

On the Line: Tough Love in High Stakes
Week 1: A Time to Contend

I. We are starting a new series of messages and I need to put my cards on the table from the onset. I study a lot in preparation for messages each week. Most weeks I feel like I have a good foundation to begin with. My alma mater, Dallas Seminary, made sure of this fact. The TH.M program is 120 credit hours. The reason why Dallas Seminary prides themselves in having the longest masters program on planet earth is that the program covers all 66 books of the Bible. And while that is true, I must have been late on the morning we covered Jude and by the time I'd arrived we'd moved on to the book of Revelation.

A. Just a few weeks ago, I found myself reading through the book or more accurately the letter of Jude and it was incredible. I had no idea the powerful punch this short letter contained. Hence how we got to today and the start of a new sermon series. We'll take the next 4 weeks to look at this letter which is 23 verses long. What is so enjoyable about dissecting these shorter letters is that every word is chosen with precision. Longer doesn't always mean better. Jude has some very interesting qualities about it, but it is so rich! I'm so excited to learn more along with you all. So those are the cards I'm putting on the table. I am very much so learning and reading everything I can about the letter of Jude. Read the letter and if you have questions or areas of interest, send me an email (craig.rush@tabchurch.org) or online write it in the chat and we can build the sermon series as we go.

B. To understand a letter and the context of a letter there are a few questions that need to be answered:

1. [Slide]: Who wrote it?

The letter which we'll see in a moment makes the author clear.

2. [Slide]: To whom was it written?

This is a more challenging question to answer but I take the audience to be Jewish Christians in the diaspora (or exile). There were pockets of Jewish people throughout the Roman Empire living in a "pagan" environment. We'll unpack this more throughout the series but make a mental note.

3. [Slide]: When was it written?

There's legitimate debate on this one but probably in the 60's. No not on the heels of Woodstock, in A.D. 60! Possibly later but the main point of the date is to remember that at least 30 years has passed since Jesus's death and resurrection. Jude and the other New Testament authors were still unpacking the faith handed down to the saints and what it meant for Christ followers to live out the Christian life. That's important as we study the letter.

4. [Slide]: Why was it written?

This is the million-dollar question. Jude will not pull any punches with this one. These early Christ followers have found themselves in a situation in which the stakes are high and they aren't even aware. The stakes are so high that eternity is in the balance because the very thing that is on the line is the purity of the faith! Jude writes a letter to tell these Christ followers:

a. [Slide]: It's time to contend!

Let's hear from Jude himself:

Jude 3 (CSB) [Slide]: 3 Dear friends, although I was eager to write you about the salvation we share, I found it necessary to write, appealing to you to contend for the faith that was delivered to the saints once for all.

(1) There is a time to be diplomatic but the circumstances surrounding Jude's letter was not one of those times. The root Greek word for contend is "argon." That word would have raised the ears of a Jewish audience living in the diaspora or Roman cities because the Romans were not a diplomatic lot. Doing battle was kind of their past time and "argon" was the word used to define events in the coliseum (Think Russell Crowe and Gladiator) and events in the stadium.

(2) The Super Bowl is today, and could you imagine if Joe Burrow called a timeout and went over to the Rams defense and said, "We need some points guys! We're going to run a post route into the middle, and you need to let us score!" He would get laughed off the field because there is:

[Slide]: Too much on the line!

- b. Jude was writing to a group of Christians who were tolerating false teaching in their midst. Why? We don't know for sure. Partially, the false teachers were being stealthy, but maybe for the same reason we sometimes tolerate it in the church today. We opt for passiveness to avoid conflict. When the stakes are this high and we choose that route there is always a tremendous wake of destruction in the path. Some things are worth fighting for and according to Jude the purity of the faith is one of those things.
- c. We'll come back to verse 3 but the "why" question is so important as we get started!

C. Jude 1 let's go!

Jude 1 (CSB) [Slide]: 1 Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James: To those who are the called, the loved by God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ.

1. Who -

- a. Jude identifies himself out of the gate as a servant or slave of Jesus Christ. He's got a hard letter to write. In fact, he was eager to write something different but when he got word of the false teaching in this community of believers, he was compelled to confront it. A slave or servant in the Roman world was the bottom rung of the social ladder. It was a place of humility but not a place of insignificance. I understand the language of servant or slave is difficult for us and rightfully so, but it is important as to why Jude and many of the other New Testament authors identify themselves as such. A servant or slave in the Roman Empire, which is the macro cultural context of the New Testament, carried with them the authority of the one to whom they were enslaved. There were instances in which slaves of Caesar were insulted by noblemen and it was the nobleman who received a one-way ticket to the afterlife. It's important for us as we approach this letter to keep in mind that Jude isn't using the term "servant of Jesus Christ" to appear humble. He's saying that in himself he's got nothing, but he's not operating in his own authority. Jude is a slave of Jesus Christ and as such represents the authority of Jesus. That's a powerful reminder for us today as well. In ourselves we don't have any authority, but we do have authority derived from who we represent, Jesus Christ. But our authority better reflect our Master!
- b. Jude also identifies himself, secondly, as the brother of James. If you looked up popular baby names in the Bethlehem Gazette in the 1st Century, you would have seen Jude. Jude or Judas is the same name derived from Judah. Very popular name, but this Jude makes it clear who he is by identifying himself with his older brother James.

[Slide]: This is Jesus' little brother!

- (1) Half-brother to be specific. That is so cool because every indication in the gospels is that Jesus' siblings thought He was crazy during His lifetime. But after His death and resurrection, James and Jude place their faith in Him as their Savior and Lord! To me that is a remarkable fact of the authenticity of the resurrection! Jesus' little brother is identifying himself as a slave of Jesus Christ!

2. Audience - Jude doesn't clarify the specific audience to whom he writes but he does address his audience:

[Slide]: To those who are the called, loved by God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ. Jude 1

- a. Jude reminds those reading the letter, including us, that we are the called ones. We often think about church in terms of an event or a location, but that is the true definition of the Church! The ones called out! We've been selected for a God ordained, God appointed destiny! To be called out involves movement from one place to another and Jude lets us know our new location. Some of your translations say "by" as does mine (the Christian Standard and NIV) and some of your translations say "in." You really can't go wrong either way, but "in" seems to me to be the preferred translation. The Dative Case ending can be a dative of instrument or location. Instrument being "how" the calling is done, or location "where" are the called ones being called to. The idea is we're being wooed toward the Father and kept by Him for Jesus Christ. Jude has an eschatological aim or end times intent in this verse. Loved in Him and guarded for Jesus Christ! Simply stated: God is for us and He's preserving us or guarding us for the sake of Jesus Christ!
- b. Let's not misunderstand what this implies. If there's a need for preservation or being guarded that means we live in an age that is hostile to the faith. The road between our salvation and our eternal inheritance isn't a smooth path. We are citizens of a new kingdom spiritually but physically remain in the kingdom of

this world. That's a life of tension and friction. We have an adversary, but Satan doesn't compare to our Advocate! We're guarded by the Sovereign Lord who ultimately calls the shots! That's the most secure location to be as we make our way into eternity. But it's good to remember we're in hostile territory. The plan of salvation isn't aimed at making us comfortable in this life. God is calling us in love and keeping us for that day in which we're presented to our Lord. Let's celebrate that we've been called out with a God appointed destiny and stop trying to be camouflaged into the world.

Jude 2 (CSB) [Slide]: 2 May mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you.

3. Jude offers a brief prayer before getting into the heart of the letter and his requests to God on behalf of those reading are for mercy, peace, and love to be multiplied. Mercy is sometimes understood as "not giving someone what they really deserve." Someone has wronged another, and mercy is opting out of getting even. Mercy as it relates to God's actions to sinful humanity is more in line with the Hebrew word *hesed* or covenant faithfulness. It's the idea that we serve a God that goes all out for us! He goes beyond obligation to express over the top faithfulness. Mercy is an important theme in Jude's letter. Peace refers to their overall wellbeing (the idea of shalom) and love in this instance isn't love for others but their reflection on being called in God's love. For those being kept by God, the mercy, peace, and love of God don't fluctuate, but our awareness of those attributes of God and our experience of them absolutely does! The mercy, peace, and love of God aren't typically multiplied when everything is smooth sailing in our life. It's usually through the disruption of this life that the multiplication happens when it is needed most. Those receiving the letter will have a hard task before them as we'll see later. There was a lot on the line. False teachers had come in and we're wreaking havoc in the family of God. But God's mercy, peace, and love are multiplied in the challenges of life.

Jude 3 (CSB) [Slide]: 3 Dear friends, although I was eager to write you about the salvation we share, I found it necessary to write, appealing to you to contend for the faith that was delivered to the saints once for all.

4. Why - The faith is not the same thing as having faith. Jude isn't compelling his audience to contend for faith in the sense of our belief in God. That may be true in other passages, but in Jude 3 he is referring to:

[Slide]: The Faith

- a. This is a letter of exhortation! Jude is instructing those reading to go to battle for the faith. The faith is the testimony of Jesus Christ. Who He is, what He came to do, and our proper response. There is no additional revelation beyond Jesus Christ. That faith has been delivered once and for all! If anyone comes declaring a faith different from that which was delivered once and for all, it is heretical. The essence of the faith hasn't changed one jot or tittle since the testimony given to us of our Lord Jesus through the apostles. To hold the office of apostle one had to be an eyewitness to Jesus. The faith doesn't evolve!
5. Jude dives straight in and goes to battle against the false teachers who were twisting the faith to support their agenda:

Jude 4 (CSB) [Slide]: 4 For some people, who were designated for this judgment long ago, have come in by stealth; they are ungodly, turning the grace of our God into sensuality and denying Jesus Christ, our only Master and Lord.

- a. Jude gives us a reminder that just like God keeps and preserves those who are loved in Him, these false teachers might presume they can outsmart God, but they can't. We all have a free will to make decisions, but in a way only God can understand, His Sovereignty cannot be negated. If God is our Father, we should sleep well every night. His plans can't be derailed. I hope we can smell the irony in this! The false teachers are coming in on the sly and all the while God had predestined them for this judgement long ago.
- b. Do you know something else that was an ah hah moment for me this week? When the Scripture talks about contending for the faith it's always in the context of preserving the purity within the church family. We can get so consumed over battling our culture "out there" that we neglect the charge of Scripture to maintain the purity of faith within the community of faith. Satan is great at the bait and switch game. We go after the cultural carrots and leave our very flanks exposed. False teachers aren't going to come in with fireworks and a show, it will be much more subtle. But Jude gives us some characteristics to be aware of:

(1) [Slide]: Godlessness

They are not atheistic but anti-theistic. They have a disregard and lack of reverence for God. Jude says it's not so much a matter of theology but morality. An atheistic person isn't nearly as dangerous as someone who acknowledges God, but lives their life in a way that indulges the flesh. That person isn't atheistic, but has created a god in their own image.

- (2) The next characteristic to be aware of is a bit tougher to spot. This characteristic is alive and well and it can be such a subtle shift. This is what I'll call:

[Slide]: Cheap Grace

We have a Core Value that says:

[Slide]: We inspire through grace.

God's grace is the agent by which our lives are transformed! God's grace is to be celebrated and the only way we have a relationship with God to begin with. We yield our lives to the Holy Spirit and by God's grace we are transformed from the inside out. We fail forward in the process. But because of God's Spirit within us, when we sin as believers it should be like hitting a wrong note on the piano. We notice it and we feel conviction. We respond with confession and in repentance, turning back to God.

Cheap grace says, "Your sins are forgiven so let's just live it up!" That is a false teaching and a dilution of the pure faith. Sin leads to death. Jesus leads to life. We can't be going in two opposite directions at the same time. The confession of the early Church and what we see presented in Scripture, i.e., Romans 10:9-10, "If we confess with our mouths that Jesus is Lord." If Jesus is indeed our Lord, it means our response to sin must be confession and repentance. Repentance means to turn away from one thing and head in another direction. We turn away from sin, by God's grace, and confess Jesus as Lord, turning back toward God! Also by God's grace!

- (3) The last characteristic to be aware of is expressed by those who would:

[Slide]: Deny Jesus Christ, our only Master and Lord

This is the teaching or behavior of "appeasement." In the Roman Empire "Lord" was a common word and it was used to express allegiance to Caesar. Caesar really didn't care if you had 100 lords as long as you acknowledged his lordship and obeyed his demands. It would have been easy to play the game, but Jesus demands our allegiance. Everything else must follow suite accordingly. Maybe in some ways it's easier for us living in a country with religious freedom. We've talked recently about the cost some pay in order to follow Christ. But it doesn't mean we don't have this false teaching present and maybe the subtler forms are more dangerous, because we can convince ourselves that we can move in and out of allegiance to Jesus. Jude says no, there is only one Master and Lord.

6. Jude is writing this letter and he is compelling his audience to contend for the faith. The purity of the faith handed down to us from the apostles, given to us through God's word, is where we draw the line. It's a call to tough love knowing that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation.

II. As we look over the next several weeks at this letter by Jude, it's a real challenge to us that the purity of the faith must be contended for. Does this mean we go around examining everyone prepared to throw a penalty flag when someone steps out of line? That's an emphatic no! Jude isn't contending for a perfect church. There's no such thing!

- A. Jude is homing in on false teachers. It's one thing for someone to be failing forward in the faith and learning. It's another thing for someone to identify as a teacher and influence others with a diluted gospel. As we'll see in Jude's day, just like ours, there are those who would manipulate the faith for their own worldly advantage.

1. There's a lot of great things that have come from technology and being able to access information easily. But there is no substitute for knowing the character of one whom we choose to sit under for Biblical teaching and instruction. It's not just what is taught but what is caught from doing life together. Everyone will have their flaws, including me, but character is demonstrated even more in the struggle. We can impress someone from a distance, but lasting influence comes through getting up close and personal.
2. One of the most important decisions we make are the Biblical teachers we sit under. Jude understood this and in the face of false teaching he stood in and challenged the community of faith to contend. There was just too much on the line.