



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

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I wish it was true that we as Christians could go to sleep at night, put our Bible under our pillow, and wake up in the morning with our head full of knowledge. One of the challenges we have is, a lot of Christians diminish the importance of Biblical truth and have lost sight of the fact this is a war of truth and deception. If you do not know the truth, then you're going to be deceived; you're going to be lied to; you're going to be off track. That's why he says you're going to have to ground yourself in the truth...in the faith...in this body of doctrine that we believe.

Think of it this way. Every single person, you have an area of expertise. Think about what that is. You have an area where you really understand something and you're really good at it. When someone comes along and lies to you in your area of expertise, you immediately, with great confidence and calmness, know it's a lie. Why? Because you're confident you know the truth. It's the same idea. "I need to know the truth which exposes the lie."

I think sometimes we make this more complicated than it needs to be. Again, I think people go into panic mode—like I have to memorize everything in the Bible from Genesis to Revelation or I'm in trouble. It's not that complicated. We're not talking about arguing over the intricacies of Bible doctrine and the need to be a Bible scholar. That's not what we're saying. We're just saying you need to have an understanding of the core theology that exposes the lie. Think about it:

What were the two areas that Jude identified in Verse Four? One is: they turn grace into a license to sin. If you just read through the New Testament, isn't it overwhelmingly clear that grace isn't a license to sin? It's not that complicated. The second was: they denied Jesus as their Master and Lord - that God is okay with the fact that I'm in charge, running my own life, me deciding what's right and wrong. Isn't it true that just a basic reading of the New Testament makes it very clear: I'm not in charge; He's in charge! He's the Master and Lord, and I need to submit to Him. Those are the examples of Jude. It's not that complicated. We just need to have a sense of the truth, which exposes the lie. So that's the first one.

Second:

...praying in the Holy Spirit. (NASB, Jude, Vs. 20b)

So, praying in alignment with the Holy Spirit is what that means. But here's also what that's saying—that this is a relationship! It is God speaking to me—that is through His Word—and it's me speaking to God—that is prayer. But the whole thing happens supernaturally because I actually have the very presence of God Himself in me. So, the one who actually inspired the Word of God, the one who actually we might say is the author of the Word of God, actually lives

in me, which creates the potential for this supernatural dialogue where I hear what God says through His Word, and I talk back to God in prayer, and it has all the dynamics of a relationship!

That's really important to understand. We are not talking about memorizing a doctrinal statement. We are not talking about memorizing a creed. We are not talking about some sort of catechism to learn the information so we can pass the test. We are talking about a living, dynamic, supernatural relationship with God, which has God speaking to me, and me speaking to God.

You see that then in Verse 21:

Keep yourselves in the love of God,

This word keep is the same one that he used in Verse One. It means to be guarded and protected by soldiers. Protect this relationship. Guard it. This is what defines us as believers. It's not just words on a piece of paper; it's a living, dynamic relationship. Think of it this way: This is not getting on Google and googling up a map that tells you how to cross through the minefield. You get your map and you're trying to figure it out, hoping you don't make a mistake. That's not what it is. This is Jesus showing up and talking to you, and hearing about your fears and your concerns and anxiety, and your confusions. This is Jesus talking to you about the minefields and how we're going to do this—how we're going to work our way forward. And when it's time to cross, He doesn't open the door and say, "Good luck." He takes you by the hand and says, "All right, are you ready? We're going to do this together, hand in hand." It's a relationship. So, what do we need to remember? We need to remember that the apostles warned us false teachers were coming. We need to remember to build ourselves up on the Word of God. We need to remember to pray and talk to God, and we need to guard and protect this relationship.

That's the key, which gets us then to the last one in Verse 21,

...waiting anxiously, (with great anticipation in other words) for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life (which is referring to His return) (Vs. 21b)

When we were in the book of Hebrews, this was the hope of the Gospel—that He's coming back, and that He will deliver us to the place He promised, a place where all things will be new. A place where things will be made right—the place that our souls long for. That's eternal life! It's not just the duration of life; it's a quality of life. He completes His mercy, finishes our salvation, and He delivers us to the life He promised. Maybe He comes back today; maybe it's a hundred years from now. But because of this dynamic, loving relationship, we anxiously await; we can't wait until He comes back!

So it's four participles: building...praying...keeping...and waiting.
That's what we need to remember!

Once we've grounded ourselves, we've secured ourselves in the Word of God, then we're in position to help someone else. It's like when you fly on an airplane and a flight attendant goes through their little spiel and the oxygen mask drops out and they always tell you to make sure you put yours on first and then help someone next to you. It's exactly what Jude is saying. You need to get secured first, and then you're in a position to help somebody else.

And there are three categories of people. Verse 22:

And have mercy on some, who are doubting;

There is discussion as to whether the doubting are believers or unbelievers. Maybe it's irrelevant, because it could be both. It's this mercy, this patience, this grace with people that are struggling, that are doubting, are trying to figure this out, just sorting it all out. We build relationships with them; we come alongside of them, and we try to help. "This is what grounds me; let me help you."

The second category, Verse 23:

...save others, snatching them out of the fire;

This is much more aggressive language. Rescue them! It has the idea they are one step from disaster, so grab them by the back of the collar or it's going to be too late. Again, there's conversation, "Is this believers or unbelievers? Is the fire like a refining fire, part of God's discipline, or is the fire like the eternal fire?" It's really hard to tell. The point is there are those who are about to make seriously horrific decisions, about to step on a landmine. At the last minute, you grab them by the collar and you pull them back. But there is an understanding that's a drastic step, and it always has the possibility of things blowing up, things going badly, so you don't just do that. Most of the time we come alongside; we have conversations, and we try to help that way. But there are occasions where this is one step from disaster and it's more like an intervention of some sort.

The third, also in verse 23:

And on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh.

The third one is somebody that is really in deep. They are neck deep in their sin, whatever it is, and there is a warning to be careful. Be careful you don't get stuck in the mud. Be careful that you don't get drawn in. Be careful that you don't get involved in something you shouldn't be involved in. There's always this tension between, "At what point am I helping, and at what point am I hurting?" "At what point am I enabling someone, and at what point am I actually helping?" That is the idea there. It gets complicated. Three categories—each one gets more aggressive. But the idea is we anchor ourselves, which puts us in a position to help others.

Starting in Verse 24, then, is arguably the most familiar benediction in the New Testament. But I think sometimes we don't really understand what it is saying. Again, when you talk about false teachers, when you talk about landmines, when you talk about trouble ahead, it is not uncommon that Christians get panicky. Christians start to think, "Oh no! That's going to happen to me and I'm going to get led astray. It is going to be a disaster. What do I do now?" Again, Jude is saying, "Wait a minute. Calm down. There's no need to panic. God's got this!"

Verse 24:

Now to Him who is able (that means has the power—to what?) to keep you from stumbling,

This is the same word keep again—to be guarded and protected by soldiers. When you're in panic mode, you're thinking, "How am I going to keep myself from stumbling? How am I going to do this?" Along comes Jude, and he says, "Wait a minute, wait a minute. You don't do that. God does that!" Now to Him who is able, He has the power—to keep you from stumbling. This is what he said right from the beginning. Right from the beginning he has been very clear the concern is not that you are somehow going to lose your salvation. He started the whole conversation reminding us in Verse One: You are called; you are loved, and you are kept. God's got this. He just doesn't want you to experience unnecessary hurt and pain from being led astray into things that will be disastrous. But He is the one that is going to keep you from stumbling.

Second,

...and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, (Vs. 24b)

Who is going to make you stand? He is going to make you stand in the glorious presence of God. And what is He going to declare? He is going to declare you to be blameless—righteous, justified. Maybe this week you got off track. Maybe over the last months or years you stepped on a landmine. It blew your foot off, and you're thinking, "Oh, this is a disaster! I'm going to stand before God one day and He's going to say, 'What happened to your foot?' and then I'm going to have to tell Him the story, and it's going to be a disaster!" You don't make yourself stand. He makes you stand! The message of the Gospel is not that it's on the basis of your good performance that you stand blameless before God. It's on the basis of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. On the basis of the blood of Christ, you stand in the righteousness of Christ. Even though you look in the mirror and you are missing a foot, God looks at you and sees you standing in the righteousness of Christ.

That is going to be such a glorious day. It will result in exceeding great joy. A lot of Christians have this fear they are one day going to stand before God and it's just going to be this disastrous moment. It's like, "Where are we getting this?" When we are grounded in the truth, we understand in that moment I stand in the righteousness of Christ. I don't make myself stand. He makes me stand, and He makes me stand blameless in that moment! In God's glory, He will declare me to be righteous, to be blameless. It will be such a magnificent moment; it will result in unimaginable joy! Which is our transition into the new Heaven, the new Earth—the place where things will be made right...the place where things will be made new...the place that our souls have longed for all of our lives. This is the glorious moment that awaits us, so there's no need for anxiety. There's no need for fear. God is saying, "Wait a minute, wait a minute, I've got this. I'm not going to let you stumble. I'm going to make you blameless before the Father!"

Verse 25:

...to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time (that's the past) and now, (present) and forever (in the future).

Essentially—now to the One who wins in the end! The false teachers may make it sound like we're not quite sure who wins in the end, but the truth is Jesus wins! The One who wins—the One to whom all power and majesty and dominion is ascribed to in the end—the Name above

every name, the Name from whom every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess. The One who ultimately wins in the end is the One that says, “I will keep you; I will make you stand blameless. I’ve got this covered. You just have to trust Me; I’ve got you!”

So, there’s no reason for panic; there’s no reason for fear; there’s no reason for getting all worked up. We just need to remember some things. We just need to remember that the false teachers are coming, so we need to remember to ground ourselves. We need to remember to pray. We need to remember to keep the relationship alive and flourishing, and we need to remember to anxiously await the return of Christ and the fulfillment of everything He’s promised! We need to remember that Jesus said,

“You shall know the truth... (and what?)...and the truth will set you free!”

Arnie: Bryan, one of the first things Jude reminds us to do is pray, and prayer is such an interesting thing for me, and it's something that over time I've learned to love to do, but I'm still amazed that this God of the universe actually takes the time to listen to my prayers. And not only that, but He acts on them as well.

Bryan: It is amazing. I don't know anybody that could ever really get used to that magnificent truth. The God who wrote the Bible actually lives in me. So between the Word of God and prayer, it's like a conversation with the God of the universe. That's an amazing thing, but it takes time. You can't really do it in the fast lane. And again, reminding all of us, I think, how we define “acts”. So God acts on our prayers, but how he acts is always the thing we have to wrestle with, because it's not always just the way we want it.

Cara: I like, "Keep yourself in the love of God". In other words, we look to Jesus as our one and only, and we don't let other influences in to break up our relationship with Him.

Bryan: Yeah. So I think anybody that thinks about, whether it's a marriage or a special friendship, how much effort it takes to make that relationship thrive, and then, why would we think it would take less than that for a relationship with a Spirit-being? So we have to work at it, but it is a relationship. It's a love relationship that's worth the effort for sure.

Arnie: Jude tells us to have mercy on some who are doubting. I think that element of mercy sets us apart as Christ followers and really that's what others are looking for from Christians.

Bryan: Yeah. So there's no shortage of people that have messed up and they know they've messed up, and in that moment, what they don't need is anger and finger-pointing. They need somebody with compassion to come alongside them and try to help and get back on the right path. I'll often think it's not helpful to be frustrated and angry. That doesn't help them. You think about your own kids, if you have kids, it's like how many times do we come back and try again to help them get something, understand something. We get involved. That's what parenting is. And it's very similar to how we need to respond to the people around us.

Cara: I have a question with that though. And with kids too. I mean, I'm a helicopter mom, so it's hard to see my kids: “Oh, they forgot their homework!”; Or remember one time my son kept forgetting his coat and so finally I was like, “You're just going to have to be cold in order to learn that you have to bring your coat” ; or, “You're going to have to get a check mark if you didn't

bring your work - I'm not going to run it to you.” I mean that's our kids, but people in our lives, how do we know when we're coming in and we're hindering their spiritual walk, because we're getting too involved with bailing them out?

Bryan: That's a great question. So let's go back to your son. You're trying to figure out when is it helping him, when is it enabling him? But with love and mercy and compassion, you're genuinely trying to figure out what's best for your son. And that's what we're talking about. Whether it's our children or whether it's somebody else. We're not reacting out of anger and frustration and just venting. We're genuinely trying to figure out what's the best way to respond in order to actually help this person. So the difference is really the attitude or the motive behind it. You know, that's contrary to a parent that's so mad at his kid for forgetting his coat, he grabs him and shakes him. It's like that's not helpful. So just the same heart that you've described for your own son; it's a heart of compassion and mercy. But the question is, how do we actually help? What's helping, what's enabling? Those are the questions we're wrestling with.

Arnie: Bryan, you make it sound so simple, and I know you don't mean it like it's simple, because I've seen you work with people patiently over the years. When it comes to snatching someone out of the fire, can you give us some guidance on how do you keep your cool when you're angry? Because it's not just this first rescue time, it's the hundredth time you've been down this road with the same person.

Bryan: Jude's language, snatching out of the fire is, I think referencing something that's gotten pretty extreme. So the stakes are high, [Right], and so one of the things would be, well we don't jump to this too quickly. This would be whatever it is, it's pretty extreme. So it takes lots of prayer and I think really being careful that you're not reacting out of frustration or anger, but you're genuinely trying to figure out how to help. So you know, maybe it depends on your temperament, but there's times to cool off a little bit, calibrate, figure out strategically what's the best way to respond. And make sure that we're prayerfully taking a step that could have real serious consequences, could blow up and not go as hoped. And that's the risk you take. And I think that's part of what Jude's talking about. The other part of it then is we guard ourselves. You know, we're stepping into the war zone and we could get stuck in the mud ourselves, if we're not ready ourselves, to step into that. Jude uses kind of unusual language. He talks about a garment that's polluted by flesh, which I think he's talking about just the reality of sin. It's like this person is wearing a soiled garment. This is their sin and it's talking about the sin and the damage. It's being cautious so that we ourselves don't end up getting involved in the same sin. But I think it's also seeing sin for what it is, which makes it less attractive, which makes it less likely we're going to go down that same path.

Cara: “Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling.” Just that part of the benediction is really powerful. [I love that.]

Bryan: It is powerful and I think sometimes we're so used to it, maybe we don't hear it and we think we're supposed to keep ourselves from stumbling. But the benediction is, “Now to Him who is able to keep us from stumbling.” There's security and power in that.

Arnie: Bryan, our last two months studying the teachings of Peter and Jude have been pretty amazing because they're so relevant to us today.

Bryan: Yeah, very relevant in our culture. This is what we need. We need to know the truth. That's what's going to set us free.

