

Jude

Please open your Bibles or your Bible apps to Jude (the one before Revelation). This morning I would like for us to consider the two topics Jude presented: (1) How should we see ourselves? and (2) What should we do about that? Jude has a very positive beginning and ending, but a dismal middle. So, I will just address the good parts this morning and leave the middle for you to read later. Essentially, that middle part is a collection of reminders of how things have gone wrong in the past as it references several Old Testament catastrophes, to encourage us to get serious about the positive parts at the beginning and the end.

We can read the Old Testament and marvel how people went so wrong so fast: Cain and Abel; Sodom and Gomorrah; the Exodus followed two years later by voting against God, not believing that they could invade the promised land successfully; voting against Moses in the rebellion of Korah when God opened up the earth and swallowed the proponents of democracy; Balaam encouraging the people to intermarry with the idolatrous Moabites; the bad angels being exiled from heaven and being chained up (already chained up by the time Jude wrote); and references to problems in the first-century church. Jude wrote all those brief references not to give us all the gory details, but to emphasize that this faith stuff is important. We need to take it seriously. People have gotten into deep trouble when God stopped occupying the central location on their plates. The first and last paragraphs, the positive parts, give us how to see ourselves and what to do about it.

So, here we go – verses 1 through 3: How should we see ourselves?

“Jude, a bondservant of Jesus Christ and brother of James, to those who are called, sanctified by God the Father and preserved in Jesus Christ: Mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you. Beloved, while I was diligent to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.”

The first way we, the faithful, should see ourselves: we have been called. That is a much misused word in modern Christianity. People talk about being called to this task or called to that task, when they really mean that the direction they have chosen is what they want to do and they are appropriating God’s endorsement without His consent. In this place in Jude, he used the word that implied that we all, all the faithful, have been appointed, that we bear a title as a result of being called. Jude’s point is not about what we were called to, since he gave no details, but rather we each have been summoned by God for an important task. We are not just those who signed up for a series of lectures, or those who chose this lifestyle, but rather Jude wants us to remember that God came looking for us, we were not searching for Him. Without God’s initiative, we would still be stumbling through life, inadequate to manage ourselves, without a realistic hope. Our only alternatives were self-deception and willful ignorance. But rather than remembering that dismal description, remember that God put out a lot of effort to flag you down. You are important to God, or He would not have bothered to call.

The second way we, the faithful, should see ourselves is as the sanctified. Sanctified – one of those big religion words. It means “reserved for godly purposes.” We have accepted God’s offer of rescue. A part of that rescue is becoming a part of the family, which comes with certain family obligations. If you look up all the places where that word, sanctified, is used, you quickly get the idea that this sanctified status implies that we behave well. But, rather than good

behavior being the price of admission, in which case none of us could even afford the cheap seats, this “being reserved for godly purposes” has to do with being believable to the outside world. If we don’t display godly behavior, no one will believe what we have to say about God. So, even though we do not achieve the level of sanctification to which we all know we should aspire, we should keep looking at the model at hand, Jesus, and moving forward, instead of stalling out as we focus on the shortcomings of the past. We are not sometimes sanctified and sometimes not. Rather, we should have the perception of ourselves as someone on that sanctified path. That’s Jude’s reminder for how to see ourselves.

Third, we should see ourselves as those who are preserved, rather than those in a jam. Jude repeats the idea at the end of the letter, in verse 24, “Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy...” God knows how to keep us headed in the right direction. If we lose sight of this – that God is capable, we can easily lose heart. He can and will, if we trust Him, keep us on track. Of course, we can easily look backwards and find plenty of occasions when we have stumbled, wandered off the path, or otherwise made a mess of things. But look how Jude refocuses us, “to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you faultless.” That points forward, not backward. One of the great attitudes of Christianity is that we learn from the past without dwelling in it, and look forward to a successful future.

Fourth, we should see ourselves as those in whom mercy, peace, and love are growing rapidly – that’s the point of the “multiplied” word. We are not slowly creeping along, gaining a little here and a little there. Rather, we should see ourselves as those who can multiply. But what are these characteristics that are being multiplied in us?

Of course, we have received mercy – we have received that which we need to overcome ourselves. Our characters are in the process of being repaired by the indwelling Spirit. But Jude’s point is not about that, but rather that we are incorporating mercy into our own characters to a remarkable degree. We have gotten past judging people for their uninspired choices. We have gotten past commiserating with them over the impact those choices have had on their lives. We are now in the repair business; having mercy on someone means that you are working on fixing the problem that got the other person in that mess in the first place. We should see ourselves as relating to the disasters of other people’s lives with fixes, helping them overcome themselves.

Peace – the defeat of anxiety that comes from living in a broken world. We have peace with others, as far as it depends on us. We have peace with God as we recognize the reality of how Jesus paid off all of our debts to justice. We have peace with who and what we are. Certainly, we accomplish our goals not as well as we would like. But because of the promises of God of being transformed in this life into the image of Jesus’ character, we are at peace with how we got here and at peace with the impossibility of the task ahead – at peace because God is driving the urban redevelopment.

Love – that which is poured out in our hearts by that same indwelling Spirit (Romans 5:5). I think an excellent illustration of the significance of that word may be found in John 21, after the resurrection but before the ascension. Paraphrasing, Jesus asked Peter, “Do you love Me more than these other apostles?” Peter responded, “Yes, Lord, You know I like you.” Peter knew the meaning of the *agape* word, selfless concern. Peter was not willing to say it, perhaps because he did not have that indwelling Spirit yet. But, twenty years later when he wrote 1 Peter, he used that word four times. Sometimes, we can feel like our selflessness is running on empty, like we need to turn inward and take care of ourselves for a bit. Jude wrote about the

confidence we should have that the indwelling Spirit will be constantly topping off the tank, having our selflessness multiplied.

And, fifth, we are a part of something titled “our common salvation.” “Common” was used in Greek like it is used in English. It meant ordinary, the common man. It was the opposite of regal, the common people. And, it was right next door to unclean, like Peter’s picnic vision in Acts 10:14 when God told Peter in that vision, “Rise, Peter; kill and eat.” But Peter responded, “Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean.” All those facets are in there. This rescue is for ordinary people, for common people, for those a little rough around the edges. We aren’t special or superior. Being part of these great promises doesn’t make me better than the riff-raff. We don’t look down on the outside world, we are all on the same level. We just have mercy, peace, and love deposited in us. We can’t even claim that we had a hand in building it.

So, that’s how we should see ourselves. But what should we do about it? Jude gives six tasks or six responses.

First, right there in verse 3, “Contend earnestly for the faith.” Certainly, some have used that line as an excuse for being argumentative, for separating from anyone who doesn’t see things my way. But that’s not the point. Jude’s point was the activity level, not the defining of essential doctrines. Another way to look at that phrase is this. Greek did not use “the” in the same way we do. They used it more as a way to keep the beat of the sentence sounding right. You could translate it equally well as, “Contend earnestly for faith.” Christian faith is very different from that of other religions. It is true today as it was then. Imagine living in a culture where idolatry was normal – and such places still exist today. Their faith is believing that for which there is no proof. They believe this or that religion because they want to. There is no evidence or logic to them. Christianity is very different. It is based on evidence. Our ideas of faith begin with the historical reality of Jesus and His prediction that He would be arrested and executed by the governmental authorities, and that He would come back on the third day, which He did, physically. Over 500 people saw the resurrected Jesus at one time (1 Corinthians 15:6). Jude is saying that we all need to make the case for the facts of Jesus. Of course, this means we need to know what the facts are, not the fables. We need to know the facts about how the Bible came to us. As in 1 Peter 3:15, “Always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.” Fear? Yes, fear for the plight of the outsider, both in this life and, especially, the next one.

The rest of Jude’s recommended activities are in the last paragraph of Jude, beginning in Verse 20:

“But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking forward to the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life. And have mercy on some, who are doubting; save others, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh. Now to Him who is able to protect you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory, blameless 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.

The second response given by Jude is to “build yourselves up on your most holy faith.” Christianity is not a passive membership but an active pursuit. Because of our description of called, sanctified, preserved, gaining rapidly in mercy, peace, and love in our common salvation,

we persist in building ourselves up (edifying ourselves), building on a foundation of faith. But how do we do that? The New Testament contains 22 passages about edification and the building materials recommended for it (see the handout in the Word Studies section on our website, titled Edification):

- The most repeated building material is sensibility. Christianity is built on evidence and logic. It was delivered to ordinary people (our common salvation). It is not mysterious or based on personal visions. You can build yourself up by that misnamed quality: common sense – which, unfortunately, is not all that common. Don't speculate. Look stuff up. Demand easily understandable conclusions.
- A common thread in this edification across the New Testament is the work of the Holy Spirit in us.
- In third place among the methods is the teaching of the apostles, the New Testament. Because we are certain that it was designed for ordinary people, read it that way. If something sounds confusing, read faster. If there is an Old Testament reference, look it up and read it in its context, not just the one verse that was quoted. If the history and geography are unfamiliar, look them up.
- Selflessness is one of those building materials. Consciously focus on the needs of others, the situations of others, the emotions of others. We cannot be other-centered unless we can understand where the other person is at. And, as a benefit, selflessness makes my own house so much easier to understand and manage because I am not tied in knots trying to reach unattainable goals.
- Thanksgiving builds us up. A thankful attitude for all we have and all the people in our lives yields a positive attitude about life. Certainly, lots goes wrong on this earth. Just watching the news can stress you out. Instead, be consciously thankful.
- Singlemindedness build us up. Figure out what you want to call that one thing that is in the middle of your plate. You might call it a relationship with God, or participating in the family of God, or becoming more like Jesus. Whatever you call it, that is your single goal. Having multiple goals leads only to competition for the same time slot, resulting in stress and never feeling like you got it right. Singlemindedness opens the door for peace.
- Compassion, being other-centered, builds you up because you are not focused on yourself. Compassion arises from taking an interest in the problems of others and trying to comfort them, which takes your mind off of the things in your life that are going wrong, and puts them in perspective. Being focused on the emotional needs of others means that you are not focused on yourself, which gives the indwelling Spirit room to operate because you are not constantly getting in the Spirit's way.
- Fear for the lost is another building block of edification, which also takes us away from thinking about ourselves and instead thinking about the needs of others. This builds us up because we are operating in love, doing what is best for another without regard to how it affects me.

All of these are ways the New Testament says that building oneself up can be achieved.

Third, Jude says to pray "in the Spirit." How does that work? Notice that little preposition, "in." Recognize the role of the indwelling Spirit in your prayers, like Romans 8:23 through 26, "We who have the first-fruits of the Spirit [that down-payment, that indwelling Spirit, which is the promise of God's future purchase of our faith], even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope

for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance. Likewise [as we hope for what we cannot see] the Spirit also helps our weaknesses. For we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession with groanings too deep for words.” We need to be “in” that Spirit who is “in” us. How can we be in the Spirit and the Spirit be in us? Jesus made a similar statement in His final prayer in the Garden in the night in which He was betrayed, in John 17:21, “That they [future Christians] all may be one, as you Father are in Me and I in You; that they also may be one in Us.” Praying in the Spirit while the Spirit is in you is to be united with the Spirit. When you pray, think about the Spirit’s role in that, and work at merging with that character development process that the Spirit is managing in you.

Fourth, Jude says to “keep yourselves in the love of God.” Remember Romans 5:5, “Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” God’s version of love, that love that Peter didn’t want to say, doing what is best for another regardless of the effect on me, has been deposited in us by that indwelling Spirit. Remember that. The world has a severe vitamin deficiency in this area. The world lacks God’s type of selfless concern. We have had it poured into us. Jude’s point is to remember that it is in there and let it guide our choices.

Fifth, Jude says to “look for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.” Look for the ways God has repaired things in you so that you can be successful in this life as well as the next. Of course, we do not want to fall into the ego trap of thinking we did this by superior self-control. But, usually, the problem comes from the other end; we fail to take note of those fixes. It’s like gaining weight or marveling that the kids have outgrown their clothes, again. You see it every day, so you don’t notice the daily growth. Perhaps we would do better with this as a group rather than individually – letting each other know the growth you see in each other. When we start to see and appreciate those repairs God has been making, our attitudes improve, our hope blossoms, and we have our evidence that God has accepted us – because we know that we had never been able to accomplish that improvement before, but now it has happened, therefore God must have accepted my faith and given me His Spirit.

Sixth and last, be compassionate with the dreamers who finally woke up. I chose the word “dreamers” because it is in verse 8 – those who fell for the slick arguments of those who pervert the Scriptures. We wonder how they could have been taken in by such obvious fallacies and ridiculous illogic. Jude says to be compassionate with them. Commiserate with them over the deception from which they have escaped without calling them a bunch of dummies. Rather, as in 2 Timothy 2:24 – 25, “A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition...” Help those who have escaped to learn from the past so as to avoid the same problem in the future, not to wallow in guilt, but to look forward instead of backward, to rejoice at finally escaping.

This is us: the called, the sanctified, the preserved, the merciful, the peaceful, the loving, and the ordinary. We are those who stand up, humbly and gently, for what we believe, who build faith, love people, appreciate mercy, and help those who are climbing back out of the hole they fell in.