

An Urgent Message for an Unexpected Moment

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[0 : 00] And Evelyn, please come and serve us this morning. Evelyn is going to read Jude 1 through 4.! Thanks, Evelyn.

Father, thank you for the privilege that we have enjoyed of lifting our voices together. Thank you for giving us, brothers and sisters, this particular body that we can be with for this season of our lives.

We're grateful for the opportunity to sing and to be reminded of our mighty fortress, of the word that will conquer our adversary, the devil.

We're grateful to be reminded of that day when we will feast and that you will bring shalom. We're grateful to be reminded of the Lord Jesus and his humble willingness to go to the cross and to suffer there and to take our place as our substitute, as the sacrifice for sin that we so desperately needed.

We're grateful for the opportunity to enjoy this time of worship together. Father, and as we now turn our attention to the preaching of your word, would you please continue to be with us and encourage us, watch over us, please keep me faithful, build us up in our most holy faith, help us to hear and to listen and to discern and to believe and to obey the things that you have for us here in your word.

[2 : 17] Father, we ask this, knowing our tendency, knowing my tendency to run off ahead, would you please speak to us those things that you would have us hear from your word this morning.

It is in Jesus' name that we pray. Amen. Most of us expect danger to be loud and obvious and alarming.

You might think of a snarling dog or a wailing siren, a flashing pop-up window or a breaking headline. But some of the most dangerous things are silent, unnoticed.

Think about a cracked foundation or cancer or terrorists in a sleeper cell or an unidentified allergy or a crooked politician.

Sometimes you don't know what you don't know. And eventually, when you find out what you didn't know, the damage is almost always more devastating because of the delay.

[3 : 45] Last Sunday at 11 p.m., Chloe sent me a text that read like this, quote, Dad, there's something dripping in the utility room.

It's pretty humid down here, too. Some threats, like a leaky hot water heater, don't announce themselves.

This is true spiritually as well. If wolves didn't wear wool, then it wouldn't be hard to identify them before they begin harming the sheep.

If scoffers weren't so piously persuasive, who would ever listen to them? If those bent on division were upfront about their intentions, churches could be protected.

If false teachers announced their arrival, followers of Jesus wouldn't be misled. Some of the most dangerous things are silent, unnoticed.

- [4 : 59] And this is the context for the letter of Jude. Jude, people who infiltrate the church and subtly sabotage its unity, its fidelity, its mission, and its testimony.
- Jude recognizes this threat, and he feels compelled to alert God's people to the danger right in their midst. But before calling the church to action, he introduces himself and reminds them who they are.
- Look at verses 1 and 2. Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James, to those who are called, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ.
- May mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you. On Friday night, Lydia showed me videos of a musician visiting a children's hospital.
- And as she walked into each room, she said, I'm Taylor. Now, in her case, she probably doesn't need to introduce herself.
- [6 : 27] But it seems like something similar happens right here in verse 1. Here's what I mean. We are not entirely sure which James Jude is referring to when he says that he is the brother of James.
- But since he only refers to him by first name, we believe that he is referring to the well-known, well-respected James, the one who was the leader in the early church there in Jerusalem, and also the author of the book of James.
- Now, Jude's introduction as the brother of James is interesting for a second reason. Most faith traditions recognize James as the son of Mary, making him the half-brother of the Lord Jesus.
- And if James is an earthly brother of Jesus, then that means the author of our letter is also an earthly brother of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- But neither James nor Jude leverage their blood relationship with Jesus to garner more respect or authority.
- [7 : 48] And I think that's interesting and instructive. Instead of doing that, both brothers describe themselves as servants, literally slaves of Jesus Christ.
- Like Moses and like David, who are called servants of God in the Old Testament, Jude's relationship with Jesus Christ as slave to master gives him both authority and honor.
- After introducing himself, Jude addresses the recipients of his letter. They are the called. Now, I know that the word the is dropped from some of our translations.
- It is present there, and I think it's helpful. Jude is referring to a specific group of people, those who are the called.
- And if you are a follower of Jesus, then you are part of the called. This matters.
- [8 : 58] This matters. They are the called. They are the called. Not just those who have received an invitation, but those who are powerfully and inevitably brought to faith by the power of the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the gospel.
- Those who are the called are also loved by God the Father, and they are kept for Jesus Christ. This reminds me.
- Kept. It reminds me of Jesus' prayer in John 17. Jesus said this, Holy Father, keep them. Keep them in your name.
- And also, it reminds me of Peter's words in his first letter, chapter 1 and verse 4, to an inheritance that is kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith.
- We are followers of Jesus, the called. We are loved by God, and we are kept for Jesus Christ.

[10 : 13] Jude concludes his introduction. I don't know why that seems so funny to me to say. He concludes his introduction with a prayer blessing, asking God for mercy, peace, and love to be multiplied to them.

This is an important prayer. This is an important prayer. Because an abundance of mercy, peace, and love is required in difficult seasons of life.

And in verse 4, we learn the nature of the unnoticed threat that this church faces. Look at verse 4. For certain people have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

You may recall that Peter uses the word false teachers and scoffers to describe his opponents. Here, Jude simply refers to them as certain people who crept in unnoticed.

They snuck into the church. They slithered around in the church. They weaseled their way into influence. That seems to be the connotations of the words that Jude chooses.

[12 : 04] But just because the church hasn't noticed them yet, God is not surprised by their behavior. In fact, God planned their judgment long ago.

Why? Well, first, because they are ungodly. They act like God doesn't exist or like God doesn't matter, like he's irrelevant.

They are ungodly. But second, they pervert grace into sensuality. Do you see that there in your Bible? Perhaps they twist the truth like this.

You're not under law anymore. You're under grace now. And grace is so amazing. And since we have such amazing grace, sin doesn't really matter, right?

God has already forgiven you in Jesus for that sin. They pervert grace into sensuality.

[13 : 14] Do what you want. God has already forgiven you. Finally, they deny Jesus' authority because they don't recognize any authority outside of themselves.

And so they refuse to submit. They refuse to submit their thoughts, their emotions, their desires, their attitudes, their actions to Jesus.

This is why God planned their condemnation long ago. These creepers are motivated by unrestrained self-interest.

And much like a leaky hot water heater, their destructive presence has gone unnoticed. But Jude gets the church's attention.

Verse number three. Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

[14 : 46] I wonder, what would the letter Jude wanted to write have sounded like? What part of our salvation did he intend to explore?

How would he have turned the spotlight onto the glory of Jesus? What wonder of Christ's atoning death or victorious resurrection would we be reading about right now?

Because of the presence of certain people who crept in and because of God's sovereignty, Jude found it necessary to change his plan.

And instead of reveling in the glory of salvation, he appeals to his readers, contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints.

Contend is a translation of a Greek word that describes intense effort or struggle.

[15 : 57] think about the line of scrimmage during a football game. And the defense and the offense, they are lined up.

And the center snaps the ball and there is intense effort. Those big old boys want to push those other players and get what they want.

Think about a tug of war between very evenly matched teams. And there is this intense struggle on either end of the rope and neither team can gain the advantage, but there's a struggle and it's intense and they're holding on with all of their might.

Think about a ninja warrior gripping the narrow edge of an obstacle and swinging and trying to make it to the next landing.

This is intense effort or struggle. Why did you choose this intense of a word? Because if the church does not contend, more damage will be done.

[17 : 19] This is the consequence of failing to hear Jude's exhortation. If the church does not contend, more damage will be done.

The ungodly perversion of grace and the rebellious denial of Jesus' authority will spread like water on a basement floor.

Brothers and sisters, there are beliefs that are non-negotiable for Christians. Beliefs that are grounded in the words and the ways of Jesus and developed and taught by his apostles.

Truths that are not secondary, not debatable, not tangential, but essential for a proper understanding of who Jesus is and what he accomplished by his death on the cross.

This set of beliefs is what Jude calls the faith, once for all, delivered to the saints. Here's Jude's wake-up call.

[18 : 36] Here is Jude's exhortation, his appeal to you, contend for the faith. And here is a vital consideration from one of my favorite authors.

Zach Eswine writes, holding the right position in the argument never justifies betraying the character of Jesus.

How do we stand for truth without damaging those who disagree? How do we contend without being contentious?

Contending requires conviction without contempt and courage without combativeness.

Jude's urgency is clear and undeniable, but given our fallenness, it is entirely possible to shift from urgency right on over into panic.

[20 : 05] Urgently contending means speaking clearly and consistently without being rash or reactive. Addressing issues with calm clarity rather than treating every single doctrinal disagreement like a five-alarm fire.

contending means recognizing that the real battle is spiritual and refusing to treat others like the enemy.

Contending leads to prayer, wise action, instead of anxiety and frantic overcorrection. contending, responds, and then trusts God with the outcome rather than obsessively trying to fix everyone and everything.

When we remember that God is sovereign, we can have urgency without being driven by hand-wringing fear of losing control.

a key question you might ask. Am I motivated by love for God? Love for the gospel?

[21 : 26] And love for others? Or, am I motivated by the fear of what might happen if I don't intervene?

Contending requires conviction without contempt and courage without combativeness. Contending means defending the truth in order to protect your brothers and sisters from further harm.

But contentiousness wields truth like a club. Contending grieves over false teaching that results in sin, but it is not gleeful about exposing others.

Contending is marked by humility, deference, and self-control that speaks the truth in love. But contentiousness justifies any means at all to win an argument.

and often confuses being rude with being bold. A second key question. Would the person who disagrees with me say that I treated them with dignity?

[22 : 54] Or would they feel dismissed And disregarded! Paul's exhortation to Timothy is so timely.

This is 2 Timothy chapter 2 and verse 24. The Lord's servant must not, must not, must not be quarrelsome, but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness.

God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth. Correcting opponents matters. But Paul says to Timothy, don't be quarrelsome in your correction.

Be gentle. Why? Because holding the right position in the argument never justifies betraying the character of Jesus. No wonder then, that Paul instructs Timothy in chapter 3 that elders must be self-controlled, respectable, not violent, but gentle, and not quarrelsome.

And to Titus, Paul writes that elders must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or violent and rather must be self-controlled and disciplined even when they are rebuking those who contradict the truth.

[24 : 48] And let's also remember our Lord Jesus. the word that became flesh. He was full, John tells us, full of grace and truth.

Contending requires conviction without contempt and courage without combativeness. on January 28th, 1986, I know some of you are not born yet, January 28th, 1986, Ronald Reagan, the President of the United States, was scheduled to give the State of the Union Address.

But that morning, America watched in horror as the Challenger space shuttle exploded just 73 seconds into its flight, taking the lives of seven astronauts.

That evening, from the solemn setting of the Oval Office, President Reagan addressed the nation. It was a short speech.

In just a few minutes, he comforted the grieving, he honored those who had died, and he reminded us all of the spirit that propels exploration.

[26 : 28] He began his speech with these words, ladies and gentlemen, I'd planned to speak to you tonight to report on the State of the Union.

But the events of earlier today have led me to change those plans. Today is a day for mourning and remembering.

President Reagan knew what the moment demanded, and so he set aside what he wanted to say in order to tell the nation what it needed to hear.

Jude also knew what the moment demanded. He didn't write the letter that he wanted to write, but in God's sovereignty, he wrote the letter that the church needed, and a letter that we still need, because certain people will creep in unnoticed.

And their distortion of grace and their denial of the Lord Jesus demands a response. Obedience to this text means readiness to contend for the essential, non-negotiable doctrines of the faith truth without being contentious.

[28 : 01] Perhaps you think that all truth is God's truth, and so perhaps you reason and you doubt whether there is any truth at all that is actually worth contending for.

perhaps you swing to the other side, and every truth that you hold is a hill that you are worth and ready to die on.

Perhaps you contend for the right truths, but with the wrong motives. You are all in, no holds barred, for every dispute, every disagreement, every fine point of doctrine.

Striking a wise balance between contending and contentiousness is not easy, and we're going to get this wrong sometimes.

But the one who called you is faithful, and he loves you, and will keep you for Jesus Christ.

[29 : 21] My brother, my sister, you may have reasons to be anxious about the state of the world, reasons to be anxious about the state of the church, but there is no need for insecurity about God's faithfulness to you, nor is there any reason to doubt his promise to preserve his people to the end.

So mindful of God's calling, God's loving, and God's keeping, let's answer Jude's call for contending.

let's contend without being contentious, because we are confident that our God is able to keep us from stumbling, and to present us blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy.

Let's pray. Father, thank you for your word. Thank you for your sovereignty and providence that led Jude to write this letter.

Oh, we would love to read about the glories of our salvation from our brother Jude, and perhaps someday we will sit down with him in the new heavens, in the new earth, and we will ask him what he might have intended to write about.

[31 : 01] But until then, good Father, we are so grateful to have this word, this message to us, a message that that church at that time needed, and a message that the church still needed, because we believe that we are those who are the called, those who are loved by God and kept for Jesus Christ.

thank you for giving us this truth. Father, as we examine our hearts in preparation for our time of celebrating the Lord's Supper, we acknowledge that we have not always and not consistently navigated being contending without being contentious.

And so, as we spend a few moments to be quiet before you, would you please show us our sin, remind us of our Savior, grant us repentance.

Holy Spirit, would you please move us to repent, and to believe again. Father, please give us wisdom to learn, give us humility to learn, wisdom to discern, and grace to disagree.

Thank you for the forgiveness of sin that is ours in our Savior Jesus. Thank you for the grace that is still sufficient for sinners like us.

[32 : 46] Would you please help us and give us wisdom to contend without being contentious. We ask this for your glory and for our good, and for the sake of the spread of this gospel throughout the world.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.