Lewistown-Trinity United Methodist Church

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Greetings in the name of the Lord! Our scriptural focus this week is the Letter from Jude. Please read as you are prompted. I hope you enjoy this Bible Study style sermon. The commentary I used was the *New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary* on Jude.

Jude is more challenging than 1st, 2nd, or 3rd John because we’ve never heard of some of the one sentence references. Yet they are important to because many portions of Jude are quoted and expanded upon in 2nd Peter’s Letter. This letter was sent to Jewish-Christians. The false teachings evidently have a Gentile background with no background in the strong, moral, Jewish teachings. Like the Letters from John, with an appeal to stay true to the scripture and traditions of the church, protecting the church from being pulled into secular society and living into society’s values, this letter is important for our time.

Some of the false teachings listed in this letter are: 1. - Freedom in Christ meant that ‘anyone who is saved by grace doesn’t have to worry about the moral law because faith alone is all that’s needed for salvation,’ meaning Christians can do anything they want. 2. – They don’t have to follow the Law of Moses, or even Christ himself. 3. – They can enjoy the fellowship meals without making Communion at the end. 4. – With no moral doctrine, they had no moral code of conduct.

So, to help us understand this letter more fully, and not get drawn into similar teachings of our era, I’d like you to pull up on your Bible app, or turn in your Bible to Jude. It’s between 3rd John and Revelation. Jude’s letter was written carrying authority and power, with exhortation, urgency, and encouragement.

***Read Jude vs. 1 & 2*** - Jude first introduces himself as a servant of Christ and then as James’ brother. James was the leader of the Church in Jerusalem. He names the recipients as ‘called and beloved **IN** God.’ When one is **in** God, they are obedient and abiding in God’s love, and kept safe from deceptive teachings. Then Jude offers a traditional Jewish greeting and gets to the point.

***Read vs. 3 & 4*:** Jude asks them to ‘contend’ for the faith. The metaphor of contend was taken from Greek athletic events – like the Olympics - as a way to compare the athletic struggles of training and competing in the games to the struggles of living a moral life and persevering against those opposed to traditional Christian teachings. Jude asked them to contend for the gospel and morals and contend against the teachings of the false teachers and those who lived no moral law. Using the word ‘contend’ sent a clear signal that there was a serious threat to the church, and its identity.

Then Jude explains the problem. He wrote, ‘certain people have ‘stolen’ in among you,’ meaning the itinerating prophets or teachers, common in the early church, who were causing conflict in the church over doctrinal and ethical matters. These ‘ungodly’ persons were irreverent toward God by their immoral behavior and their rejection of the moral commandments.

Jude uses the word ‘licentiousness’ in the NSRV. You may remember that word from *The Ten Commandments* movie which described what happened as the people partied when Moses was on the mountain getting the Commandments from God. They forgot all moral codes of conduct. Then Jude says they ‘deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ!’ The term Master refers to the head of the household, meaning head of the church - Jesus. The false teachers most likely didn’t deny Christ verbatim, but they did so through their actions that dishonored themselves and Christ. They were defiling the flesh and rejecting the authority of Christ. Jude said to contend and persevere against them.

Have you watched the Olympics the past 2 weeks? There was story after story of contending and perseverance through serious illness, injury, a family being critically hurt, or passing. Virtually every athlete had a story of contending to get to the Olympics and competing in the finals. Jude is asking those in that church, and us today, to contend for the faith – meaning make your faith a priority, the number one priority – with prayer, Bible study, worship, and outreach. Then he gave illustrations of God’s judgment, when his people don’t contend.

***Read vs. 5-16*:** Some of the references are familiar, while others are not. The first example references the 12 spies who explored the Promised Land yet only Joshua and Caleb came back with favorable reports, found in Numbers 14. Because the Israelites refused to enter the land, and didn’t believe God had the power to fulfill his promise, their disobedience resulted in anyone 20 years and older dying in the wilderness, except Joshua and Caleb. So, when we work against God’s effort to keep us in salvation for the final judgment, we are no longer ‘keeping’ in God’s love.

The second ungodly example is when some left the heavenly places in order to have union with human females, found in Genesis 6. As a result, these ‘watchers’ were bound by the Archangel Michael and placed in darkness until the day of judgment, then they will be transferred to the fires of Gehenna, told in 1st Enoch. Jude’s point is the false teachers will experience a similar fate as those evil angels.

The third example was the divine judgement of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19. Their sins were many. The first sin was inhospitality with attempting violence. Hospitality was a high virtue in society. The second sin was that the male inhabitants wanted to rape Lot’s guest. Homosexuality was forbidden in the holiness code in Leviticus 18 and 20. During the Roman era, an older, powerful man would dominate a younger, powerless man. Rape is always a sin.

The third sin was perversion and unnatural lust, not for human flesh, but of a different kind. Angels lusted after humans; later humans lusted after angels, violating the order of creation. Next we find a reference to a story regarding the dispute over Moses’ body. In the *Testament of Moses*, the devil accused Moses of murdering the Egyptian, found in Exodus 2, claiming that Moses was undeserving of an honorable burial by Michael. Michael quoted Zechariah 3, “The Lord rebuke you!” meaning judgment comes only from God. Then Jude presents 3 ungodly individuals from the Old Testament.

First is Cain, who murdered his brother, who exemplified the sins of envy, greed, and hatred. Jude claims the false teachers are ungodly, greedy, and lustful. The second story is found in Numbers 22 & 24, is when Balaam ended up refusing Balak’s temptation to curse Israel, however, Jewish tradition assumed Balaam was a greedy false prophet who led Israel into sexual sin and idolatry with those worshiping Baal.

The third reference is Korah, who led the rebellion against Moses. His punishment was portrayed vividly in the movie *The Ten Commandments*. Korah and those standing with him were swallowed up by the earth, as they fell down to Sheol alive, when the earthquake opened the earth beneath them. Korah rebelled against the authority of Moses and the Laws of God Moses presented the people.

Then Jude shifts to the love feasts. A love feast is a fellowship meal of a community of faith followed by Communion, to mirror what Jesus did on Passover. ‘After the supper, Jesus took the cup, blessed it and gave it to his disciples.’ Yet disobedient persons were eating as much as they could, with no consideration for those coming after them. They would feast, leaving no food for others. Jude condemned this, as did Paul in many of letters to churches and individuals.

Then we find four metaphors of the four regions of creation: sky, earth, sea, and the heavens. These come from the stories in 1st Enoch, chapter 2, where nature follows the laws God established, contrasting the wicked that do not. Then, in 1st Enoch chapter 80, nature no longer follows God’s laws and misleads people in the last days. The deeds of the false teachers are doing the same. They are like the wandering stars/evil angels Michael bound for judgment, who remain in the darkness, and both will receive the fire of eternal judgment.

Enoch, was of the 7th generation after Adam, and was highly regarded by God, and prophesied the final judgment. Yet what might surprise us is – the ungodly in the final judgment will also encompass those who speak harsh words, the grumblers, malcontents (meaning the whiners, protestors, agitators, complainers), and faultfinders; along with those who lust, boast, and say what people want to hear to get ahead. We all fall into at least one of these ungodly sins. Then the closing of the letter reiterates what has been said, with appeals to act as God desires.

***Read Jude 17-23*:** Jude affirms what the Apostles fore-told in the last days and encourages the church to avoid those who are scoffers, indulging in their own lust, and the worldly people who are causing divisions; followed by 7 ways believers can contend for the faith: 1.) build yourself and one another up on the most holy faith – as a priesthood of believers who live holy lives; 2.) pray in the Holy Spirit, allowing the Spirit to direct your prayers; 3.) keep yourself **in** the love of God in moral works; 4.) look forward to the mercy of our Lord when Jesus returns.

Then Jude shifts and encourages the believers to help those who follow false teachers: 5.) have mercy on those wavering, as you expect to receive mercy; 6.) save, actually snatch some out of the eternal danger they are in, and look out for others; and 7.) have mercy on others with fear, meaning don’t get pulled or swayed into following the false teachers – be on guard to protect yourself and don’t get yourself soiled in the process. Then Jude ends with a doxology, which is appropriate, because this letter was read during worship. The doxology reminds the church to not fall into sin, so they can stand in God’s presence before the throne.

I think you’d agree, there was a lot to unpack that we would never understand just reading 25 verses. The 5 lessons from the Letter of Jude are: 1.) Contend for the faith: both in your heart and in your actions; 2.) Remain faithful to Christ every day; 3.) Be ready for scoffers and false teachers, in your midst; 4.) Build yourselves up in the faith and love of Christ; and 5.) Snatch others from the fire and don’t get burnt yourself.

When we are **in** God, we are obedient and abiding in God’s love, and kept safe from deceptive teachings. We are beloved, and the Father has shown us his love through Jesus Christ and through the amazing workings of the Holy Spirit in our lives. “Now to him who is able to keep you from falling, and to make you stand without blemish in the presence of his glory with rejoicing, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority, before all time and now and forevermore. Amen.” *(Jude 24 & 25)*