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Title: The Urgency of Responsibility

Text: Jude 1-25

Today we are going to look at the book of Jude. Basically it's a one-page letter of the New Testament. Jude contains an urgent message for its recipients. He gives a challenge and exhortation to adopt certain qualities and characteristics and habits NOW – these are qualities that can't wait. Jude is probably one of the most overlooked and fascinating books of the New Testament. I suppose we could take several weeks preaching from this book, or at the very least, I could make today's sermon really, really long and still only scratch the surface of all this book has to offer.

Today we'll take an overview of the book, and then we'll look at three things Jude was telling his readers – and telling us today – to watch out for. Jude was written by a man named Jude. He refers to himself as the brother of James, probably the James who wrote the book of James. Most scholars believe that Jude and James were brothers of Jesus. It appears that Jude didn't become a follower of Jesus until after Jesus' death and resurrection, and then he eventually became a leader in the early church.

When you study the book of Jude, you learn some Old Testament history. Jude wrote the letter to a church, or possibly a group of churches. His purpose in writing the letter is stated right after the greeting. *“Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints”* (vs. 3). He wanted to write a letter celebrating salvation – “this is what it means to be saved” – but a problem had developed in the church that desperately needed to be addressed. Some people had come into the fellowship and had situated themselves into positions of influence and they were tearing the church apart – not just by teaching bad doctrine, BUT by promoting an immoral lifestyle. Jude wrote in response to this situation. Now, he wrote the letter knowing that the whole church – the sincere BELIEVERS and the struggling LEADERS and these DECEIVERS – would all hear what he had to say. He wrote hoping that those who were sincere in their faith, especially those among the leadership, would become aware of what was going on around them and take appropriate action. I would also think that he hoped that these problem characters in the church would hear his words and recognize themselves in his words and would have a change of heart, a change of attitude, and a change of direction. Jude doesn't beat around the bush, and he certainly pulls no punches. He makes it very, very clear that this is a matter of ETERNAL life and death. The problem was not that these individuals were emphasizing minor doctrinal differences over the mode of baptism or the style of worship. They were attempting to sabotage the very foundation of the Christian faith as it had been taught from the beginning, by Jesus Himself and by the apostles. They were attacking the character and nature of God, they were attacking the work of Jesus, and the meaning of His death and resurrection, and they were attacking the doctrine of grace and making light of God's call to holiness. Jude said they *“change the grace of our God into a license for immorality...”* They didn't teach: “God calls us to holiness but sometimes we struggle with sexual sin and we need His grace and mercy to help us experience victory.” No, they taught, “Sexual sin no longer exists. Because of God's grace you have been forgiven and you can do whatever your body wants to do because it's all covered by grace.” If this applies to sexual sin, then it applies to every area of ethics. You only have to tell the truth when it's convenient for you, because your lies have been covered by grace. You can be RACIST and you can be ELITIST and you can be SELFISH and you can be DISHONEST and you can use people for your pleasure and your own purposes and it's all good BECAUSE...it's all covered by grace. A wonderful thing about Christianity is that it teaches that it doesn't matter who you are or what you have done or how many times you have fallen or how ugly the sin of your past. You can be forgiven, washed clean, made right with God, and given a new life in Jesus Christ, BECAUSE...our God is a God of mercy. But then there are some who hear this wonderful truth and twist it to the point where they say, “That means the rules no longer apply to me.” Some use it to justify an immoral lifestyle. Some use it to justify greed, or gossip, or selfishness, or laziness. They say, “Because of God's grace, I can do whatever I want.” Jude is saying that THAT IS NOT THE CASE! Then he gives several examples to show that there are consequences for those who thumb their nose at the goodness of God. He reminded them how God led His people out of Egypt, and how they continued to rebel against Him. He finally said, “This generation will not enter the Promised Land. You'll all die in the desert and the next generation will inherit the land of milk and honey.” He reminded them that when the angels rebelled against Him and abandoned their positions of authority, they were cast into darkness. He reminded them that the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah could have been saved but they completely and unanimously gave themselves over to sexual immorality, and the cities were destroyed. Jude is saying that there are CONSEQUENCES to BEHAVIOR. YOU REAP

WHAT YOU SOW! God pours out His mercy on His people, but when His people take the attitude that says, “That means the rules don’t apply to me anymore,” God will likely send a wake-up call. So Jude is telling his readers: Watch out for these deceivers. They’re headed for destruction in their own lives, and if you follow their teaching and follow their behavior, you will experience the same thing.

Jude points out more red flags to watch out for. In some of the churches I have been a part of, there have been those who sought to do what these men in the book of Jude sought to do. These people never consider themselves enemies of the church. Most considered themselves heroes. They consider themselves the brightest and the best, the most intelligent, the most enlightened, the most perceptive, the one with the best ideas and knew how everything should be done. Sometimes they cause division by trying to live outside the rules and encouraging others to do the same. Sometimes they cause division by ridiculing everyone who doesn’t think like they think. Sometimes they cause division by trying to jockey for power, position, and influence. Many a church has to deal with this kind of person, so Jude tells us to be aware. Even though he goes into great detail about the problems this kind of person can cause, the purpose of his letter is not to get you to point your finger at other people in the church. The purpose of this letter is to encourage you to **CONTENTEND FOR THE FAITH IN YOUR OWN PERSONAL LIFE**. Today’s message is about taking responsibility for what **YOU BELIEVE** and what **YOU DO**. Okay, that was a long introduction. Here are the three things that Jude is telling us to do in order to contend for the faith:

1. Don’t let anyone get between you and Jesus. Jude says... *“Dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold. They said to you, ‘In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires’”* (vs. 17-18). He calls them “godless.” Isn’t that strange? They’re in the church and he considers them godless. The Greek word translated godless refers to a person who fails to worship. They may have a religious life, but they don’t have a devotional life. They don’t have a surrendered life, a yielded life. Craig Groeschel, the pastor of Life Church in Oklahoma City, wrote a book called *The Christian Atheist* about those who believe in God but live as though He doesn’t exist. This is the kind of thing Jude is talking about. Another red flag Jude points out – *“these men speak abusively against whatever they do not understand.”* For them, there’s no room for exploring ideas, no room for discussing or even debating differences of opinion. If you don’t agree with them, you’re wrong and there’s no two ways about it. And, they don’t bother to mask their contempt. Another red flag is that these people tend to be self-serving. *“Shepherds who feed only themselves.”* They tend to be all show and no go, all talk and no action. *“Clouds without rain...autumn trees without fruit,”* Jude calls them. He also says they are *“grumblers and fault finders.”* The Greek words used here refer to the kind of perfectionist for whom nothing is ever good enough. They’re going to gripe and complain and criticize EVERYTHING. Worst of all, Jude says, *“These are the men who divide you.”* These are the ones who create divisions among you. In other words, they’re tearing this church apart, pitting one group against another. *“These are the men who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit”* (vs. 19). One mark of a cult is a leader who takes the place of Jesus in the minds of his followers. His word becomes the final word and following him becomes more important than anything else. We see this in extreme examples like Jim Jones and David Koresh, but it can also happen, to some extent, in evangelical churches. We put leaders up on a pedestal and we give them more power and influence than they deserve. And then when they stumble and fall, it causes people to question their faith. It breaks my heart when I see a leader fall – it breaks my heart for them – but it doesn’t change what I believe about Jesus. I’ve heard people say, “I’m not a Christian anymore because of what some other Christian did. A Christian cheated me in business. Or a preacher I know ran off with his secretary. Or I attended a church that was full of hypocrites.” Those things are terrible, but I’m not about to let them change what I believe about Jesus. In fact, if the most notorious preachers of the land all got together today and renounced their faith, I would be sad for them but it wouldn’t change what I believe about Jesus! My hope isn’t built on any church or any preacher. MY hope is built on NOTHING LESS than JESUS’ BLOOD AND RIGHTEOUSNESS. On CHRIST THE SOLID ROCK I stand. Why? Because ALL OTHER GROUND is sinking sand. Don’t let ANYTHING get between you and Jesus. Make sure that JESUS is the center of your life. Walk with Him and talk with Him EVERY SINGLE DAY! Don’t let anything or anyone get in your way. Keep Jesus first in your life.

2. Don’t let anything get between you and Spiritual Discipline. *“But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit”* (vs. 20). How do you build yourself up in the faith? Prayer (Praying in the Holy Spirit), Bible study, Fellowship with other Christians, Worship, and Serving others. Keep each of these five things active in your life. As you devote yourself to prayer and you grow in the knowledge of the Word and spend time with God’s people and you spend time in God’s presence and you lose yourself in service to others, you will become rock solid in your faith. You’ll be able to spot deception at a distance and you’ll know when to exclude those with a negative influence. Notice that Jude says, *“Build yourself...”*. Do you know what that means? YOU are most responsible for your spiritual growth. Your pastor

and other leaders in the church will likely do everything they can to help you in this area, but they can only lead you to the water. It's up to you to drink. Build yourself. In the next verse Jude says, *"Keep yourself in God's love."* Earlier in the letter, Jude says that we are kept by Jesus Christ. At the close of the letter, Jude says that He is able to keep us from falling. Here he says, *"Keep yourself in God's love."* He's saying that God will take care of you, so don't let go of Him. It's your job to hang on. I've been a Christian since my early childhood days at Marlowe Assembly of God, and I cannot emphasize enough how much these five disciplines have had on my life. Prayer, Bible Study, fellowship, worship, service. When I have neglected one of them (or more) – I've paid the price for it. Don't let ANYTHING get between you and these basic disciplines of the Christian life.

3. Don't let anything get between you and a Life of Mercy. *"Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life"* (vs. 21). Jude says this because WE NEED GOD'S MERCY. And who is on the receiving end of mercy? Jesus said... *"Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy"* (Matthew 5:7). For this reason, Jude continues... *"...as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life. Be merciful to those who doubt; snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear – hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh"* (vs. 21-23). There will likely be times when your good Christian friends question their faith and stumble a little bit. Don't judge them. Show mercy. There will be times when people do more than stumble. They fall BIG time. They get themselves dirty, and sometimes they're slow to get back up. Don't be quick to judge them. Be quick to show mercy. Reach down and pick them up. And...DO IT IN LOVE. Then there will also be those who don't STUMBLE into the mud, and who don't FALL into the mud – they JUMP into the mud. They DIVE in! Then they WALLOW around in it and BASK in it for a while. Guess what? You don't judge them either. You show them mercy. You don't let them pull you down, instead, you carefully pick them up. Jude is saying that every person you know NEEDS your mercy. You don't condescend to anyone. Instead, you give everyone you meet a hand up. The Christian life is a life of mercy. It defines how God relates to you, AND it MUST define how YOU relate to others.

CONCLUSION. So what's the urgent message of Jude's letter? It's the urgency of responsibility. You are responsible for YOU, for what you think, for what you believe, for who you listen to, for what you do. It is ON YOU to keep Jesus first in your life. It is ON YOU to be consistent in spiritual discipline. It is ON YOU to show mercy to the world around you as you await the full expression of God's mercy in your life. It's ON YOU. It's UP TO YOU. YOU are responsible for YOU. This is how you contend for the faith. Jude closes with a beautiful doxology. I'll close today's message with his words... *"To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen"* (vs. 24-25).