

“In the Last Time” Jude 17-18 Sermon

We should review briefly where we are in this short letter. The main thrust of the letter is found in verse 3, “*Beloved, although I was 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*”

So his hearers were to contend for the faith. And the reason he gives for urging the church to do this is in the next verse where he says that ungodly people had crept into the fellowship of the church. These intruders posed a serious threat in Jude’s eyes.

And in order to prove his point about the seriousness of the threat and the church’s need to contend for the faith, Jude uses much of the letter to give proofs and examples of the kind of wickedness that had made itself known with the presence of these infiltrators.

Jude used the body of the letter to emphasize the seriousness of the threat and he did this by giving examples from the OT and other places of this type of rebellion and its grave punishments. And so we were told of Sodom and Gomorrah, Cain and Balaam and of the coming judgment that will accrue when Christ comes with His holy angels on the last day.

Here now in the closing part of the letter he directs his attention to the true church and to showing them how exactly they were to fight for the faith once for all delivered to the saints. And he does this by telling them to remember what the Word of God says about false teachers and commanding them to keep themselves in the love of God.

Jude begins here in verse 17 with a transition. He says, “*But you must remember, beloved...*” With this short turn of phrase he separates the visible church into two groups. Now we have to remember who Jude is writing about here. He is talking about all those who profess the name of Christ.

There is the true church, or as he says in verse 1, those who are *called*, and in verse 3, we are “*the saints*”. And Jude says that *within* this group of called ones there exists ungodly people who, though they profess Christ with their mouths, actually deny Him as Master and Lord. We’ve spent 3 weeks now looking at what Jude says about the true nature of these infiltrators.

Even though they participated in the visible *form* of the church these ungodly people were not part of the true church. And so Jude now turns to address the “saints”. He says “*But you...*” that is to say, not these people over here, the ungodly, but “*you*” the beloved (“*Beloved*” is actually the first word in the greek).

Jude, it seems, desperately wanted the members of the church to know that they were loved by God. And we are friends. We are God’s beloved. Jude calls the church in verse 1, “*beloved in God the Father*” and he addresses the church as “*beloved*” in verse 3 and here in verse 17, then again in verse 20.

It is not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to die for us. Even when we were unlovable, God loved us and He comes to us by His Spirit. And He gives us a new heart and a new will. He sovereignly recreates us, causes us to be born from above and we then see Christ in the gospel and we no longer deny Him but we embrace Him by faith.

With this new heart we love Christ and we love the Father and the Father and the Son love us. When we believe the three persons of the Trinity come to make their home in us. So then, Father, Son, and Spirit, the one true God, never leave us.

This is what it means to be *called* by God and to be *loved* by God. To put it another way, to be called by God is to be loved by God. This love is not known, indeed it is rejected by the other group of people, the ungodly. But you, you church, you are beloved. This love we know friends is a Trinitarian work through and through, a three-fold cord is not easily broken.

Remember we've mentioned Jude's love of groups of three in this letter. Well we see perhaps the strongest group of three in this section when Jude mentions the three persons of the Trinity. He says in verse 20 that we are to pray in the *Holy Spirit*.

Then in verse 21 we are to keep ourselves in the love of God (*the Father*), and that we are to wait for the mercy of *Jesus Christ*. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit then mentioned in the span of two verses. This is important for Christians to understand the power of God's love for us.

So that when we hear Jude call the church "*beloved*", this is what it means. People say "I love you" to one another all the time, but based upon their true character it may not actually mean anything. Even we as Christians often fail to love others properly.

But when the Bible says we are loved, we know God means it in the truest sense of the word. And what are we as God's beloved to do? Jude says we are to remember the prophecies of God; "*But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ* (just a side note here about being God's beloved. To be loved by God means that Jesus Christ is *our Lord*. That is to say we seek to obey Him in all things in our love for Him)

We see here to that we as beloved by God we also listen to His voice. Jude directed his hearers to the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. If for whatever reason we were still somewhat skeptical about the prophecy Jude gave from Enoch in verse 14 and 15, Jude solidifies the truth with a reference to apostolic authority.

The apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ were those who had been directly called by Christ to bear witness to His death and resurrection. They were eyewitnesses to Christ's resurrection and they received gifts from the Holy Spirit to proclaim and to write down the very Word of God.

Their authority was unquestionable because the authority was God's. One of the apostles, Paul, gave thanks for the faith of the church in Thessalonica in receiving their divinely given authority when he said in 1 Thessalonians, "*and we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers*" (1 Thess. 2:13)

So Jude here appeals to this apostolic authority to get the church's attention if he hadn't gotten their attention already. Now Jude was writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit himself. This letter therefore has the authority of God, but this letter was also written at a time in history, redemptive history.

At this time in history the newly formed church was receiving letters from Peter, an apostle of Christ, and Paul, an apostle of Christ, and they were hearing their preaching. Then they get this short general letter from Jude, the brother of James. And in it he quotes Enoch and he says ungodly people had crept in.

If at this point there may have been any temptation to dismiss some of what Jude is saying here, Jude says the church should remember the predictions of the apostles of Christ. Now when Jude says "predictions" he means that the apostles spoke words about what would happen in the future.

To “predict” means to tell the details about something *before* it happens. This quote from the apostles of Christ that Jude uses here, it is not apparently a direct quote from a place in Scripture in the NT. But the content of the quote is in keeping with what we do have in the NT (e.g. Acts 20:29-30).

At some point during their ministry to the church the apostles predicted this; “*in the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions*” At this point in our own context we should know a lot about so called “predictions”. There are voices from many different circles of well informed and educated people giving predictions about what they think will happen in the coming weeks and months.

And there are voices from groups who are not so well informed offering their predictions. But those that are speaking about this are all giving predictions about what they think will happen in the future. Based upon their knowledge of the past and the present they attempt to predict the details of the future.

Now these “predictions” that come from men are not truly predictions in the sense that Jude uses the word here. They are simply *guesses*, some well-informed and others not so much. But in the end they are all guesses.

Only time will tell who was closer to the truth. But in the midst of all these guesses about the future the absolute truth is that not one person living today or at any time in history, except for Christ, can in their own power, speak with absolute authority about details of the future.

The apostle Peter said as much when he said, “*no prophecy was every produced by the will of man...*” (2 Pet. 1:21) Only God knows the details of the future, because He has already determined the future. He is not only the first but He is the last. He is not only the alpha (the first letter in the Greek alphabet) but He is the omega (the last letter).

Only God knows the future and therefore only God can speak with absolute authority about the future. We as created beings with knowledge of only the past and the present (which is always moving by the way) cannot *predict* the future.

Now this does not mean we cannot make educated, well-informed guesses about what we think will happen and make decisions and take actions based upon these guesses. We can and should. God after all is a God of order.

Based upon the order He has created in the world, we can examine what happens in His world and prepare as best we can for the future. God’s order provides a world where weathermen, doctors, economic analysts, and virologists, and all kinds of other fields have real legitimacy and benefit.

But in the end we all have to admit we cannot every definitively predict the future. Only God can tell us about this with absolute authority and with Divine precision. And how does He do this? “*For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit*” (2 Pet. 1:21)

By the power of the Holy Spirit God influenced men like Jude and the apostles to speak and write so that what they said and what they wrote had the full authority of God Himself. And so under the inspiration of the HS these men spoke at times about the future, they predicted, or spoke before hand authoritatively about events that had not yet happened.

Now of all the details about the future that God could choose from to tell the church about what does He choose? We see in the NT details about our salvation and the judgment of the wicked and the destruction of Satan, and about the arrival of the new heavens and the new earth, but Jude takes a prediction from the apostles that was being fulfilled in his own time.

He said remember the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, “*They said to you, ‘In the last time there will be scoffers following their own ungodly passions’*” There are a couple of things we need to recognize about this prophecy. First is that Jude believed the arrival of these infiltrators in his day was a fulfillment of what the apostles of Christ said would happen before the intruders ever arrived.

The apostles said to the church “*there will be scoffers*”. So then at some point in time, in the history of this young NT church, the apostles spoke about the future and said there will be scoffers, mockers, people who despise religion and who scoff or mock at the idea of a coming judgment.

In 2 Peter they are described as those who say, “*where is the promise of his coming?*” *For every since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation*” (2 Pet. 3:4)

They think there is no judgment, therefore they can live as they please and they teach others to do the same. Jude says they follow their own ungodly desires. And then he says it is *these* who *cause divisions*, present tense. Jude was talking about the kinds of people that were present in the community at that time.

We said last week that we don’t always know who these ungodly false teachers are at first. This is true. God knows. But Jude has shown us that on some levels we can know. We will recognize them by their fruit, their actions.

What do they do? He says these people are slaves to sin. They are those who cause divisions. Korah gathered a following behind him among the Israelites in order to challenge Moses and Aaron’s authority. These people do not care about maintaining unity causing divisions is their specialty.

Lastly, Jude drops the most serious indictment upon them. He says they are worldly people, devoid of the Spirit, not having the Spirit. The phrase “devoid of the Spirit” essentially defines what “worldly people” are. To put it bluntly, they are not Christians, they belong to the world. They do not belong in the church.

Believers on the other hand, we pray in the Holy Spirit (v.20) and bear the fruit of the Spirit, waiting for the mercy of Christ that leads to eternal life in the power of the Spirit.

That the apostles predicted their entrance should encourage us in our fight for the faith. It should not be a surprise to us they exist in the church. In fact Jude shows us from this prediction that the arrival of the infiltrators in the church in Jude’s day signaled the arrival of a particular time period. The apostles said there will be scoffers, when? “*In the last time*”

What is “the last time”? The last time refers to the ending of one age and the beginning of another age. The arrival of the Son of God in the flesh, His death on the cross for sinners and His resurrection on the third day, the pouring out of His Spirit on the church at Pentecost, all of these events signaled the dawning of a new age, a new world-aeon.

Like the rising of the sun marks the beginning of a new day, the arrival of Christ and the pouring out of His Spirit on the church signaled the beginning of a new creation. This is why Paul can say that for those who by faith embrace Christ in the gospel they are a new creation in Him; “*if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation*” (2 Cor. 5:17)

We have been crucified with Christ, therefore we have died to that old age. That age of the flesh, that world-time characterized by sin and death, and Satan’s dominion. That age is coming to an end. At the cross this world-age has been crucified to us and we have been crucified to it.

By faith we belong now to the age of the Spirit, the new world-order characterized by righteousness, joy in the Holy Spirit, and living under the dominion and lordship of Christ.

At the cross the *last days* of that old age of sin started to register on the calendar. Christ will come on a day unexpected and this world of ungodliness will come to an abrupt end. Jude had given proofs in this letter to prove his point.

Here he says the mockers, the false teachers who came in his day (and who will continue to come until Christ returns), their arrival and existence served as *proof* that Jude's hearers were living in the last time. The existence of false teachers is also proof to us today as well that we are living in the last time.

We are God's beloved, loved by F,S, and HS but this does not mean that we will not face conflict in the church. In fact the conflict that results from false teachers is proof positive that Christ will end the conflict soon.

"It is the last time" is what the voice of our Savior says through the apostles. The arrival of false teachers proves this. Or as the apostle John says, *"Children it is the last hour and as you heard that antichrist is coming so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour"* (1 Jn. 2:18)

What does this mean for us? Jude says we are to remember these predictions of the apostles. This remembering is not only a call to bring this teaching to memory but to think about in such a way that we are moved to action. The arrival of those who pervert Christianity and reject authority, cause divisions should cause us to remember the predictions from the word of God that they would come and that we are living in the last time.

We are to remember this and be moved to contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints, preparing ourselves for the coming of our Lord. How we do this, keeping ourselves in the love of God, is taken up in the next few verses.