

How to Contend for the Faith **Jude 1:1-4, 17-25**

The last several weeks Pastor Eric has led us through a series of messages focusing on the Hope we have in Christ because of what He did for us during His First Advent. Today I want us to turn our attention to the Second Advent of Christ: God's promise that He is coming a second time when He will replace this old fallen world with a New Heaven and New Earth for those of us who are trusting in Jesus as our Savior and Lord. I invite you to follow along as I read from Jude 1.

Read Jude 1:1-4, 17-25

I don't think I have to tell you that 2020 was a rather difficult year for most of us. I have spoken with many of you who are anxious to say "good-bye" to 2020 and to turn the calendar to a new year. But I have to tell you that when it comes to the future, God's Word has some good news, and some bad news. First the bad news: it's only going to get worse! You see, we have to understand that we are in the Last Days. The Last Days are the days between Christ's first coming and His second coming. And according to God's Word the deeper we get into the Last Days, the tougher it will get. The closer we get to the 2nd coming of Christ, the more violent, wicked, messed up and spiritually dark this sin-saturated world will become. Now before some of you get totally depressed, let me quickly go to the Good News. Here it is.

Even though you and I are living in a world filled with false teachers and doctrines of demons, and all kinds of sexual immorality and spiritual darkness, and hatred and division, we can "Contend for the Faith." Yes, we can stand strong in the faith all the way to the finish line. (verse 3). That is the message of Jude! And that is the call that God has placed upon every follower of Christ during the last days. The Greek word used for the word "contend" is an athletic term that literally means "to fight, strive or agonize earnestly." This word gives us a picture of a devoted athlete who is stretching his muscles and pushing himself to the very limit in order to win the race. The words "the faith" refers to the body of truth which is recorded for us by the Prophets and Apostles through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit: i.e. the Word of God. So Jude assured us that we indeed can stand upon the Truth and we can stand up for the Truth of God's Word in this messed up world!

But there is even more good news in this little book. Jude finishes his letter with a roadmap, and a guarantee in verses 17-25. In this divine roadmap God gives us explicit directions of "How to contend for the Faith." And He closes with a promise: that if you will follow His map, then you will be able to stand firm in your faith, and stand up for the Truth of God until the Day of Christ! You will be able to finish well! So let's open God's roadmap and answer this question, "How can I Contend for the faith?"

1. By Remembering the Apostles Warnings! Vv 17-19

God did not want us to be caught off guard so He inspired the Apostles to warn us about the extreme hardship that we may face during the Last days. Paul warned us in I Timothy 4:1—

“The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars whose consciences have been seared.” Here we learn not only that false teachers will be present spewing forth their lies during the last days, but Paul also informs us of their origin. False teachings come from people who no longer have a functioning conscience, and who have been deceived and inspired by demons. Man-made religions & cults are not man-made; they are from the pit of hell.

In 2 Timothy 3:1 Paul writes: “But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days.” According to Wycliffe’s Commentary the word for terrible means “stressful, savage, and dangerous.” That describes today’s world, doesn’t it? But perhaps the most graphic description of the Last Days is given to us by our Lord Himself, in Matthew 24:9-14.

“Then (during the last days) you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of Me.” (Matt. 24:9) Persecution of Christians has been going on since Jesus ascended to heaven; but it continues to get worse. Depending on what source you look up there are between 10,000 & 100,000 believers in Christ martyred every year since 2000.

“At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people.” (Matt. 24:10-11) Man so called “Christians” are going to fall away in the last days.. This falling away is happening all around us. We see many congregations, even whole denominations disregarding the Word of God, compromising with the world, and embracing sin and sinful lifestyles. And it is causing division, arguing and hatred among members—and giving a horrible testimony to the rest of the world.

“Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold...” (Matt. 24:12) Wickedness and hatred are the two words used over and over to describe the last days. Sadly, that is our world to a T! But there is some good news in this passage. “But he who stands firm to the end will be saved.” (verse 13). In other words, you can “contend for the faith” all the way to the end, if you will follow God’s roadmap. How? First, by remembering and taking heed to these Warnings and preparing yourself and your loved ones for these trying days!

2. By Nurturing Your New Life in Christ! Vv 20-21

In 2 Corinthians 5:17 we learn that “If anyone is in Christ, they are a new Creation! The old has gone the new has come.” When a person repents and turns to Christ in faith, at that moment the LORD gives us a new life; and we are given a whole new foundation (which is Christ) on which to build that new life upon. But it is up to us to utilize the resources that He has provided for us to nurture or build up our new life in Christ! No one else can do that for you! How? Jude gives us 4 resources we must use to nurture our new life.

- By building yourself up in the most holy faith. V 20. We grow in the Truth by taking daily nourishment from the Word: through reading, studying, meditating on it, and allowing it to

wash over us. This must be a priority in your life; without this you cannot grow in the faith. Peter preaches this in I Peter 2:2 where he proclaims, “As newborn babies, desire the pure milk of the Word that you may grow thereby.” 60 years ago I watched as my dad came to faith and began to study the Bible. I saw him take his Bible and his commentaries and a pencil and pad. The Word transformed him; he became a Man of strong faith. I knew I wanted that!

- By praying in the Holy Spirit. Praying in the Spirit does not mean praying in tongues. Rather it means we ask for His Guidance, Help and Power. Earnest and constant prayer keeps us connected to the Holy Spirit, who is the power source we need to live out His will and to build-up our new life in Christ. Prayer is not something we do in an emergency; it must be something we do moment by moment to stay connected to our Father in Heaven.
- By keeping yourself in God’s love. In order to understand what this means we need to go to John 14:23 where Jesus explains it this way: “If anyone loves Me, he will obey My teaching. My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make our home in him.” Love and obedience are inter-locked. The more you love Jesus, the more you will want to obey Him and do His will. The more you obey Him the more you will experience His love and grow in your love relationship with Him.
- By waiting (or looking) for His 2nd Coming. We must have an upward look. Now this does not mean that you quit your job, sell your home, and sit around passively waiting for Christ’s return. The Greek word for wait is an active verb which means “to eagerly long for or anticipate;” it means to keep His return as your focus; that you are cultivating an eternal perspective. (Phil. 3:20) Let me illustrate it this way.

Example: Shortly after I received my driver’s license, my dad asked if I would take the junk that had accumulated in our pole shed to the town dump. I was quite excited to be able to get behind the wheel of our 1961 Ford Falcon Station wagon and enjoy my freedom! So I loaded up the junk, and started out on my adventure. It was such a gorgeous Spring Saturday and I was totally distracted by all the beauty around me. I was focused on the flowers that were blooming, the birds that were singing, the sun that was shining; and all the other sights, sounds and smells. I was in teenager heaven; that is until I glanced at the road ahead and noticed I was headed straight for a mailbox and the ditch. I quickly cranked the steering wheel; and immediately heard the squeal of my tires. I had over corrected myself and was skidding sideways. I promptly over corrected the other way and before I knew what was happening the car came to rest on its side in the ditch. I was terrified, but unharmed. And I learned a huge lesson that day: when I lose my focus on the road ahead, and when I am focused on all the distractions around me, I usually end up in the ditch; or worse! It is the same spiritually. You and I must look beyond the distractions and the temporary circumstances of this life and we must keep our focus on the 2nd coming of Christ. We must eagerly long for that day. Then we will be able to contend for the faith no matter what difficulties we may face in these last days.

3. By Lovingly Pursuing the Lost and Straying Sheep. Vv 22-23

Another way we can contend for the faith (remain strong in our faith) is to lovingly pursue the lost and straying sheep. Someone once said, "Don't keep the faith; give it away!" That is such a powerful truth because something mysterious & supernatural happens when we share our faith with others. Our faith is strengthened; our joy is increased; and our love for Jesus is multiplied. Paul captured this mysterious truth in his short letter to Philemon. In Philemon 1:6 he writes, "I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ."

All of us have family members and friends that have been influenced by worldly philosophies and false doctrines such as secular humanism, evolution, materialism, Marxism, Islam, atheism and other doctrines of demons. How are we to respond to them? We need to pursue them in love. We must not avoid, rather we are to show them compassion. We must not criticize them, rather we are to point them to Jesus and His saving love.

If you know of someone who is struggling with doubts, or who has been deceived by the enemies lies, or who has been enslaved by a sinful lifestyle, don't give up on them! Don't think they are beyond reaching. Lovingly care about them and pursue them. How? Let me suggest 4 ways:

- Pray for them. Paul says in Romans 10:1, "Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved." This is where we must begin.
- Live out your faith in a way that is winsome. "Let your light shine before men that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in Heaven." Matt. 5:16
- Love them genuinely. Take the time to get to know them and genuinely listen to them.
- Be ready to give a gentle answer when they ask you a question about life or your faith, or when an opportunity arises to talk about spiritual matters. "In your hearts set apart Christ as Lord, & always be ready to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that you have, but do this with gentleness and respect." I Peter 3:15

4. By Trusting in the Power of Christ to Protect and Perfect you! Jude 24-25

Jude gives us one final way we can contend for the Faith (remain strong in the faith). It is by trusting in the power of Christ to protect and perfect us! Did you notice that Jude closes His book in the same way He began it? By focusing on the Power of Christ to keep us from falling away! In verse 2 he proclaims that we are "kept by Jesus Christ." Then in verse 24 he once again proclaims, "To Him who is able to keep you from falling..." Jude repeated this precious promise so that these 1st century believers and we 21st century believers would never, ever forget this most important truth. That ultimately the only One who can protect and keep us safe is Christ. The same One who was able to seek us and draw us and call us and save us, is the same One who is able to keep us strong in the faith.

Scripture: Jesus made a similar promise in John 10:27-29 where He declares, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish;

no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who is given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my hand....”

But that’s not all! According to Ephesians 1:13-14 the Holy Spirit is also involved in our security. “Having believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession.” So we learn from these two Scripture passages, that all three of the members of the Holy Trinity are involved in our eternal security. That nothing or no one can snatch us out of His loving hands, or touch our eternal soul.

Example: Several years ago, my grandson Micah told me about a fascinating creature called the Diving Bell Spider. This curious little fellow is found in Europe and Asia and has a God given protection that is pretty unique. When the spider is threatened by one of its enemies, it has the ability to form a bubble around itself and then it dives to the bottom of the river or lake. There beneath the surface of the water, this spider is kept safe and secure from the attacks of its enemies. It can remain there for hours, even days. When the coast is clear, the spider comes back up to the surface unharmed! That is a tiny picture of the impenetrable protection that God places within and around every believer. If you have trusted Christ as your Savior, then you are eternally saved, sealed and secure. You are protected by the presence and power of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. No one or nothing can touch your eternal soul. Not even Satan himself, nor all the demons of hell.

So my brothers and sisters, you can trust the Power of Christ to protect you and keep from falling. You can trust Him no matter what happens in 2021 and beyond as you eagerly anticipate His 2nd coming, when He will present you before the Father without fault, without sin, and without guilt. All of this is because of His sin-forgiving blood that He shed for you, and the robe of righteousness that He placed upon you and all of us who believe in Him!

So my brothers and sisters in Christ...even though we are living in the last days of the last days, and Even though you and I are living in a world filled with false teachers and doctrines of demons, and all kinds of sexual immorality and spiritual darkness, and hatred and division, we can “Contend for the Faith.” (Yes, you can remain firm in your faith, you can stand strong for the truth, all the way to the finish line.) How?

By remembering the warnings of the Apostles.

By nurturing your new life in Christ.

By lovingly pursuing the lost and stray sheep.

By trusting in the Power of Christ to protect and perfect you.