March 21, 2015

“Contending for the Faith”

Jude 17-23

**FCF**: Matters of high stakes cannot be left to chance

**PROPOSITION**: (anchor) Christ has called us to contend for the faith.

(magnet) But we must do so in a way that is consistent with the faith.

**SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:**

Matters of high stakes cannot be left to chance. Case in point, a black leather briefcase that follows the President of the United States wherever he goes and is never more than a few steps from his side. It contains a secure SATCOM radio and handset, nuclear launch codes, and also the *President’s Decision Book* – the nuclear playbook that the President would rely on if he would ever have to decide to use nuclear weapons. This briefcase is known as “the football”.

The football is carried by a military officer who undergoes the most rigorous background checks – the “Yankee White”. The criteria includes U.S. citizenship, unquestionable loyalty, and an absolute absence of any foreign influence over the individual, his family, or “persons to whom the individual is closely linked.” That’s just a part of security surrounding the football.

Why? Matters of high stakes cannot be left to chance. You need explicit instructions vital to heed. And in the Christian life, there is far more going on and the stakes are even higher.

**SCRIPTURE READING**: Jude 1-23

**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

**SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

Francis Schaeffer, one of the great writers and thinkers of the 20th century, was like a prophet – both in the predictions he made and the warnings he gave. There was a twofold crisis facing Christians in our day, he said in his book, No Little People. One was not seeing the utter lostness of the world. The other was trying to meet that, relying on ourselves (READ quote):

Is it not amazing, though we know the power of the Holy Spirit can be ours, we still ape the world’s wisdom, trust its form of publicity, its noise, and imitate its ways in manipulating men!  If we try to influence the world by using its methods, we are doing the Lord’s work in the flesh…The key question is this:  as we work for God in this fallen world, what are we trusting in?  To trust in particular methods is to copy the world and to remove ourselves from the tremendous promise that we have something different — the power of the Holy Spirit rather than the power of human technique.

These are words we desperately need to hear and ponder again and again in every generation. They need to be carefully considered. And then, like all good counsel, specifically applied. It’s not enough to be moved by the concepts. The concepts have to be worked out where we are.

That’s what we see in Jude’s letter. In vv.1-4, he wrote of the need “to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” – to fight, to struggle, to wrestle against a false gospel that had infected the church. Then, in vv.5-16, he wrote of the stakes, the great danger. He starts with the call to contend, moves to the reason, and now, in vv.17-23, the methods. Put another way, he takes us from the what, to the why, then to the how. How are we to contend?

“*Christ has called us to contend for the faith*,” Jude says. “*But we must do so in a way that is consistent with the faith*.” What would that mean? What does contending for the faith look like? Three points – things we remember, living proactively, and paths of mercy.

1. **THINGS TO REMEMBER**

Jude tells us this contending begins with crucial things to remember (READ Jude 17-19).

1. *Be Braced*

Certainly, Jude wants us to be braced, to be prepared and not be caught unawares.

1. These people – what they do

Do not be surprised to discover scoffers and mockers of the faith even among you. Do not be surprised by their self-destructive lifestyles. And the divisions that they will bring as well.

1. These people – what drives them

Do not be surprised by these things and do not lose sight of what is driving all that – a love and obsession with the world and the things of the world and an absence of the Spirit in their lives.

1. *Be Encouraged*

Be braced for this. But all the while, be encouraged. Remember these things too.

1. You’ve been warned

You’ve been warned. These were apostolic predictions. There was foreknowledge and certainty in that. Not just predictions but prophesies. These things were given to you. To you for you.

1. You are cherished

You’ve been warned. Why? You are loved, cherished. Three times (vv.3, 17, 20) the readers are addressed as “beloved,” harkening to the introduction (READ Jude 1). An eternal affection.

Which is to say that, yes, there is danger but you are not beyond the Lord’s reach or sight.

*Illustration:*

Sometimes the best illustrations come from the nursery – the game our littlest ones love to play, hiding their faces from us as if to say, “*If I close my eyes, you can’t see me*.” Which, of course, is so very cute and amusing. But thank God that’s not the way it goes with Him.

*Application:*

We may close our eyes to danger. We may even close our eyes to His love. But that doesn’t change the facts of the danger or His love. Jude says, “*Oh, my friends, open your eyes. Be braced. And be encouraged. Don’t play either of these down*.” Christ has called us to contend for the faith. But we must do so in a way that is consistent with the faith.

1. **LIVING PROACTIVELY**

First, remembering. Second, living proactively (READ Jude 20-21). Four things here.

1. *Building*
2. Holy faith

Ours is a holy faith – holy in its source and its effect. It is utterly different, unlike any other.

1. Build yourselves up in it

And we are to be building ourselves up in it, going deep in our study and wide in our application.

1. *Praying*
2. Not according to our agenda

And we are also to be “praying in the Holy Spirit,” meaning not according to our agenda.

1. But in harmony with the Spirit

But, rather, in harmony with the Spirit, with an eye to how things should be as in the Scriptures.

1. *Waiting*
2. A coming mercy

Waiting for a coming mercy – a renewal, redemption, and return of Jesus, reclaiming His own.

1. Eyes set

All with our eyes, our gaze set – a looking to and longing for the completing of His saving work.

1. *Keeping*

And then these three – the building, praying, and waiting – leading into the keeping.

1. Not that it is up to us

Our keeping ourselves in the love of God. What does this mean? Jude is not saying that God’s affections toward us are up to us. Don’t kid, delude, burden, or cripple yourself with that.

1. But that it is to be enjoyed by us

This relationship with God is initiated, established, and preserved by Him. It is not up to us. But it is to be enjoyed by us. He has His hold on us. Ours is simply to keep our face towards Him.

*Illustration:*

It’s like what should be happening in a marriage – like tending a garden. The work of tilling, sowing, watering, weeding – ongoing, intentional effort put into a relationship that is not going anywhere, secured by vows. This isn’t a perfect analogy but bear with me. There’s a settled permanence to it. But to experience that, there are things to be done for its flourishing.

To contend for the faith is then to live proactively, continually doing these things.

*Application:*

Building, praying, and waiting. These things make for the keeping. We need to always be about these things, not waiting for the crisis to come. That’s how you contend for the faith.

Not dropping our guard when things are smooth, trying to build up the defenses when the enemy is at the gate. Jude is saying, “*No, to contend you must live proactively*.” Christ has called us to contend for the faith. But we must do so in a way that is consistent with the faith.

1. **PATHS OF MERCY**

That means there are things to remember, proactive ways to live, and then paths of mercy on which to walk (READ Jude 22-23). There are three groups of people described here.

1. *To the Doubting*
2. Who this is

First, the doubting. These are those caught in the crossfire, weighing the arguments, wavering between truth and heresy, feeling torn as to which way to turn or which path to take.

1. Our response

And Jude says be merciful to them. Engaging them, listening and talking with them. Not to be soft on truth but patient, extending the same care to them that has been lavished upon us.

1. *To the Endangered*
2. Who this is

The second group are the endangered. These are those who have embraced the false teaching. They have succumbed, given in, and given themselves to it all that makes its claims appealing.

1. Our response

And Jude says be merciful to them. Be direct. See the path that they are on as one of destruction – even if they cannot. For they need to be rescued. They need to be told and warned.

1. *To the Defiled*
2. Who this is

Then there is the third group, the defiled. These are those who have not just fallen but immersed themselves into the cesspool of the lies. Possibly even spreading this false hope to others.

1. Our response

Our response? Again, to be merciful. To have pity but to show great care not just for them but for us. To engage but to do so humbly, aware that we could fall into this pit ourselves. Hating the sin and also the damage it brings but showing mercy to the person ensnared in it.

All of these are people in need of mercy, demanding paths of mercy in how we contend for the faith – for the sake of those caught up in this now and those they may hurt down the road.

*Application:*

And like the other two ways of contending for the faith – the remembering and also the proactive living – this does not come naturally to us. It’s not according to our impulses.

Think with me. Ours is usually to see only the surface, not reckoning with the reality that what people believe – even without any real evidence – is often tied to what they want to believe. Or just what they want to have. Many have been seduced by heresy because of what they think themselves to somehow gain through it. And we need to pray for them with that in mind.

Another impulse this call to mercy resists is our tendency to just dismiss people – to take it personally and write people off. Clearly, the Lord is telling us that, “*My child, they are not rejecting you but me*.” So we need to then say what we can and leave the rest to Him.

Christ has called us to contend for the faith. But we must do so in a way that is consistent with the faith. And that means walking on these paths of mercy with people.

**CONCLUSION:**

That’s the key in this – contending for the faith in a way that is consistent with the faith. It’s an expression of integrity, made of one whole cloth, what we are being characterized by what we do. Think of the problem of mixed messages. There’s a problem when nutrition oversight agencies have conferences sponsored by Hershey’s and catered by MacDonald’s. There’s a problem with customer service hot lines that say, “*We value your business*” and then leave you waiting on hold. There’s a problem with husbands who say to their wives and children, “*You need to respect me!*” with harsh tones borne out of deep insecurity. There’s a problem with Christ followers who go forth into the world proclaiming, “*Jesus loves you!*” while never taking the time to listen and actually love people. Those are mixed messages, saying one thing while doing another. At best, such messages are confusing. And often they are self-defeating.

Jude is pushing us in another direction, giving us the what, the why, and then the how. We need to do the Lord’s work the Lord’s way. If it’s an earthly battle with temporal stakes, then pull out the sword. The metal will cut right through the flesh. But if it’s a spiritual battle with eternal stakes, that sword will just go flailing in the air. We need to put it away before we hurt someone. Listen to what Jude is saying here. There is indeed a battle with high stakes. We do need to contend for the faith. But to do so in a way that is consistent with the faith.

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