

Jude: Living in the Truth Part Three *Jude 20-23¹*

I know I don't have to tell you that we are facing very unusual times as a society and as a church. I know that many of you are grateful that our church is taking the precautions as mandated by our state and county health departments, in order to protect each other and to stop the spread of the virus. I also know that there are some in our church family that are not happy that we haven't opened up for services yet, and some feel that, at the least, this is an overreach by our government, and at the most it is actually something intentional and sinister.

I think it's going to be interesting when we can finally open back up again, to see who in our church family will return. There has been a great deal of study that is being done by Christian research organizations to attempt to understand how Christians and churches are responding to what's going on. For instance, one study done by the Barna group found that, within two months of churches going to a purely video format (like we are doing), that 30% of regular church attenders quit church altogether.² That's right - 30% of regular attenders quit watching video and quit staying connected to their church.

Another researcher has determined that, so far, among churches that have begun to open, and based on people's pre-Covid behaviors, they've been able to identify who *will not* return to church;³

- 1) The decreasing attendance member. If your pattern of attendance *before* Covid-19 was dropping, the odds are that you stopped altogether and is less likely to come back when we open.
- 2) If you were not plugged in to the church beyond worship attendance, the likelihood of returning is lower. In other words, if *before* Covid-19 you were not in a small group or involved in a ministry, there's less of a chance that you'll come back when we open.

¹ Resources used for this series:

- The Letters of John and Jude (The Daily Study Bible Series), William Barclay
- 1 & 2 Peter, Jude: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition, Daniel G. Powers
- Hebrews through Revelation: Beacon Bible Commentary, Ralph Earle, Ed.
- More Hard Sayings of the New Testament, Peter H. Davids
- James, 1 & 2 Peter, Jude: The Communicator's Commentary, Paul A. Cedar
- 1-2 Peter, 1-3 John, Jude: A Bible Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition, David A. Case and David W. Holdren

² <https://www.barna.com/research/new-sunday-morning/>

³ <https://churchanswers.com/blog/five-types-of-church-members-who-will-not-return-after-the-quarantine/>

- 3) If, before Covid-19, you viewed church as just another activity that you attended among other activities, like your child's sports events or frequent outings *instead of* church, you probably won't be committed to church when it opens.
- 4) The constant critic. If you were a person who constantly criticized the pastor or church before we closed, you are probably *still* complaining, and you probably won't be back (not sure that's a bad thing!).
- 5) The cultural Christian. If you only attended church because it gave you a better cultural standing – maybe it helped you on your resume, or helped you get on some kind of community or organizational board or group, than you are a cultural Christian. And by now, you've figured out you don't really need to attend church (you probably aren't watching this, anyway).

I don't know how that makes you feel to hear those things, but I can tell you, as your pastor, it's heartbreaking. But I believe that God is using this time to sift the church, so that, in the words of Hebrews:

“God is shaking everything that can be shaken, so that what can't be shaken remains.” (Hebrews 12:27)

I am praying that none of that list applies to any of us, that this sifting time is making us stronger, and I pray constantly for the unity of our church – something that I think is a keynote of West Valley Church. We are very good at our unity. I pray that we will maintain and carry on that love and unity through this time and when we reopen.

If nothing else – at the very *least* – during this time, we are learning that the church is *not* the building; we are still the church even though we are temporarily not worshipping together. If you don't believe that – if you believe that church is defined by meeting together in a building, then I challenge you to look at the Church in places like China, Iran, and Syria; they can't worship together without putting people's lives in jeopardy. And yet the church is growing the fastest in those places and people are coming to faith in Christ and being disciplined by the thousands – *without* a church building. And that's why this passage today is so incredibly important. Jude is describing what it means to be the church. He's spent the main section of his letter warning them of the false Christians that have slipped in among them, so now Jude affirms what a true Christian is. If you and I can be these things *now*, it will make our worship even more powerful when we *are* together again in the building.

Today we're in part three of our sermon series, “Living the Truth; studying the words of Jude,” looking at the New Testament letter of Jude. The passage we are looking at today is really an affirmation and celebration of what it means to be a true Christian. I encourage you to turn in your Bibles or Bible apps to this section – Jude 20-23. You'll want to follow along as we go through it. Here's what it says:

“But you, dear friends, must build each other up in your most holy faith, pray in the power of the Holy Spirit, and await the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will bring you eternal life. In this way, you will keep yourselves safe in God's love.

And you must show mercy to those whose faith is wavering. Rescue others by snatching them from the flames of judgment. Show mercy to still others, but do so with great caution, hating the sins that contaminate their lives.” (Jude 20-23, nlt)

I'll say it again – this passage is an affirmation and celebration of true Christianity, and it gives us some very clear descriptions so that we, as Christians, can make sure we have these characteristics in our lives and in our church, in “ever increasing measure” as Peter said, so that we can keep ourselves close to Christ. If you haven't figured it out yet, what this passage describes are not suggestions; they are *commands*. God is commanding us through his Word to make sure we understand what it means for us to be followers of Jesus. Make no mistake my dear friends; this is not something followers of Jesus ought to aspire to as if it were some lofty height to achieve; this is the ground floor of our faith. These instructions may be short, but their scope and reach is wide and long. In that passage I just read we find a succinct description of the essentials of theology, including specific references to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and the essentials of the Christian life, including prayer and the importance of faith, hope, and love. He concludes with a reminder that we are here to reach and help rescue others for Christ.

Jude begins by returning his focus to his “dear friends.” Remember that's a phrase he used in the first verse (and that Peter used in his letters), that describes his deep love and affection for those who are reading it. Remember, too, that in verse three he urged us to “contend for the faith,” and now he describes what that means.

This passage can be broken down into just two parts, with both being equally important. The first part is that we are...

1. Commanded to remain strong. (vs. 20-21)

Your Bible might say, “keep yourselves strong,” so notice that it is plural. In the translation I read, it says it more specifically: “you must build each other up...”

I think that in the church of today we've emphasized people's individual faith and responsibility so much that we don't recognize and value the importance of the Christian community – our church, our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. We have this “most holy faith,” Jude says, and it's our responsibility to build *each other* up – not just build ourselves. In the early days of our faith history, God asked Cain where his brother was (God was giving Cain an opportunity to confess, because God knew Cain had murdered his brother, Abel). Do you remember Cain's sinful response? It was:

“How should I know; am I my brother's keeper?” (Genesis 4:8-10)

That turns out to be a rhetorical question because the answer should be obvious: YES! Yes you are your brother's keeper. Folks, if our faith is going to remain strong and we are going to make a difference for Christ in this world, we need each other and we must look out for each other! By the way, that's why small groups are *still* so important – they give us an opportunity to obey this command!

I received a letter from someone complaining about wearing masks, and about the church being closed. Keep in mind, we are doing these things in order to help protect the most vulnerable among us during this pandemic. But this person said, “Everyone's protection is THEIR (own) responsibility; not mine...” Doesn't that sound suspiciously like Cain? That's not the side I want to be on, and I sure don't want to have Cain's attitude, because that didn't end so well for him.

We build *each other* up in our “most holy faith.” And, “most holy faith” means “A Christian’s life is built on the truth of God and the truth from God. It is holy because it is a faith based on God’s revelation to us, focused on Jesus Christ, God’s Son, our Savior and Lord. We mature by (helping each other) study the faith, learn to apply the faith, and by sharing the faith with others. It is also a holy faith because its goal is the transformation of those who believe (Matthew 5:48; Romans 12:1–3; 2 Corinthians 3:17–18; Ephesians 3:14–21; Philippians 1:9–11; 1 Peter 1:15; 2 Peter 1:3–9; 3:18).⁴ There is only one faith that can do that, and it is given to us by God himself.

As a part of building each other up in our faith, we are also commanded to “Pray in the power of the Holy Spirit.” What does this mean? It means we are commanded to be filled with, and following, the Holy Spirit. It means our prayers (listen to me!) our prayers should be continual, and they should be prayed in submission to and in dependence on the Holy Spirit. Otherwise, if we don’t pray that way, we are simply rattling off the list of things we want for ourselves, or are praying in our own wisdom. Praying in the Holy Spirit is praying from a surrendered life, submitted to God’s desires, not ours (Romans 8:26–27), being purified by the Holy Spirit. If you want an example of that, how do you think Jesus was able to pray in the Garden on the night before he was crucified, “Yet not as I will, but as you will.” Only the Holy Spirit could lead one to pray so selflessly.

Jude says if we will do this, we will each “keep yourselves in God’s love.” If you remember from last week’s message, one of the key themes in this book, as well as in 1 & 2 Peter, is how important it is for us to keep ourselves close in our relationship to Christ. God will *keep us* through our salvation by Christ, but it is also our responsibility to *keep ourselves and each other* close to Jesus by obedience. This is the same thing Jesus said in John 15, when he told us to “remain in my love” (John 15:9), and then he explained to his disciples that the way we do that is by obeying his commands (John 15:10). This is the exact opposite of what the false Christians were doing.

Then the last command is to focus on the future as we’re told to “await the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ.” He’s referring to Jesus’ second coming. This is our ultimate hope, and it is the promise that allows us to endure anything and everything – even death itself. This hope means we don’t just hang on for the future so that we’re no good in the present. Waiting for his return keeps us active in our faith today and every day.

The second command, which is true to God’s heart, is that we are...

2. Commanded to reach others. (vs. 22–23)

Jude describes three groups of people that we are commanded to reach – which means we are to either reach Christians who are drifting dangerously away from their faith, or we are to introduce non-Christians to Jesus. Got that?

So the first group we are commanded to reach are “doubters,” and we must show mercy to them. Jude is talking about people in the church who were beginning to buy into the false

⁴ David A. Case and David W. Holdren, [*1-2 Peter, 1-3 John, Jude: A Commentary for Bible Students*](#) (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2006), 374.

Christian's sinful lifestyle and teaching. Remember, our hope is in Christ's mercy toward us, so we are commanded to extend that same mercy to our brothers and sisters when they are going astray. We *are* each other's keepers! That's what you heard me say to our new members, and that's what we do in each small group. We hold each other accountable; we love each other and the church too much to let each other slip away from our faith! We expect the most out of each other, and we help each other reach it!

Then we are commanded to "rescue others by snatching them from the flames of judgment." Have you seen those viral videos of people involved in car accidents, and their vehicle is on fire, and some good Samaritans pull the victim from the car just before it is engulfed in flames? That's *exactly* the picture here. "When we help others come to faith in Christ, in a sense, we are snatching them from the fires of hell that would have been their eternal destiny."⁵ It's true my friends: there are people who are headed to judgment and hell if we don't share the Good News of how much God loves them! We are *commanded* to do this – every one of us!

Are there people you know – maybe even in your family – that don't know Jesus? Who are you expecting will introduce them to Jesus, when YOU are the one who knows them...when God has intentionally placed YOU in their life? If not you, then who?

When Jude said to "snatch" them, it is an urgent and direct path of action that's required for the salvation of some people. That's how urgent it is. But again – we do so with mercy; there is no excuse for being rude or judgmental toward someone. Mercy and love rule all our interactions.

Finally, we are commanded to show a third group mercy but "to do so with great caution, hating the sins that contaminate their lives." Your Bible might say, "hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh." In the original language this is an extremely vivid word picture. The type of clothing he describes is the long undergarment that they would wear next to their skin – like a t-shirt that would go from their shoulders to their knees. But the "contamination" or "stain" described filth in that undergarment...more specifically, human excrement, or a drunk's vomit. Got the picture in your mind? (Sorry, but don't blame me!) That describes the spiritual condition of someone who is lost in their sin. Jude probably included in this group the false Christians. As much as he warns people against them, they are still not too far to try to reach. So to even those that we may think are the worst sinner, we are to show mercy. But we must try to reach them with great caution – in other words, making sure we don't get drawn into their sin with them.

So in all cases, we are not excused to be rude or judgmental – we must show them the same mercy we have received from God. But we also must realize that there is extreme urgency in our need to introduce people to Jesus Christ – they are headed to judgment and hell without him, and they don't even realize how sin has made them so spiritually filthy.

My dear Christian friends: PLEASE hear this. This isn't me speaking, even though it's my voice you are hearing, God is commanding us to remain strong in our faith by holding each other accountable, being submitted to the Holy Spirit, praying in ways and about things

⁵ David A. Case and David W. Holdren, *1-2 Peter, 1-3 John, Jude: A Commentary for Bible Students* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2006), 376.

that GOD desires (*not* us), keeping our hope in Christ's mercy and return. That gives us the sense of urgency to obey his command to reach others – showing mercy to those who doubt and are struggling in their faith, those who don't know Jesus, and even those who seem like the worst of sinners to us.

Pray for the church

Do you realize you are not a Christian? God loves you! Accept Jesus!

Pray for unsaved.

I want to sign off by quoting what Jude says, which we will look at next week:

“Now all glory to God, who is able to keep you from falling away and will bring you with great joy into his glorious presence without a single fault. All glory to him who alone is God, our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord. All glory, majesty, power, and authority are his before all time, and in the present, and beyond all time! Amen.”
(Jude 24-25, nlt)