

Foundations for the Fight

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[0 : 00] But we are going to be studying in a moment with Paul Brennan the little letter of Jude. So I wonder if you'd turn with me now to Jude, which you'll find right at the end of the Old Testament, right before the book of Revelation.

And Paul's beginning this evening a series for some weeks so that we can study this little letter in detail. And I hope that as a result, by the time we come to the end of these studies, we'll know this letter and its message very clearly indeed.

We're going to read through the whole letter, it's just short, and get the big picture. And then Paul will be beginning to open it up to us a little later. So the letter of Jude, verse 1.

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.

[1 : 22] 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 who 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 is 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.

Yet in like manner, these people also, relying on their dreams, defile the flesh, reject authority, and blaspheme the glorious ones.

[2 : 32] 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 he said, Let the Lord rebuke you.

But these people blaspheme all that they do not understand. And they're 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 winds, fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, uprooted.

Wild waves of the sea casting up foam of their own shame. Wandering stars for whom the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever.

[3 : 39] 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've committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against them.

These are grumblers. The malcontents, following their own sinful desires, their 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's these, who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit.

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.

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

[5 : 14] 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. Amen. Well, we were reading the warnings of the Lord Jesus this morning, and we're reading the warnings of one of His apostles, Jude, this evening.

The Lord must think that we need to be warned, don't you think? Well, please have the book of Jude open.

There we go. Please have Jude open in front of you. Well, Tron Church, you are called, you are beloved in God the Father, and kept in Jesus Christ.

[6 : 25] He will hold you fast. And my goal this evening is to hammer those realities home to our hearts. We need to know these realities.

We need to know that we are called, beloved, and kept because of the fights that are to come.

These foundations are essential for the fight.

Now, we might naturally focus immediately on the key call of the letter, Jude's key imperative there in verse 3. That call to contend.

Our eye is naturally drawn to that, isn't it? And we'll get there. But don't miss the foundations. Don't miss the bedrock that will enable the contending that Jude urges.

We contend in the knowledge that we are kept. The heart of this letter is difficult. And it's difficult because it is facing its first readers and us with reality.

[7 : 38] There are, according to Jude, unexpected leaders in the church, and Jude's plea is to contend for the faith. The very future of the church is at stake.

The time, says Jude, has come to contend. But before we grapple with that, we need also to hear the great encouragement that there is in this letter.

We need to soak up the great assurances, the great reassurances in this short letter. Notice how this letter is wrapped. Notice how Jude begins and ends.

We need to pay attention to the foundations. You see, coming to terms with Jude's key imperative, could lead to despair, to panic, this call to contend.

And when you really grasp the issue, when you see what is at stake and what is involved, then you feel the lump in your throat. The stomach begins to churn because of what Jude is setting out here.

[8 : 47] but Jude's key message ought not to frighten us because of the way in which he begins and ends the letter. He wants us to remember, to grasp, to be steeped in what God has done for us.

Before anything else, he says, before we get to the meat of the letter, remember who you are and remember what God has done for you. Jude wants to shore up our foundations so as to give us confidence so that the realities he unveils in the letter, they won't rock us, they won't shake our confidence.

Like a beautiful building that has dodgy foundations in need of stabilizing and strengthening if it's going to remain standing, the coming storms, you've got to strengthen the foundations and likewise, Jude is stabilizing and strengthening the beloved church he's writing to so that they can withstand the coming storm.

Let me read again the opening and closing words of the short letter. Look at verse one. 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. Look on to verse 24. 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.

[10 : 41] Amen. And those are wonderful, wonderful words, aren't they, of assurance and we're going to dwell on those this evening, particularly verses one and two.

And these are words we must meditate on and appropriate and think on and know to be true. If we don't, if we don't grasp those realities, then we're going to struggle with what Jude goes on to say. We're going to struggle with this call to contend. If we don't know who we are in God, if we're not unshakable in those convictions, then we're never going to contend. But before we go further, I guess two quick questions to answer.

First, who's Jude and who's he writing to? Who is this guy Jude? First one, he says he's a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James. Now, the James, of whom Jude is a brother, is almost certainly the James referred to in Acts 15 and also the author of the book of James, a key leader in the early Jerusalem church.

And given who James is, who we know James is, James is in fact one of Jesus' half-brothers. And so Jude here is a half-brother of the Lord Jesus himself.

[12 : 02] We get a reference to him in Matthew 13. Some people are saying, is this not the carpenter's son referring to Jesus? Is not his mother called Mary? Are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas?

For obvious reasons, Jude decides to shorten his name. He doesn't want to be known as Judas, for obvious reasons, so Jude. He's a half-brother of the Lord Jesus. And he's a man who's come a long way in terms of his own faith.

Having grown up alongside Jesus, seen him grow as a carpenter and then take to public ministry, he wrestles with what's going on in front of him.

In John 7, remember, the Feast of Booths, we are told at that point that even his own brothers did not believe in him. But as they witnessed all that would go on to happen, as Jude and James and his other brothers saw, his arrest, his trial, his crucifixion, his resurrection, their lives are turned upside down.

As you read on through Acts, you see James taking a real lead in the early church. And Jude also has become active in proclaiming the gospel of the risen and ascended Lord Jesus. He's a key figure in the early church.

[13 : 25] But he doesn't seem to claim the badge and privilege, does he, of being Jesus' half-brother. There's no mention of it here in the letter. How does he describe himself?

A servant of the Lord Jesus. He doesn't trumpet his own privilege. He doesn't say, consider my pedigree. He doesn't do that.

And the key for him, the key for his first readers, the key for us, is ongoing faithfulness to Jesus. Regardless of pedigree and privilege, faithful obedience to Jesus.

So that's a bit about Jude. Who's he writing to? Well, we don't know an awful lot, but he's writing to the church, the body of believers. He's not writing to church leaders, he's writing to the whole church.

And it was a letter from Jude to Christian believers. It's hard to pin down exactly, but given the many references we have here to the Old Testament scriptures, we'll get into that in the coming weeks, but given all the assumed knowledge, these are probably Christians of a Jewish background.

[14 : 35] And Jude's message to these believers of a Jewish background, it is a sober one, isn't it? It's a sober call.

The main point in verses 3 and 4 is clear. Teachers have slipped in unnoticed and they are a danger to the faith.

And Jude is urging these dear Christian brothers and sisters to be prepared to contend, to fight for the faith. But before we get there, we'll be there next week, thinking about that key call to contend. Before we get there, let us notice this evening the great assurance that Jude wraps around this hard and challenging message. And it is a letter full of great assurances.

Jesus. There's much to comfort in this letter. Just notice the little word beloved. He keeps referring to these dear Christians as beloved.

[15 : 36] Beloved, verse 1. Again, verse 3. You get it again in verse 17. You must remember beloved. And then, again, you have in verse 20.

But you, beloved. These are dear beloved Christians. And notice how he describes these dear Christians in verse 1.

This is what we're going to focus on. He says, to those who are called beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ. three simple points this evening.

And we'll have a lot of three-pointers in this series because Jude loves threes. They're all over. There's about 20 of them. Things come in threes all the way through this letter. But I might try and mix it up and not have three-point sermons.

So keep you on toes. But three points tonight. And these are true of his first readers and you. If you're a Christian here tonight, you are called, you are beloved, you are kept.

[16 : 43] And Jude is stating these things that are true of Christians all through the ages. If you repented of your sin, put your trust in Jesus Christ, then these are true of you.

These are absolutely certain unshakable realities. So first, called. God has called you. It's not just that God has invited you to follow him.

it's not just he's invited you to become part of his eternal family. It's a much stronger word than that. God has summoned you. You were unable to resist.

Chosen in Christ before the very foundations of the world. Yes, you may have struggled and resisted. After all, God calls us, doesn't he, to follow him and that involves taking up our cross, dying to self.

death. We, by our natures, resist that. But consider who it is that's called you. The almighty God of heaven and earth, the one who created you, the one who sustains you.

[17 : 53] That is the one who's called you. And what God calls us to is beautiful and glorious. and it was at his initiative.

It wasn't our idea. It wasn't down to you or me. And that fact is greatly reassuring. It doesn't depend on our intellect, our wisdom. No, it was God who called us.

And that fact ought to give us massive reassurance and confidence. It was never our own idea. We didn't come up with this. We've been called.

But it's even deeper and more glorious than that. One of the marks of the people of God in the Old Testament was that they too were called by God to be his people. Again and again in the seven songs in Isaiah, God speaks of the people he has called, a people to be his own, a people to shine brightly in the world, witnessing to him.

And as Christians call today, we are to join with this ancient people. Our heritage stretched back through the millennia, called by God. And that is important in this letter because not only does it ground us unshakably in God's eternal purposes, that is our foundation.

[19 : 22] He's called us and nothing can shake us or take us away from that. God. But also those whom Jude warns about here are not ultimately called by God.

The dangerous teachers and leaders he warns about in the rest of the letter are not ultimately real believers. Despite how they may look, what they might say, they are ultimately destined for destruction, says Jude.

They are not ultimately called by God. But you are. You are called beloved. These people I'm warning about are not.

And that gives real clarity, doesn't it? Jude is preparing them and us for the contending that's to come. And so we likewise need to be clear, don't we, on ultimate realities, on ultimate destinies.

There are not in the end multiple categories, categories into which humanity will ultimately be seen to be part of. There are only two. There are those who are called by God and safe with him for eternity and those who are destined for destruction.

[20 : 36] And in a bid to be nice and polite and British, we like to pretend that there's more categories than that. But there are not.

Be as clear as Jude is about that reality. If you're not, if you're not clear on the fact you are called and the enemies of the gospel are not, then you will not be prepared to contend for the faith.

You'll always find reasons not to. If you're not clear on the danger that these false leaders actually present, then you're not going to seek to rescue those who are coming under their influence into the orbit of their sphere.

knowing who you are is going to be really crucial for the fight that is to come. But hear the encouragement.

Jude is saying, here is who you are. You have been called by God and there is nothing in all this world that can dislodge you from being his.

[21 : 40] tough opposition, false accusations, betrayals, disappointments at the hands of other people in the visible church, although hugely painful, cannot ultimately in any way prize you out of his grip of the God who's called you.

Beloved, you've been called. That's the first thing Jude wants you to know. Second, beloved, God loves you. He says we're called and he says that we are beloved in God the Father.

Believers have been loved by God the Father. And there is perhaps no greater thing that you or I can know than this and to hear these words spoken to us.

We crave these words, don't we? You are loved. Love is a word we use liberally in this world. Those who profess to love us can and do hurt us.

They can, as is so often sadly the case, wound us deeply and permanently. That is often our experience of love in this world, but God's love is not like that.

[23 : 02] God's love is not like our love. It's of a different order. God's love is just a little bit bigger, a little bit better than ours.

It's on an altogether different scale. God's love is different from our love because his love is eternal and because it's eternal it's unchanging.

As one writer put it, his love is unaltered by the passage of time because God exists beyond time because God is eternal. We can be confident that he will never move in his affections.

God's love to you is unchanging. It will not be altered. Friends, you are beloved in God. That is an unchangeable, unshakable reality.

He won't suddenly drop you because a better offer has come along. And that is good news, isn't it, for all of us, for each of us. Because we are surrounded, aren't we, by relational breakdown.

[24 : 11] From the minor falling out to the heart-wrenching betrayals of one who once professed to never abandon us. We experience broken trust in a hundred ways, perhaps with a spouse or a family member, an employer or colleague, folk in the church, a church leader.

a spouse with a wandering eye, a child who turns their back on us, a son-in-law or daughter-in-law who seems to be the source of souring of relationships, the colleague who makes life in the workplace miserable, the boss who abuses his position.

It may be that people you've looked up to in the church turn out to not be the real deal. It may be that the sorts of people that Jude warns about in this letter so strongly are the sorts of people who have caused you great harm in the past or will do in the future.

Perhaps we're the ones who brought great pain and hardship to others. See, love in this world, it's a messy thing, isn't it? God's love is not like that.

We make a mistake if we map our love onto God's love for us. See, God's love is perfect and so unlike human love in many ways.

[25 : 40] And so to be loved by God, as Jude tells us that we are here, to be loved by God is the most wonderful thing that we can know in this uncertain and often painful world, to know that you are loved by God, that is a certain reality.

That's never going to change. It's the most important thing we must remember and hold onto in an imperfect and sometimes fractured church.

God will never be unfaithful. He will never let us down. He will never falsely accuse us. He will never think the worst of us. Christian, you are loved.

by God. He calls you his beloved. Cherish that truth. Dwell on that reality. Trust him as your pastor and shepherd because he loves you with a perfect love.

He's the one who will never dim in his affections for you. And this is a truth that Jude wants to plant firmly in our minds as we face the possibility of contending and fighting for the faith.

[26 : 53] The battle may well be very bitter, but we have the sweet assurance that we are loved. Loved by God. God. And knowing that we have a secure grounding in the love of God, the eternal, unchanging love of God, that will enable us to fight and contend and agonize for the gospel in the church.

So you are called, you are beloved, and lastly, you are kept. God will keep you. It is wonderfully reassuring, isn't it, to know that we have been called in the past by God.

It's a wonderful reality to know that we are in the present loved by God. He has loved us, he does love us, and he will continue to love us unchangingly. But even if those two realities are clear in our minds, there remains another source, doesn't there, of anxiety and fear.

If you're like me, then your thoughts are not so much consumed with the past, but with the future. The future to us is uncertain, it's unknowable.

We have no idea what will happen tomorrow, or the day after that, or next week. And that is why knowing that we are kept for Jesus Christ is so important.

[28 : 27] God will keep us for the great day of redemption in Jesus Christ. That is what Jude is looking forward to here, that great day when Jesus will return and claim us as his bride.

He will hold us fast. He will never leave or forsake his people. No matter what may come in this world, he will keep us safe until that great day.

No matter the prospect of the battles that Jude is going to outline in the letter, Jesus will keep us. It doesn't promise us an easy life.

It doesn't promise us wealth or fame. But it does promise us that no matter how things go for us in this world, no matter how others may view us, perhaps they consider us not just pitiful for our faith but dangerous.

No matter how things go, God has not let go of us and he will never let go of us. He is keeping us safe until that day.

[29 : 39] We are kept for him forever. As I was preparing this, it reminded me of what we're looking at with the students this past term with the Heidelberg Catechism and particularly the section about the providence and care of God.

It reminds us that all things come to us not by chance but by his fatherly hand. He is keeping us prepared for that day. And question 28 of the Catechism asks this, what does it benefit us to know that God has created all things and still upholds them by his providence?

What's the benefit? Well, here's the answer, that we may be patient in adversity, thankful in prosperity, and that in all things which may here ever befall us, we place our firm trust in our faithful God and father, that nothing shall separate us from his love, since all creatures are so in his hand that without his will, they cannot so much as move.

You see, we are kept in Christ for that day. And these are greatly reassuring words.

They bring huge comfort to us, don't they, as we read them, as we consider them, as we grasp and lay hold of it, to know that we are called and kept and loved.

[31 : 11] That ought to bring great reassurance. And Jude begins and ends his letter with these reminders that he keeps us.

He keeps us. But his gracious care, his protection, his promise to keep us, it goes hand in hand, as we'll see, with our God taking up the responsibility to contend and to keep ourselves in his love. Just notice verse 21 there, which we'll come to in a few weeks. As well as God keeping us, we are to keep ourselves in the love of God.

Jude knows that the divine action and calling and loving and keeping safe, it must be met by faithful human response. We must keep ourselves in his love.

We must contend for the faith. And that is the great concern of his letter that we'll see next time. But that contending that Jude is going to urge us on to, that contending, that fighting, that agonizing for the one true faith, can only take place if we have grasped the reality of God's keeping.

[32 : 36] We can only fight if we're assured that God is keeping us. That is the solid foundation that will enable us to fight for the faith.

And there will be fights. There will be battles. Yes, from outside we expect that, but harder are the fights within.

And that is the sphere in which Jude writes this letter. It's not external problems, it's the enemy within. And to fight that fight, we must know that we are called by God, beloved by him, and kept for eternity.

We need to know that. Know that your foundations are rock solid, because all these things we've looked at tonight are not dependent on us in any way.

these are all true of you because of God and what he has done for you. And knowing these things will give us confidence, and that confidence will give us the poise and steadfastness when we have to face the realities of battles, when we have to fight the enemies within and contend for the faith.

[33 : 56] Lay hold of these realities, know you are called and beloved and kept, because he is able to keep you from stumbling.

He is able to present you on that day blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy to the only God our Savior. And he does it through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom be glory and

majesty, dominion and authority before all time.

And now, forever and forever. Let's pray. Father God, you know that we are a feeble and easily frightened people, and the call to contend shakes us.

but help us to know with great assurance the wonderful reality of being yours, of being called and beloved and kept.

Please, would you write these things, etch them on our hearts, prepare us for the fight, for we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[35 : 19] Amen. Love you. children. Women. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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