

BACK TO THE BIBLE SERIES: Jude: Hope Filled Living in a Culture of Despair

By Pastor Bryan Clark

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So, let's imagine that every time you left your house, you had to cross a minefield, and one little mistake could be devastating. You have to teach and train your children, your spouse, your friends, whoever it is, to also cross through the minefield. And there's lots of voices telling you how to navigate the minefield. But there is one voice of One who knows exactly where the mines are and exactly how to get through—and that's what we want to talk about.

So, if you have a Bible, turn with us to the little New Testament book of Jude. This happens to be the Jude that's the half-brother of Jesus. He even tells us that he's the brother of James—another half-brother of Jesus—and it's the James that wrote the New Testament letter of James. So that's our Jude ... a bondservant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James,

Who are the recipients? So that would be us:

To those who are the called, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ:

(*NASB, Jude

1)

So, three words to describe us; the first is called—sanctified, set apart, chosen, elected—lots of terms for this. But basically, from Genesis to Revelation there is this strange wonderful, mysterious, confusing theology that God in some way, for reasons we'll never really understand, chose you to be His child, to be part of His kingdom, to spend forever with you in Paradise.

So that's the second description: those called, beloved loved by God! One of the amazing truths of our salvation is God chose you. It's not a random choice. It's because He knows you, it's because He loves you, and He wants you to be with Him forever.

The third term is the term kept, which is actually a military term. It means protected or guarded by soldiers. Jude's concern is not that the false teachers are going to lead you astray and you're going to lose your salvation. What he's actually saying is, "You're guarded; you're protected. God's got that part covered." So, the tone, the feel is like a parent having this conversation with a young child, and trying to explain to this child, "There are bad people in the world; there are people that want to do you harm." If the child doesn't listen, and harm comes to the child, the child doesn't cease to be my child, but the child goes through pain and heartache that could have been avoided. So that's the idea of the letter: We're God's child; He loves us, He's trying to protect us from unnecessary harm. (That's the feel of it). And He wants three things for us.

Verse 2:

May mercy and peace and love be multiplied to you.

Multiplied carries the idea He wants you to experience more of His mercy, more of His peace, more of His love. So, think of it this way: Honestly, how many times a week do you struggle with shame, do you struggle with guilt, do you struggle with this feeling of despair and hopelessness— what I refer to as the dark room? How many times a week do you find yourself in the dark room? To which I would say, “What are you doing in there?” If you have trusted Christ as Savior, what are you doing in there? And the answer would be, “The liar, the deceiver got to you and you believed it, and that’s what gets you in the dark room!” Jude wants you to know the truth because it’s the truth that sets you free. He wants you to experience more of God’s peace.

The third one is God wants you to know more of His love. So honestly, do you feel loved today? Maybe you feel lonely; maybe you feel rejected; maybe you feel discarded, marginalized, kicked to the curb, unwanted. To which I would say, don’t you understand how much God loves you? Don’t you understand what it cost God to make it possible for you to spend forever with Him in Paradise? Don’t you understand that He cares about every little thing that happens in your life every single day? So, this is the idea that when the liar gets to us and deceives us, we believe things that aren’t true, and it has all kinds of negative effects in our lives. So, he wants us to know the truth, because the truth sets us free.

Verse 3:

Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity (I was compelled) to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.

So, Jude says, “I wanted to write you a nice letter that celebrates our wonderful salvation, but rather I felt the necessity—I was compelled by the Holy Spirit we would say—to write and appeal to you. That word appeal is a military term. The general is trying to rally and motivate the troops because if we don’t go in there with all we have, we’re not going to come back home. So, the idea of to contend earnestly is, it’s a Greek word from which we get our English word agonize. It’s an athletic term we use to describe a wrestler or a runner, agonizing in order to win. So, he says, “I wanted to write you a nice letter about our salvation, but was compelled to appeal to you, to motivate you, to challenge you to agonize for the faith.” The faith, which defines us—our doctrinal statement, this creed and its creedal language—is passed down from generation to generation. Now in Jude’s time, they did not have the completed New Testament. We would simply say today, the reliable, inspired, authoritative Word of God. That’s what we’re agonizing for; that’s what we’re contending earnestly for. What’s the concern?

Verse 4:

For certain persons have crept in unnoticed,

This language is really important. It’s not talking about all the lies and deception in the secular world—This is someone who looks like a Christian; this is someone who sounds like a Christian; this is someone who smells like a Christian. This is showing they’re going unnoticed. They’re creeping in the backdoor and no one notices. So, what are they doing?

those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, —meaning the prophets warned us this would happen. He refers to them then as ...ungodly persons (and what do they do?) who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness. (Vs. 4b-4c)

Basically, we would say license, meaning there is a minimalizing or dismissing of the concept of sin. License just means sin is no big deal; don't worry about it. So, this happens a couple of different ways. It can be the idea that sin isn't really real. It's kind of this archaic concept, so don't worry about it, God is a God of grace and mercy and love, and you and Jesus—you're kind of buddies and He's okay with how you're living—so just go with it. The other would be, "Well, sin is still sin. I mean technically, but because God is a God of grace and mercy, you sin tonight, get forgiveness in the morning—no harm, no foul!" So that's usually what's meant by the idea that grace becomes this license to sin.

So again, think through this. We're talking about someone who is slipping in the back door. They're creeping in on purpose. They're seeking to go unnoticed. They're not going to deny the Scriptures; they're not going to say things that are obviously untrue. But what they do is they begin to turn and twist our theology into something it doesn't actually mean. They turn the grace of God into a license to sin!

The second thing he (Jude) identifies: ...and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. (Vs. 4d)

So because he says only Master and Lord—both of those are reference to Jesus—maybe part of the issue is this idea that all roads lead to God, that Jesus isn't the one and only way to God, which of course would be a popular belief today, even though Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life and no one comes to the Father but through Me." So perhaps the false teachers were denying that. I think there are lots of Christians that live lifestyles that are offensive to God and they've convinced themselves it's okay. "Hey, Jesus and me, we're buddies! We get along just fine, He's okay with this"—that's the whole grace and mercy bit; that's what he's talking about. So, a lot of scholars think this idea of denying our Master and Lord is a denial of the return of Christ and the judgement of Christ, and they get that because 2 Peter and Jude are very similar. A big problem that Peter deals with is the denial of the return of Christ and the judgement of Christ, so they may be dealing with the same false teaching.

So, think about what he's just said. The ungodly—those who are without God or those who are determined to be their own god—told them grace is a license to sin. "You decide what's right and wrong and, ultimately, Jesus is not coming back to judge you; don't worry about it!" And does that sound familiar? Genesis Chapter 3, there's a serpent that creeps in unnoticed, and what does he say? "You can be your own god. "You know, you can decide what's right and wrong." A license to sin!

So, here's the question: How do these voices come into our lives and influence us? The language creep in the back-door kind of has this imagery of a building. So, in the ancient world, in Jude's time, before there was electricity, before there was the internet, before there was the printing press, just think about it. The only way this happened was literally someone physically talking to someone else, influencing others to lead them astray. It could have been literally infiltrating the group. But think how much that has changed over the years. How do these voices get to us today? They get to us through the radio, television, movies, the internet, books, podcasts; they get to us a hundred different ways and seek to convince us that something's true that isn't actually true. They're convincing us there are no true mines in the field or what mines are there are not really of any concern.

So, think of it this way. If your desire as a Christian is to live your life the way you want to live it—“I don’t want Jesus to be my Master and Lord; I don’t want Him telling me what to do. He’s my buddy; He’s my pal; we get along fine!”—and so you’re determined to live the way you want to live; you’re determined to find someone who claims to be a preacher or some church that will tell you it’s okay. If that’s what you want, you can find that. You can twist the Bible and make it mean anything you want it to mean. But that doesn’t change the truth—that the landmines are there and they’re real and they will do serious damage when you hit them!

It’s a very different attitude when you are agonizing for the truth. I don’t start with what I want to believe and how I want to live. I start with what’s true; I want to know what’s true, and what has God actually said? And having agonized, contended earnestly for the faith, now that I understand this is true, I will adjust my morality to fit my theology. So, a lot of the questions you have to wrestle with are, “What is the starting point?” Well, if you’re going to start with your morality and then find a theology that accommodates it, you can do that, but the consequences will be severe! So that’s Jude’s concern—that they creep in unnoticed. It sounds like the Bible...looks like the Bible...those seem to be Bible verses...and yet they lead you astray.

Verses 5, 6 and 7 are just three quick illustrations of times in history where God responded to rebellion, where God responded to sin. The message of the false teachers is, “God is a God of grace and mercy; He’s kind of okay with sin, so don’t worry about it.” These illustrations show otherwise:

Now I desire to remind you, though you know all things once for all, (So they already know this.), that the Lord, after saving a people out of the land of Egypt, subsequently destroyed those who did not believe. (Vs. 5)

So he’s talking about how God delivered the nation of Israel out of Egypt: brought them to the Promised Land; twelve spies went in, all agreed it was a land flowing with milk and honey but ten of the spies said, “There are giants in the land; we can’t trust God; we can’t go in,” and they persuaded the majority. Now stop and think about that. If this is already where they’re at, struggling with their own fears, then these voices convince them that’s best and they choose not to believe, not to trust God, so God, in judgment, says, “This entire generation will die in the wilderness, and We’ll raise up the next generation and see if they will trust Me and enter the land.” The point is: God takes that rebellion, that disbelief seriously. He’s not just shrugging it off as no big deal!

The second one, Verse 6:

And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day,

One third of the angels fell, and God judged them. Again, the point is simple. When people choose not to believe, God doesn’t just shrug His shoulders and say, “That’s all right. You know, whatever you want.” He’s serious about sin and He’s serious about truth.

The third one, Verse 7: Just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they in the same way as these indulged in gross immorality (sexual sin) and went after strange flesh,

So, any sexual experience outside of a man and woman in a one-flesh, life-long marriage relationship is strange. That's the language. To God it's strange; it's outside of what God intended, so it could be all kinds of things in Sodom and Gomorrah.

...and went after strange flesh, are exhibited as an example in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire. (Vs. 7b)

Exhibited there means to view a corpse. So, the idea is that God judged Sodom and Gomorrah as an example that He's serious about sin; He's serious about rebellion. God is not in Heaven as a God of grace and mercy, shrugging His shoulders saying, "That's all right. I don't care, Me and Jesus, we're pals; live as you please; don't worry about it."

The intent of the three illustrations is that God takes this seriously and He means what He says. Now this idea of the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah viewed as corpses, meaning this is an example, look at it; think of it this way: At the end of the story, everybody stands in some judgment before God. Believers stand before one judgment—never for salvation; There's no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, but a judgment of rewards. Unbelievers stand before God in judgment for their sins and are then cast into the lake of fire.

So, the idea is everyone, as soon as they die, experience some judgment. So, the idea is the false teachers come along and say, "Don't worry about it. You know God's okay with it. God is a God of grace and mercy; God's not that serious about sin; live the way you want." You can find somebody to tell you it's okay, and just go merrily along. There are no landmines in the field, and even if you hit one, they're just little landmines; they won't hurt you. So many Christians believe this, and their lives are devastated because they did not take God seriously. They did not believe the truth. Jude's desire is that we would agonize, contend earnestly for the truth. Jude's desire is that you experience more of His mercy, more of His peace, more of His love, but that's only going to happen when you earnestly contend for the truth—because it's only the truth that will set you free.

Cara: So, Bryan, thanks for taking us to Jude to finish out this series on living Hope-filled lives. This book actually has many of the same warnings as Second Peter.

Bryan: Yeah, it's interesting how very similar it is. So, we could conclude false teachers were a huge problem in the First Century and they're a huge problem 2000 years later and probably will always be a big problem.

Arnie: I appreciated your illustration of the land mine today. I'm learning more and more just how careful we have to be in our walk as Christ followers.

Bryan: Yeah. So, Jesus said the enemy is a liar and that's his nature as the father of lies. So that is the way it's going to be. And more and more, culture is littered with the traps or the landmines and it's very challenging. And as a pastor, one of the things that comes home to me is the risks are real. The devastation of people's lives when they listen to the lies and the false teachings; it's devastating.

Cara: You reminded us of the power of this liar. He's always working, and I think just to steal our hope, to make us think that God is disappointed or angry with us. That's part of the truth that we have to contend for, isn't it?

Bryan: Yeah. That's really an important message, is everyone has a view of God. It might be a messed up view, or better view of God, but typically people's view of God is formulated around life circumstances, different things they go through, and all of us spend a lifetime getting into God's Word, and trying to correct our view of God, and see it rightly. So, when you have a messed-up view of God, then it just creates all kinds of core problems. And really, until that is correct, straightened out, you have little chance to experience the hope and the peace that God wants us to know.

Arnie: So, it's critical to remember that when we look for God's truth, we start with what He says, not what we think He says or how we feel.

Bryan: Yeah. Well, that's such an important message and so contrary to our culture. So yes, it's absolutely critical. You can't survive as a Christian really without understanding and believing the truth. So, feelings reflect beliefs, but they can't be what we use to define beliefs. But one of the things I've found helpful over the years is, look at your feelings and work it backwards. It is helpful to assess, what do I believe and what is the belief that's generating these feelings? Because sometimes we don't believe what we think we do. And that's a helpful way to unpack that a little bit.

Cara: Some Christians have a hard time understanding how the truth gets maligned by false teachers within the church.

Bryan: You know, as a preacher, it's easy to twist the Scripture, and the more Biblically ignorant people become, the easier it is to misrepresent the Scripture. You say things that sound right, you tell people what they want to hear. It's kind of this slow fade, this frog in the kettle kind of a thing. Little by little people are led astray. And one of the frightening things about deception is when you're deceived, you think you're right, but you're not right. That's the frightening part of that. You know, thinking about maybe some of the false teachers today, there's a reason why so many of them dig into obscure Old Testament passages that nobody really understands, in order to promote their message is, you can twist it around, nobody even knows what you're talking about. And if you listen, that's what many of them do.

Arnie: So one of the tough things that I wrestle with is, you see all these people, they're like heading off a cliff and you want to tell them that judgment is coming, but you don't want to be that crazy guy on the street with the megaphone that says, "Judgment is coming." How do you handle all of this?

Bryan: Yeah. So, a lot of us grew up and were trained that the message of the Gospel is a presentation. [Yeah.] And you think about that. If someone you don't know very well, sometimes even a stranger, and within minutes you're going to tell them they're a sinner and they're going to Hell, it's like that's not going to be well received. It's like how would you like that from a stranger? So I think in the spirit of the whole truth, we need to be open and honest with people - but it requires relationship, context, more conversation to realize what the situation is - why God has sent a Savior and the realities of choosing not to trust Christ as Savior. But that's probably not the starting place in a conversation, if you want it to go well.

Cara: You kind of, got to ease the wall down a little bit maybe, before you put that on them. But I think about my own walk, it took me decades to really understand and like, you know, God was there the whole time, but I was ignoring the noise, I guess.

Arnie: But it has to be a balance, because I think you can become immune to all the people around you that are going to Hell, and it doesn't bother you. So, it's really a balance, isn't it?

Bryan: I think it's a balance, but I think that the Scriptures themselves refer to the Gospel as Good News. So it is, it is Good News. [Yeah.] Part of that does include coming to grips with the consequences of sin, if we don't trust Christ. But at the end of the day, the news is good, and we need to frame it accordingly.

Cara: Bad news first Arnie. Then hit them with that mind-blowing Good News. Well, you go on social media and there are those guys and they're like, "Repent or burn!" And I'm thinking, well you're not wrong, but maybe your heart, your reasons, your motives aren't because you genuinely love the person, and want to see them saved, but you just want to stick it to them. And I think the deliverer has to be in the right heart, in order to be authentic enough to want to do it in a loving way.

Bryan: Yeah. So, another way to think about it is Biblically, the message isn't really about going to a place. It's about a relationship with a person. If you go back and read the New Testament, the primary message is not, "Wouldn't it be better to go to Heaven than Hell"? It's "We're all made for and long for a relationship with Jesus". And everybody feels that one way or another; you just have to figure out where it's shown up in people's lives.

Cara: And people want to know that there's a purpose for them, like there's a reason you're here, and it's because Someone created you that loves you. That's the message you want to open with, maybe, instead of "repent or burn". It's just a little hard to take sometimes, most of the time. [laughter]. It's encouraging to think that God has given me this roadmap to negotiate the craziness of this life. And when I follow it, there's not only safety in that, but there's some real joy going on.

Bryan: Yeah. So, we're not left to guess, try and figure it out. You know, the Bible describes itself as a lamp to my feet, light to my path, and honestly, as a pastor, it's confusing to me, as to why so many Christians minimize the importance of the Bible. If God's given us a map, why would we not study the map? And that's something we talk about a lot here.