] Well, a very good afternoon to you all. Welcome to our Wednesday lunchtime Bible talk. If this is your first time here, then a very warm welcome to you. I'll do a short reading from the Bible in a moment, then we'll pray, and then we'll have 20 minutes or so unpacking the text, and then we'll sing together at the end. So if you need to get away back to work, then you can slip away during the hymn at the end. So we're beginning today a short series in the short letter of Jude. We'll be spending the next four weeks in this letter, and this afternoon we're looking at the first four verses of Jude's letter. So do grab your Bibles there and turn with me to Jude. And we're looking at the first four verses, and Jude can be found on page 1027 in the Church Bibles, just tucked away there before Revelation.

So 1027 in the Church Bibles. So the first four verses of Jude.

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. 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, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality, and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

[2 : 17] Let me pray, and then we'll dive into this text. Heavenly Father, we give you thanks for all your good gifts that you shower upon us day by day, week by week.

We thank you for your promises. Promises in your word that never fail. And help us to take a hold of your promises, and hold on to the God who is faithful.

We thank you for so much that you give us, and we thank you for your words. We pray for the churches that are represented here this afternoon, from all across this city.

And as we consider these verses from Jude, I pray that you would help us, help our churches, to be willing to contend for the one true gospel.

We pray for our city. We pray for Glasgow, that it would hear and respond to the preaching of your words. We long to see many folk coming to know you as Lord and Saviour in this city.

[3 : 29] And help us now, as we come to your words, help us to hear what you have to say. Help us not only to hear it, but to respond in willing obedience, as we consider Jude's message in front of us this afternoon.

So help us now. Help us for your name and your glory. Amen. Well, I do have Jude open in front of you there.

So why are we studying this rather short, this rather out-of-the-way sort of letter, tucked away just before Revelation?

Well, despite being a short letter, it is a letter that packs a real punch. And it is a letter that is as relevant today as it was two millennia ago when Jude first put pen to paper.

It is a letter dealing with ultimate realities about salvation, about judgment, about holding to the true gospel or being deceived and swept along by a false gospel peddled by false teachers.

[4 : 49] Now, we need to sense the urgency of Jude's letter. We need to be persuaded to contend for the gospel and yet be reassured by Jude's confidence in the sovereign keeping of God.

Now, before we jump into the letter, I want to introduce you to Jude, the man who wrote this letter. Look with me at verse 1 now, where we have Jude's introduction.

Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James. Now, there's a bit of a surprise here.

Jude is the brother of James and he was the leader of the church in Jerusalem. He was the writer of the letter of James. He was a well-known figure in the early Christian worlds.

But Jude and James were sons of Mary and Joseph, which makes Jude the half-brother of Jesus.

So, why doesn't Jude introduce himself in that way then?

[5 : 55] Why not say, I'm the half-brother of Jesus? Instead, he describes himself as a servant of Jesus Christ. Now, yes, this is a sign of true humility.

Yes, it does indicate that he didn't see himself as somehow privileged because he's Jesus' brother. He doesn't get special status. But it also reveals that Jude is a man who sees things as they really are.

He sees himself not primarily as Jesus' half-brother, but rather as his servant. And it is this, seeing things as they really are, that is characteristic of his letter as a whole.

Jude sees reality. He sees the false teachers in this letter for who they really are, seeing beyond their ordinary appearance, their ordinary friendliness, their ordinary sounding words.

And he sees through all that to their unordinary and false gospel. A false gospel that leads only to condemnation.

[7 : 06] And the challenge for us here this afternoon in Glasgow is to do likewise. It's to be people that see things as they really are.

Not as we'd like them to be. Not as we imagine them to be. But as they really are. So we're going to look particularly at verses 3 and 4 in Jude's introduction here.

And two key things to see are Jude's plea and Jude's reason. So firstly then, Jude's plea in verse 3. And his plea is this, that Christians must contend for the true gospel.

Christians must contend for the true gospel. Jude is setting out his reason for writing. Here at the very start of his letter. He gets right to it. There in verse 3, we read about the letter that he wanted to write.

And the letter he had no choice but to write. He wanted to write about their common salvation in general terms. That was the letter he wanted to write.

[8 : 13] An encouraging, positive message. But Jude had to write a more focused letter. Because of the real urgency and danger presented to that common salvation by these people.

That is how Jude describes them all through the letter. These people. People who are in the church. False teachers. Jude had no choice in the subject matter of his letter.

His subject. His main point is an appeal. A plea. To contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

Second half of verse 3 there. That's his plea. Now we need to feel the force of this word contend. The word contend is steeped in the imagery of the Greek games.

Think of athletes. Competing. Contending for a medal. Striving. Agonizing. Straining. Sweating.

[9 : 19] Giving all to win the prize. That's what we're to think of. Jude isn't calling his readers to take it easy. To just sit back.

Quite the opposite. He's calling them to agonize. To strive. To contend with every fiber of their being. Don't shrink from the battle. Says Jude.

But just what are they to contend for? Is Jude vague and imprecise in what he's telling them to contend for? Well no he's not at all.

He's very specific. He says. Look down at me at verse 3. He says there to contend for the faith. That was once for all delivered to the saints.

It's the faith. The gospel. Jude isn't talking about our little area of church responsibility. He's not talking about flower arranging or bell ringing or the welcoming water.

[10 : 23] He's not calling us to contend for those things. We're to hold those things lightly. But he's urging us. Playing with us to contend for the gospel. The objective.

The final gospel. And it's been delivered. Past tense. It was given once. And there will never be altered or changed. It can be pointed to.

It's a body of truth entrusted to the church. Where do we find this gospel? Once for all delivered to the saints? Well it's right here.

It's in our Bibles. And it's not to be added to. Or subtracted from. The gospel is fixed. It's final.

Contend for that.

Says Jude. Defend that. Pass that on. But let's be realistic. Contending in the sense that Jude means it here.

[11:23] Is going to be deeply unpopular. For his original recipients. And for us now. We'll all face ridicule and opposition. From within the church.

As we contend. And yes. It is all of us. That are to contend. It's not restricted to the professionals. Jude is addressing the saints. Look down at verse 1. Where Jude is writing to those. Who are called. Beloved. And kept. That's all.

Who call on the name of Lord. As savior and king. It's not to be left. To your minister. Although he has particular responsibilities. For this.

It's not to be left down to the elders. Or the deacons in your church. Jude's letter. Is directed to everyone. Who calls. On the Lord Jesus. As their savior.

[12:20] And king. We are all. To hold to. To fight for. The true. Complete gospel. Now. How.

Are we to do that? How are we to contend? Well. We're going to be spelling that out. In a few weeks. As we come to the very end. Of Jude's letter. He deals with the how question.

At the end. But before we get to that how question. Jude answers the why question. Why contend? It's all very well saying.

We must contend for the gospel. But is that really necessary? Do we have to contend for it? Well. Jude's plea is to contend. And Jude's reason. Secondly. Is that the true gospel's greatest threat. Comes from within. There in verse four. Jude wrote. Urging his readers. To contend for the faith. Because people with influence.

[13:17] In the church. Were peddling. A false Christianity. Look down at me. At verse four. Where Jude gives his reason. 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. The stakes. Could not be higher. And here is why. We must listen in. And feel the weight. Of the message. Of this short letter. The gospel itself. Was under threat. But it wasn't because. Of some external force.

It wasn't the threat. Of an antagonistic culture. It wasn't the threat. Of an authoritarian regime. It was a threat. From within.

[14:14] Godless men. Unconverted men. In the church. And this has always been. One of the greatest threats. To the church. Hasn't it? Not the danger. Of ungodly people.

Out there. But in the church. It doesn't take. Outside opposition. To destroy the church. That usually has. The opposite effect.

Doesn't it? But false teachers. Within the church. Were bringing in. A different gospel. And let's just note. Some of the things. That make. These people.

Just so dangerous. Three things. To point out. They're unnoticed. They're designated. For condemnation. And they are. Promoting. A different gospel.

So firstly. Then. These people. These false teachers. Were unnoticed. This is why. Jesus writing. These people.

[15:07] Did not come in. With signs. Saying. Watch out. We are holding. To a different gospel. So beware. No. There were no such signs. They seeped in.

They infiltrated. Without anyone. Knowing. Isn't that. Just a little scary. Isn't that why. These people. Are just. So dangerous.

They've smuggled. In a false gospel. And no one. Spotted it. They looked. Ordinary. They were nice. They preached. They took.

Sunday school. They have people. Around for lunch. They were. Unnoticed. Now. These weren't. Ignorant. Untaught.

Christians. That Jude. Was writing to. These were real. Intelligent. Christians. And these. Ungodly. People. Were then. And they are now. Convincing enough.

[16:03] To threaten. And fool. Real. Intelligent. Christians. They slipped in. They were. Unnoticed. They instilled.

Their errors. Drop. By drop. Before they were. Noticed. They pretended. To be friends. Of the truth. But they were. Nothing of the sort. Noticed. So.

Let's not. Fall into. The trap. Of thinking. That this is. Some danger. Out there. We need. To be alert. And ready. To test. The thing. That we. Here in the church.

These guys. Missed it. Don't assume. That we won't. Miss it. We need. To be. Watchful. And alert. Grounding. Ourselves. In the word.

Of God. So that we. Can tell. When untruth. Is being. Commended. Is. Regardless. Of who. It is coming from. In the sharp words.

[16:58] Of one writer. We are not to let our affections. Control our judgments. We admire the person. And his gifts. And so we easily swallow. His teaching.

No man. Is infallible. So test everything. You hear. Have your Bibles open. When the word. Is being preached. Look at.

The word. Is that. What God's word. Actually says. Test everything. By God's word. No man. Is infallible. Test everything. The truth. Loses nothing. By being tested. So test everything. You hear. So these people.

Were unnoticed. And secondly. These people. Were destined. For condemnation. Jude explains. That their judgment. Had been predicted. These people.

[17:52] Were. Long ago. Designated. For this. Condemnation. Now what is Jude. On about here. What's he talking about. Well. Jude goes on.

In verses 5 to 19. The middle chunk. Of the letter. To prove. From the Old Testament. That these people. Through what they say. How they behave. Are the sort of people.

Who will incur. God's judgment. Condemnation. And condemnation. That is where. These people are headed. Says Jude. So beware. The existence.

Of such people. As predicted. Long ago. So don't be surprised. Don't be surprised. That you have to contend. With these false teachers. In the church. There always have.

And always will be. Such false teachers. In and around the church. So we're to see the danger. That such people pose. And not to be surprised.

[18:48] We're certainly not to be tempted. To follow them. Look at their destination. That's where they're going. So let's not be surprised. They are destined.

For condemnation. The third thing to. Point out. Why these people. Are so dangerous. Is they are promoting. A different gospel. They promote.

A different gospel. It's now that we get. To the real center. Of the matter. The source. Of the problem. That Jude saw. But which the Christians. He's writing to missed.

These ungodly people. Pervert. The grace of our God. Into sensuality. And deny. Our only master. And Lord Jesus Christ.

What exactly is going on? Well. The behavior. Of these people. Had descended. Into sensuality. And they're using. The gospel of grace.

[19:42] As justification. For it. And by doing that. They are denying. The lordship of Jesus. Over all of life. Two central elements. Of the gospel.

Are being eroded. The grace of God. The lordship of Jesus. These false teachers. Are undermining. These two basic things. But why didn't the church.

Recognize it? Didn't they see. These ungodly people. For who they were. Well. Clearly not. These ungodly people. Pushed.

An attractive message. Seeking to loosen. The moral commands. Placed upon Christians. And they were pushing. Sensuality. They follow their own.

Ungodly passions. Rather than be subject. To the lordship of Jesus. They were lips. Not lives. Christians. In the word.

[20:39] Of one preacher. All these people. Although these people. No doubt. Mouthed. Christian phrases. Quoted the bible. And knew. All the songs. They were not.

To be taken. At face value. Jude. Was denouncing. Their friends. And heroes. As anti-Christian. Pagans. They said.

All the right things. But beneath. The surface. In reality. They lived. They lived sensual lives. They denied. The lordship of Jesus. These people.

Encouraged. Living now. In terms of. What was pleasing now. Don't worry about. What's to come. Don't worry about. Sin. Just relax. And Jude's.

Response to that. His antidote. Is to turn up. The lights. On ultimate. Future reality. Here is where. These false teachers. Are headed. Says Jude. Ultimate.

[21:32] Condemnation. And here is where. Those who contend. For the gospel. Are headed. They're headed. For future. Salvation. So live now.

Not. In the light of now. What feels good now. But live. In light of reality. In light of the future. Says Jude. Contend now. Because the now.

Is not all there is. There is a judgment day. To come. So if we. Don't contend. For the once for all. Delivered to the saints. Gospel now. Then the gospel. That gets handed down. To our children. To our nephews. Our nieces. To our children's children.

Will be a false gospel. A gospel. That leads not to salvation. But to condemnation. Jude.

[22 : 28] Is as stark as that. It's as important. As that. So we can see. Can't we. Why Jude. Was just so eager.

To write. Urging these beloved Christians. To contend for the faith. The objective. Final. Complete. Apostolic gospel. The true gospel. Is under threat.

He wanted to write. About common salvation. But he had to write. A more focused letter. Dealing with this. Urgent problem. And the same gospel.

Is still under threat. Today. Those. In the church. Who push. Sensuality. Deny. The lordship of Jesus. The call. To contend. Is as relevant.

Today. As it was. In Jude's day. Will you. Contend. For the full. Final. And clear gospel. Will you. Carefully test. Everything that you hear.

[23 : 25] We need to. Because. False teachers. Don't look like. False teachers. They look like. Everyone else. And we like to think.

Well of people. Don't we. Don't like to think. Critically. But do. Cause us. To test. Everything that we hear. Be alert. Contend. That is our responsibility.

As Christians. And whilst. We need to take that call. Very seriously. We do need to remember. One other truth. That Jude. Asserts.

In this letter. We need to see. Jude's reassurance. God. Will. Keep you. God.

Will. Keep you. This letter. Calls us. To the serious task. Of contending. For the gospel. But it also. Gives us. Great assurances. Of safekeeping. For the Christian.

[24 : 23] We're to contend. In the knowledge. That those. Who hold. To the apostolic gospel. The faith. That was once. For all. To live to the saints. Are kept. By God himself.

Not sure. If you notice. But that word. Tops. Entails. This letter. Look down. With me. There in verse one. Jude writes. To those. Who are called. Beloved.

And kept. For Jesus. And then look to the end. Look to verse 24. Of the letter. In that great doxology. Where Jude writes. Now to him.

Who is able. To keep you. From stumbling. Yes. We are. To contend. For the gospel. We have a responsibility.

To do that. But. We do so. Safe. In the knowledge. That we are kept. Sure. Of salvation. From judgment. You see.

[25 : 23] Our contending. Takes place. In the context. Of. And in response. To God's keeping. God keeps us. So we're able.

To contend. God will keep you. Is one of Jude's. Base notes. Throughout this letter. It tops and tails. The letter. It's always in the background.

God keeps you. But don't miss. Jude's. Urgent appeal. As one writer concluded. Jude knows. That the divine action.

In calling. Loving. And king safe. Must be met. By faithful human response. And the response.

Called for here. Is to contend. For the one. True.

Faith. The stakes. Could not be higher. In Tuesday. Or in ours. Do we see the danger? Do we see the threat? False teachers.

[26 : 18] Within the church. Will always threaten. The gospel. By repackaging it. By making it more appealing. For the now. Be alert to that. How are we to keep ourselves.

From this danger? Well the answer here. Is to contend. For the once. For all. For all. Delivered to the saints. Faith. Will you. Strive for.

Will you. Agonize. For the gospel. As our sovereign father. Keeps us. Let me pray.

Father. We thank you. For your word. We thank you. For the letter. For the letter. Of Jude. Which speaks. So clearly. So penetratingly. Into our own day.

I pray that you. Would give us courage. To contend for the one. True gospel. To be willing. To face. Unpopularity. As we contend.

[27 : 24] Within the church. Against those. That would seek. To undermine. To undermine. The gospel of grace. Deny. Jesus lordship. Help us. To remember. You're keeping.

Sovereign hand. And look forward. Seeing. Our certain. Ensure salvation. On that final day. Help us father. To contend.

For the gospel. Now. So that future generations. Can know. The wonder. Of the saving gospel. So help us now.

As we go away from here. To remember these truths. For your glory. Amen.