March 8, 2015

“Following Christ in Troubled Times”

Jude 1-4

**FCF**: The need to “stay the course”

**PROPOSITION**: (anchor) Following Christ can mean troubled times.

(magnet) He calls us respond in ways “counter” – cultural/intuitive.

**SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:**

“Stay the course” is a phrase used in the context of a war or a battle meaning to pursue a goal regardless of the obstacles or hesitation. It’s said to have begun as a nautical metaphor, meaning a constant, unfaltering course while navigating. Leaders of all kinds will appeal to this idea in an attempt to rally when things aren’t going well and their grand plans are questioned.

There are times when that response demonstrates a stubborn blindness, when a modified approach is called for. But there are other times when that approach is a stubborn resolve, when “staying the course” is exactly the thing that is called for and to do less would be disastrous.

There are such times in following Christ. What would that look like and what would that call for? This morning we’re beginning a study in the letter of Jude to explore those questions.

**SCRIPTURE READING**: Jude 1-4

**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

**SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

Getting our expectations right can spare us heartache down the road – disappointment and even disillusionment. Before family vacations, we need family meetings. Before we go to a new school, orientations. Before we get married, pre-marital counseling. Before we join CPC, the Inquirer Weekend. As we begin the Christian life, we need straight talk on what it means.

There’s something of that going on in the letter of Jude. For some, no doubt this was new and bracing. For others, it was needed repetition. Either way, getting our expectations right can spare us heartache down the road – disappointment and even disillusionment. For following Christ can mean troubled times. Temptations alluring, pressures bearing, choices confusing. Following Christ can mean troubled times. In fact, they are certain, likely, and inevitable.

And Christ calls us to follow Him in such times – not to back down, turn aside, or give up. He calls us to follow Him in such times, in ways that are counter both to our culture and to our intuition, counter to what we see and may even feel. That is Jude’s message to his readers in their particular context, a context unique to them. But it’s his message to us as well.

And such a response, a response counter to our culture and our inclinations, will mean three things – being clear on our identity, grounded in our standing, and braced with our charge.

1. **CLEAR ON OUR IDENTITY**

First, this counter response will mean being clear on our identity (READ Jude 1a).

1. *Not What We Might Think*
2. His family background

Given what we know, this is not what we might think. All the evidence points to Jude as the younger son of Mary and Joseph – with James, Joseph, and Simon. He’s Jesus’ younger brother.

1. His refusal to stress it

But Jude refuses to stress this. Why? He sees no spiritual benefit in it, no special authority.

1. *But What We Must Hear*

This isn’t what we might think he would say. But it is what we need to hear.

1. Brother of James

So how then does Jude refer to himself? First, as the brother of James – James being the pillar of the Jerusalem church, the author of the New Testament book by his name. This is a mark of Jude’s humility and modesty. He’s saying, “*You know James. Well, I’m his little brother*.”

1. Servant of Jesus Christ

But how else does he refer to himself? As a servant of Jesus Christ. This was a profound shift which points to the impact of the resurrection on Jude’s life. Now Jude knows Jesus to be his Lord. He knows himself to be Jesus’ servant. In such devotion, Jude had found true freedom.

Jude is clear on his identity. Fundamentally, he knows himself as a servant of the Lord.

*Application:*

Do you? Know that troubled times will come, times that will make you feel shaken, shrunken, confused, concerned. You will be tempted to go back to what you know. We all are. That’s the way we’re wired, to go back to what’s deep, to what we know. What do you know?

Jude is saying, “*Be clear on your identity. Respond in a way that is counter cultural and counter intuitive. Know yourself to be a servant of Jesus Christ*.” That is, as a servant of His interests, obedient to His commands, trusting in His ways, and resting in His promises.

1. **GROUNDED IN OUR STANDING**

That’s the first thing. The second is to be grounded in our standing. Let’s move from the author to his audience (READ Jude 1-2). Reading between the lines of the letter, Jude’s readers are likely Jewish, possibly in Judea. And receiving this letter sometime in the mid to late 60’s.

1. *Settled Facts*

How does he describe them? First, by reminding them of some settled facts.

1. Called

They are called – meaning that they’ve been set apart by God to be His own.

1. Loved

They are loved – brought near by God and in God, speaking to an intimacy and union.

1. Kept

And they are kept – ever secure, preserved by God, kept from utterly falling away – truly His.

1. *Ongoing Needs*

Those are settled facts about them. Then there are ongoing needs for which Jude prays.

1. Mercy

For mercy – help for the helpless from the God of mercy.

1. Peace

For peace – especially as those settled facts about them settle into their hearts.

1. Love

For love – as that costly compassion and faithfulness pours into them and through them to others.

From the very opening of the letter, Jude is showing his great desire that his readers would be deeply grounded in their standing – in these settled facts and their ongoing needs.

*Application:*

Are you? Again, this is in the context of troubled times, times that were unsettling. And in such times, we need some settled facts. Besides even that, we will often feel a need within us but be unable to identify what it is. And so we’ll need to know what those needs are.

The temptation will come to listen to the voices, to accusations and our fears, voices that threaten to condemn and crush us. Or to think ourselves self-sufficient, able to handle it all.

Jude is saying, “*No, my friends, hear me. You need to be grounded in your standing. You need to always keep two things in front of you – these settled facts and your ongoing need*.”

1. **BRACED WITH OUR CHARGE**

Which then brings us to the third point – being braced with our charge. Here we move from the author to his audience to the reason for his writing – a terrible danger (READ Jude 1-4).

1. *Know the Truth*

Jude is imploring his readers to do two things. And the first is to know the truth.

1. Beautiful message

That is, the truth of the beautiful message of the gospel. “*Your sin is far worse than you ever dared to fear. But God’s love is far better than you ever dared to hope. And, even more, there is nothing you can do to make Him love you more. Or fail to do to make Him love you less*.”

1. Shallow hearing

That’s the gospel. And it’s a beautiful message. But a shallow hearing of the gospel leaves the door open to abuse. “*You mean this has nothing to do with my commitment, discipline, and obedience? Great! Then I can sin all I want!*” That’s the heresy Jude is addressing, the very thing Paul refuted in Romans 6. Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote of this (READ MLJ quote):

The true preaching of the gospel of salvation by grace alone always leads to the possibility of this charge being brought against it. There is no better test as to whether a man is really preaching the New Testament gospel of salvation than this, that some people might misunderstand it and misinterpret it to mean that it really amounts to this, that because you are saved by grace alone it does not matter at all what you do; you can go on sinning as much as you like because it will redound all the more to the glory of grace.

1. True hearing

That’s the shallow hearing. But a true hearing will see God’s law as an expression of His heart and very character. It will gladly hear Jesus say in John 14 that whoever keeps His commands is the one who loves Him. It will resonate with Paul’s words (READ 2 Corinthians 5:14-15).

*Illustration:*

Some of you have heard me tell this story of Abraham Lincoln before. The story teller now has stories told of him. It’s said he went to a slave auction. And there, a young woman was brought forward to be sold. There was hurt but fire in her eyes. And Lincoln bought her. After settling the accounts, he then said, “*My dear, you are now free*.” Not understanding, she asked, “*What do you mean?*” He said, “*I mean you are free to go*.” “*Free to do anything, to be anyone, to go anywhere?*” she asked. “*Yes*.” So, after thinking over it, she said, “*Then I’ll go with you*.”

1. *Contend for the Truth*

That’s the gospel. And Jude says we need to know it and then contend for it.

1. Definition

“Contend” – a word from athletics, especially wrestling. To struggle, fight, wrestle for the faith.

1. Shape

How? For now, let me say this. We cannot contend for the faith in a way that contradicts the faith. These folks were abusing the gospel, living how they pleased. “*So let’s turn the screws, press law!*” No. The answer is still the gospel. Steve Brown notes (READ SB), “*The problem (isn’t) that we made the gospel too good.  The problem is that we didn’t make it good enough*.”

1. Reason

To do otherwise or to just let it go is to encourage a diminished gospel. To do otherwise or just let it go is to let harm come to those affected. For what we believe matters. It has repercussions.

*Illustration:*

It’s why this question, perhaps rephrased but worked into our casual conversations with people we care for, has some potency – “*How’s that working for you?*” And we can say the same with faith and worldviews. As Francis Schaeffer often said, the most loving thing you can encourage someone else to do is to “*ride their tiger*,” to push to their ideas to their logical ends.

Jude then is saying, “*My friends, you need to know the truth. And to contend for it.*”

*Application:*

Your church is in turmoil, your fellowship endangered. These are troubled times. The solution? Know the truth – your own tendency to legalism or license. And hold to the gospel.

Know the truth and contend for it. See the danger for what it is – a twisting of the truth, a rejection of the Lord. See it and weep for those in harm’s way. And pray. That’s your charge.

**CONCLUSION:**

Back to where we began. Following Christ will mean troubled times. He calls us to respond to such times in ways both counter cultural and counter intuitive. He calls us to stay the course. Put another way, to “dance with the one that brought you”. This being an image of going on a dance date, your partner having gone to great lengths and shown great delight to be there with you. And that being something you need to keep in mind when other options come calling, giving you the reason and ability to pass them up. Following Christ will mean troubled times. It can be tempting to go another way, try another approach. Jude is saying, “*No. This is no time for something novel or new. You need to dance with the One who brought you*.”

Granted, there are times when something novel and new is just what you need. Think of Rocky Balboa in *Rocky III*. To take on Mr. T in their rematch, Rocky had to train in a whole new way and to get away from his reliance on sheer power and become faster and agile. And, not to spoil it for you, but it worked. There are such stories of taking an opponent by surprise.

But there are also stories of facing challenges, losing sight of who you are, of who and what got you where you are, and falling flat. Just ask Pete Carroll and the Seattle Seahawks. It’s the Super Bowl. You’re down 28-24 with 26 seconds left. It’s 2nd and goal on the one. And you throw a pass that gets picked instead of handing it off to your running back who’s been running loose on the other team. There are times when you need to dance with the one that brought you.

What’s my point? How is this related to Jude? Following Christ means troubling times. And He calls us to follow Him, even then. All the more so then. His promise is that He will see and get us through. He brought us into it. He’s with us in it. And He’ll bring us through.

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