Contend for the Faith

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[0:00] We begin this evening with an exhortation from Jude.

! We covered an exhortation earlier, maybe that was in Peter.! But you might recall that an exhortation is used in Scripture to strongly encourage someone to do something.
It is used to encourage someone principally to do the right thing. And verse 3 of Jude is an exhortation.
And remember there's only one chapter in Jude, 25 verses, so this is verse 3. Beloved, while I was making every effort to write to you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you exhorting that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.
So Jude begins this verse of Scripture with the word beloved. We've looked at that before. this man who self-identified as a slave of Christ is exercising his great pastoral concern for the readers of this book down through the years and through the millennia.
[2:01] This book's been around for 2,000 years. I believe the case can be made that Jude was concerned for his readers in the first century.

That's when he was alive. Makes sense. But I think Jude would make a case if he were here tonight that he was equally concerned for his readers in the 21st century.
If he could see that far in advance. Some of the New Testament authors that exercise this pastoral concern are Paul and James and Peter and John.
The concern then being exercised here is not being sentimental. Rather, it is an expression of affection that is deeply rooted in the mind and soul of the writer.
Now we all know and we understand that the ultimate author of Scripture is the Spirit of God. We know that. And we can authoritatively state that this level of compassion that Jude is pointing out here lies within God Himself and is expressed to us in these inspired words that I just read.
[3:49] It is quite interesting that Jude did not set out to issue a warning concerning individuals that had crept into the church and were doing great harm.

Instead, he sat down at his desk. I assume he had a desk. Maybe it was a rock. But he sat down intending to write about our common salvation.
And instead, the Holy Spirit got a hold of Jude and directed him to write about the need for every believer in every age to contend earnestly for the faith.
And Jude used an expression here stating that he was making every effort to write about our common salvation.
Maybe when we get to heaven we can sit down with him. What were you going to write? I doubt it. But he used an expression that's very strong in the Greek language, the language of the New Testament.
[5:06] Effort is the word spude, which means that Jude was hurrying to complete his book on our common salvation.

And as hard as he tried, he could not complete the task. The Holy Spirit had other plans.
God got in the way. And he can do that anytime he wants. I think he did everything and he changed here in midstream, so to speak. And he changed because of the urgency of the calling that the church to battle in order to deal with those who were doing great harm to the church and even leading to the destruction of some churches.
So this warning flag had been raised. It was a warning flag and as a result of that warning flag raised by the Spirit of God, Jude had to abandon the original project.
He couldn't complete it. But there was this urgency that Jude felt of calling the church to battle.
[6:36] That's the warning flag. And we have Jude abandoning his first writing project about salvation and giving really what is a dire warning to get in the fight of saving the church.

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And Jude said, you do that, he's writing to the church, we're a church, by contending for the faith. So the very salvation that Jude wanted to write about was under assault by the apostates that had entered the church.
Now the church, we know, is engaged in a war on truth. We have been locked in this fight ever since the church was born on Pentecost and we will be engaged in this war until Christ removes us from this planet.
Which, if we want to speak for practically it could happen at any moment. We don't know when, but it could happen. The war on truth has claimed unknown numbers of people.
They were bought into the enemy's lies and right now and forever will spend an eternity in hell for having rejected the truth that was given to them by the Spirit of God.
[8:14] Now as in any war there has been great defenders of the truth, the men and women who have come before us formed a barrier against error and stood for Christ and His Word even to the forfeiting of their own life.

these are men and women in this world who will lose their life even today. Even today people lost their lives rather than deny the Lord who purchased them.
We should study the lives of the defenders of the faith and be like them. Now in any war there has also been defectors.
Some men and women have gone over to the other side. They joined the enemy. There have been many defectors all the way back into the New Testament period.
Many of the inspired writers had to contend with those defectors who spread error. Paul dealt with the legalists. John had to battle the Gnostics to name just two.
[9:39] So the truth war has had its defenders and it's had its defectors. Now you may recall Jude is the half-brother of Jesus.

He didn't inform us of that but we can track that in Scripture and he stood for truth and warned his generation and ours about this great war on truth.
And Jude produced a short book and it concerns standing for truth. The book is only 25 verses long.
As I've said before it lives in the shadow of the book of Revelation but it is powerful and it is packed with information on how we can be defenders in this war on truth.
Indeed the Spirit of God gives us through this brief writing really our marching orders. He's given us our marching orders. So that's what we end up with here.
[10:56] Our marching orders are packed with information on how we can be defenders in the war on truth. We are compelled to contend for the faith.

And by the way, this is the only book in the Bible where the author tells us he sat down to write one thing and ended up writing something else.
Now we don't know what prompted Jude to change his mind. Obviously the Holy Spirit led him in another direction.
And there's no doubt that some human events around Jude compelled him to change the content of his writing.
Most likely there were a series of events that came to Jude's attention he probably saw a trend that was taking people in the church away from the truth that had been delivered by the saints.
[12:03] The salvation that Jude wanted to write about was being seriously undermined by forces that had come in to spread lies concerning the truth of Scripture.

Now Jude walking by the Spirit of God and he was correctly surmised that the very salvation he wanted to celebrate was in grave danger of being compromised.
the problem was so serious in Jude's day that he sounded an alarm and he issued a call to arms for the church in many respects an infant church.
So we have Jude drawing a line in the sand asking who's going to be on the Lord's side. Now this alarm bell went off in Jude's head and most likely had to do with a serious problem that was affecting the church in his day.
And the problem was this guys the church had been infiltrated. The church had been infiltrated. And Jude even describes the infiltrators as those who crept in unnoticed.
[13:31] these infiltrators came in and tampered with the grace of God. And any time someone tampers with the grace of God, they are deceivers and defectors.

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Tampered grace is a form of denying the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ. Now we don't know the specifics of what set Jude off.
We do know that it was so serious that it caused Jude to change directions on his writing project. Because Jude correctly surmised you know the church is in grave danger.
And he was correct in noting that the danger was from within. That's important.
It was inside the church in Jude's day. And the very fact that the danger was from within is a great clue to us.
[14:46] People within the true church, if it's a true church, are exposed to truth. We do that here. They hear truth preached, taught, week in and week out.

But knowing the truth and then rejecting it is a grave sin before God. In fact, I'd have to say, I don't think I get much more serious than that.
And there is, of course, a term for these people. And we've looked at it last week and in previous weeks. Anyone who is exposed to truth, seemingly accepts that truth, and then rejects that truth, is known in Scripture as an apostate.
When apostates infiltrate a church, church, they bring with them the goal of turning that church into a center of apostasy.
The true church must always be on guard against apostates and apostasy. Now, don't think it can't happen here.
[16:07] Here we are on the buckle of the Bible belt, but it happens all the time. It happens all the time. Brothers, there's apostate churches within five miles of where I stand right now.

And all of this that Jude is writing is designed to protect the church from apostasy. Now, the Lord Jesus spoke of this in Matthew and in Luke.
And these are his words from Luke's Gospel. I'm going to read to you Luke chapter 8, verses 5 to 8. Dr. Luke said this, The sower went out to sow his seed.
And as he sowed, some fell beside the road, and it was trampled underfoot. And the birds of the air ate it up.
Other seed fell on rock. As soon as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. And other seed fell among the thorns, and when the thorns grew up, they choked it out.
[17:23] another seed fell on good soil. And growing up, it produced a crop 100 times as great.

As he said these things, he would call out, He who has an ear to hear, let him hear. Well, to say the least, the followers of Christ were confused.
They didn't know what this parable meant. A lot of people today don't know what it means. So the Lord gives an explanation. I thought that was rather nice of him, since I probably didn't understand it either.
But he gives an explanation to them and details the meaning of these words. Again in Luke 8, but now verses 11 to 15.
Now the parable is this. The seed is the word of God. And those beside the road is those who have heard.
[18:34] And then the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart so that they will not believe and be saved. And those on the rock are those who when they hear, receive the word with joy.

But they have no root. They believe for a while and in a time of temptation fall away. And the seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of life and do not bear fruit.
And then Jesus said this, but the seed in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart and hold it fast and bear fruit with perseverance.
Beautiful words. we see in this parable three different cases where people hear the word of God and at some period in their life they turn away from it.
Now that's happened in every church. It's happened in every church. That is the message of Jude. Now there is no doubt in my mind that the greatest danger to the church in our day is the infiltration of apostates within the church.
[20:15] And that takes us a long way back. But the good news is the parable also speaks of good soil. And we should be happy for that.

In the midst of all these trials there's good soil. There exists within the church of good soil true believers.

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And they are rooted in Christ Jesus and they produce legitimate fruit for the kingdom of God. The apostates do not produce true abiding fruit.
Why? They're not connected to the vine. And that's where fruit comes from. Fruit doesn't come from the branch. Comes from the vine.
Through the branch they have no root. Another example in scripture, another apostate I might say, was Simon the magician.
[21:18] Remember that guy? It's in the book of Acts. He claimed that he believed. He went to great lengths telling people that he believed.

He followed through with New Testament baptism. That's always a good thing. Maybe I should say usually. He followed after the apostles and he observed them.
He was watching them. And when he saw the Holy Spirit manifested in them, he went to them and he said, I too want to receive the Spirit of God.
But what was behind this? He had a desire to market his magic tricks and to make more money. And he knew if he had the Spirit of God, he could do amazing things. At least he thought so. He reasoned that with the Holy Spirit in him, he would have tremendous power to put on display to his audience.
[22:30] Quite frankly, there's a few modern-day televangelists, that sounds like. Well, Simon was found out. The apostles figured him out, declared him to be an apostate within the church.

apostasy has always been around the true church. Even large churches, large denominations practice today a form of apostasy.
Liberalism is apostate and the orthodox theology is an apostate. The cults practice some form of apostasy.
The very extreme fringe of the charismatic movement, guys trying to make trees walk and trains fly, they're into apostasy. So Jude tells us this apostasy existed 1900 years ago and it will exist in our day and it does.
And it does. And he tells us what to do about it. He says we must contend.
[23:58] We've got to be contenders. We are to contend earnestly for the church. And that word contend is very interesting.

In Pognizo, I have no idea if I did that right. But it's from the root word which translates agonize. Now that we can hold on to.
We get an English word from this in our language agonize. Same word. It means that we are to fight strenuously for and defend vigorously.
apostasy. The type of defending the faith strenuously for could bring about our own agony.
It may result in that. In the Greek language, it is a continuous command, meaning we are to continue to the end because apostasy is going to be with us throughout our lifetime.
[25:12] In the 21st century, just like the 1st century, it's going to be around. Now what are we to contend for? Well, we're to contend for the faith.

faith. And don't think of the faith as I use it here as some unknowable mystical thing that we talk about quite frequently in here.
It's not even our faith. It's the faith that God has given everyone who belonged to Him from before the foundation of the world.
Ephesians 2.8 If you don't have it, memorize it. We'll have a test next week. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.
God's given the church a gift, His faith to believe. The faith is what the Lord has entrusted us to. It's worth more than all the gold, and precious stones in the universe.
[26:27] It is the treasure from heaven. It is elsewhere called the pearl of great price, and we are to guard the faith vigorously and share liberally and accurately with people that need to hear it.

Now, just who are the guardians of the faith that has been once delivered to the saints? Well, it would be easy to say the pastors are.
It would be easy to say, well, teachers are. But in truth, every believer is a guardian of the faith.
We are to protect the truth. It is truth that we are to proclaim. but if we do not protect the truth, mark this down, guys, in your mental file, in our day, if we do not protect the truth, meaning the accuracy of the Word of God, there won't be any truth to protect.
Even now, entire denominations have departed from the truth. I can name them, but I won't.

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[27:51] The truth we protect is fragile. And the enemy wants us off. He doesn't want it way over here. He wants us off that much.

I remember well the mission to Mars, unmanned. They're going to land a probe on Mars. and one group of scientists computed in inches and feet and one computed in the British form.
And by the time they got to where Mars was supposed to be, they were millions of miles away. And millions of dollars were lost. You've got to be on point.
But lots of denominations have departed. And he just wants us off a degree or two. Well just how serious is God about the preservation of his faith?
Listen to Paul in Galatians chapter 1. This really gives you a grip on how serious God is. Galatians chapter 1 to the churches in Galatia.
[28:58] It's a group of churches. And he says, I'm amazed. I'm astounded.

I'm told that's an extremely strong word in the Greek language. I'm amazed that you are so quickly deserting him who called you by the grace of Christ.
What did they get called to? By the apostates. A different gospel. Which is really not another. only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.
But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, let him be cursed.
The word is accursed. And then he repeats that. He said, as I've said before, so I say now again, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, let him be accursed.
[30:19] It's a serious matter. It's a very serious matter. anyone who preaches a watered down or inaccurate version of the grace of God that was delivered to us by Christ and the apostles through Christ is to be accursed.

in the original American Standard version, the word used there is anathema. Anathema literally means they are to be eternally damned of God.
That's pretty serious. I don't think in scripture it gets any more serious than that. So remember this, guys. There's a war going on.
many have fallen in the battlefield. We must contend until the Lord takes us home to be with Him.
We are to fight for the truth as He Himself is the truth. And believe it or not, that's where we're going to pick it up next time. And until then, be blessed.
[31:47] Let's go to the word in prayer. Lord, we thank You for Your grace and Your mercy. We thank You for Your word, Lord. We thank You for Jude.

He set out to write to us probably a great book. I know it would be a great book on our faith, but you had other ideas, and now we're learning more and more about what's plaguing the church in Jude's day and in ours.
Lord, may we be contenders for the faith, which has been delivered to us and has once been handed down to the saints.
I ask all this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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