

Title: Nothing greater
Text: Jude 1-2
Theme: The blessings of our calling
Series: Jude #1
Prop Stmtnt: There is nothing greater than the blessings of our calling.

Text:

It is possible that many of you have never heard a sermon from the book of Jude since this is probably the most neglected book of the NT, perhaps because its message is so pointed. But, this book concludes with one of the greatest benedictions and blessings you could ever hear.

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen

The weight and beauty of this hopeful benediction is in sharp relief to the warnings of this book. We quickly realize why the Spirit of God directed Jude to write this brief letter to the early believers. Theological and moral corruption were infiltrating the church and creating havoc. There is a lot in this book that is hard to hear and certainly not fun to preach on and I don't delight in preaching on tough truths, but I want to be faithful and I want you to be faithful and God has included this book in the Bible because it is profitable for teaching, reproof, correction and training in righteousness that you may be competent and equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3.16-17).

Jude is the half-brother of Christ and he is writing about 65 A.D. which means that he is addressing 2nd generation believers now. The initial excitement and explosive growth of the early church has given way to the challenging reality of life for the church in a fallen world. In many ways, the life of a church mirrors the life and ministry of Christ. There can be times of wonderful growth, excitement, and favor, but what comes with that are many people who are along for the ride and like the crowds in Jesus day, loved the miracles and the excitement but over time it became clear that Jesus was not the Messiah they wanted, so over time they simply fell away. If that wasn't challenging enough, even within the 12 disciples there was a traitor. From this little book we learn that we should not be surprised by false theology. We should not be surprised by moral compromise and imposters. We should be on guard against it but not in a spiteful and suspicious manner. Our orders are (per vs 20-23) are to be *building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. And have mercy on those who doubt, save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.*" This is our calling and it is formidable one. How do we do that?

I think it was Anne Ortlund who said that if we really understood what was going on in church, ushers would not be handing out bulletins, but instead would be handing out seatbelts and crash helmets. She is right. There is a war that is raging for the kingdom of this world and that war is experienced in the war that is raging for the affections of your heart. Who will you love? Who will you serve? The answer to that will determine who we love and who we serve! There is no

middle ground between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of man. There is no ceasefire, no peace, no truce. Winner takes all. And Jesus wins. But the enemy is not going down without a fight and has not taken the news of his defeat very well. But, this is the stuff that many people, even professing Christians do not want to consider seriously. It is easier to offer spiritual Prozac to people. Help them escape the monotony of life for a while on Sunday with an escapist feel-good experience. Make it all about themselves and send them on their way. But, when the realities of this world cannot be ignored there is no truth to stand on, no Christ to walk with, no promises to embrace, no hope to be held by, just more pills to take.

So, as much as I would love for Covid to be over and for us all to re-gather, re-unite, re-fill our Worship Center, and for the choir and orchestra to re-launch, my goal for you is more personal. I want for every one of you to be so convinced of the gospel and so confident in Christ, that if this week, you were in the ICU with Covid and the doctor said that you were going on the vent as the last resort because your situation was grim, that your heart would respond with, *“My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousness. When through fiery trials, thy pathway shall lie, my grace all sufficient shall be thy supply. The flame shall not hurt thee, I only design thy dross to remove and thy gold to refine.”* But, in order to be in that position, we need to do some heavy lifting. We need to work through some hard truths. We need to ask ourselves some difficult questions and we need to realize that embracing Christ is not an easy road. It is the good road, but it is the narrow road and the book of Jude makes that very clear. Let’s dig in.

I. A sweet and surprising testimony – (1a)

According to Matthew 13.55, Jesus had 4 brothers; James, Joseph, Simon and Judas and at least a couple of sisters. We generally refer to the siblings of Jesus as half-brothers and half-sisters since they share the same mother, but not the same father. The author of this book, Jude, is by all accounts, the Judas, who is the brother of James (as he says) and the half-brother of Christ. The James referred to in v.1 is not the James who was the brother of John and the early disciple executed by Herod in Acts 12. But is the James who was an early leader of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 12.17; 15.13) who was also the author of the book of James.

I call this “a sweet and surprising testimony” because Jude identifies himself as *“a servant of Jesus Christ.”* This is beautiful. The word translated servant is the word *doulos* which means bond-slave. Here is a brother of Jesus who identifies himself as being owned by and in complete submission to his brother. This was not always the case.

In Mark 3.21 after Jesus called his 12 disciples and was launching his ministry, his family tried to stop him. They were saying that he was out of his mind. John 7.5 tells us that his brothers did not believe that he was the Messiah. They did not believe in Jesus as the Messiah and the Savior until after his resurrection. And while the Scriptures do not say anything about Joseph and Simon, clearly, James and Jude (Judas) did believe, so much so, that Jude calls himself *“the bond-slave of Jesus Christ.”* Christos is the term for Messiah. Jude was all in. But, what is a bit surprising is that Jude does not play the “brother” card. Now, he could. But he identifies himself as the brother of James. He could have said half-brother of Jesus, but his identity does not come from his proximity to Christ in his biological family, but in his union with Christ as a follower and therefore, bond-slave.

Jude is not exaggerating. He is not using “bond-slave” for shock value. Jude is identifying himself with every other genuine follower of Christ. Paul, Peter and James all used the same term to describe themselves. This is the normal Christian life. We are bond-slaves. We are owned by Christ. Aristotle said that “a slave is a living tool, just as a tool is an inanimate slave.” A slave has no rights, no due process, no court of appeals, no standing. A slave is completely at the mercy of his Master. But, that is what is so incredible, we are at the mercy of the One who is so full of mercy that he is described as being rich in mercy. What makes us slaves of Christ? We are owned by him because we have been bought by him. He paid for us with his own life. Slavery to a master who died that we might live? That is amazing. But, don’t miss the point. Followers of Christ follow Christ. They pick up their cross daily. This concept is so foreign to our world. It is the opposite of what the false teachers were teaching (as we will see.) It is almost inconceivable. So many have been lied to and they have believed those lies. Those lies sound like this: You can be whatever you want. Follow your heart, it will never betray you. Happiness is found in making the world look at you, notice you, envy you, desire you and imitate you. Your feelings are all that matter. Promises are made in the moment to make you and others feel good, but no one is obligated to keep them. If life gets miserable, it is always someone else’s fault. Bad vibes mean that it is the time to move on, find a new partner, a new hobby, a new passion, a new career, a new project, a new diet, a new trend, a new fitness routine, maybe a new gender or identity etc. In the name of freedom, lanes, parameters, expectations, even laws are viewed as infringements on rights. How does a person like that fit Jesus into their world? They don’t unless that make Jesus out to simply be the fan who blows wind in their sails or in their hair as they take and post their 10,000th selfie.

My granddaughter fell and hit the side of her face on a window ledge. When her mom took a picture of her eye with various colors of green around it, little Clare, who is infatuated with make-up responded, “Oh, it’s beautiful.” Clare, I hate to break it to you, but it’s not beautiful. Now, what was going on in the churches in Jude’s day is that leaders and teachers were emerging who were telling people what they wanted to hear. Your black-eye is beautiful. And teachers who tell you what you like to hear and want to hear are not helping you be you, but are echoing the lies of the world and your heart which will betray you. Jude, is showing us a picture and telling us the truth. It is not beautiful. Life centered around us is hopeless because we cannot save ourselves much less anyone else.

And the irony in all of this, is that your freedom is your bondage. Every pursuit of happiness leads to a cul de sac or dead end. You are not the gauge of truth and your feelings cannot be trusted. The call to follow Christ is the call to die to yourself and give up your rights to make your rules. Slavery to Christ is freedom from the penalty of sin, the power of sin and one day the presence of sin. And you and I are no match for sin. Jude, a bondservant of Jesus, the Messiah. This humility is the fruit of being a follower of Christ. We live to make much of Christ, not for Christ to make much of us!

The medical world recognizes that your blood pressure is a big deal. Blood pressure doesn’t lie. You may look really calm and cool on the outside, but your blood pressure may still be through the roof. Your life at home is like your blood pressure. It doesn’t lie. You may seem like a really nice, caring, gentle person who contributes thoughtful ideas in a bible study, but your spouse, or

kids, or siblings know what you are really like. Home life doesn't lie. Jude grew up with Jesus and at one point decided, Jesus is my Savior. Jesus is my King. Jesus is my Master. I am giving myself completely to him and handing to him all of the rights to my life. Obviously, Jesus really was, what he claimed to be.

The other thing that is sweet is that Jude became a follower of Jesus, just like we do. Being the brother of Jesus didn't count for anything. But, faith in and surrender to Christ counts for everything. And for every follower of Christ, we have a "common salvation" (v.3) with Jude. That's pretty sweet.

II. **A sweet and glorious reality** – (1b)

Verse 1 tells us who wrote this letter and who the recipients are. This book, like the book of James that Dave mentioned last week, is a General Epistle, that is, it was not written to one particular local congregation or believers in one region, but to believers in general. Look at how Jude describes the recipients.

A. **"Who are called"**

Early in my walk with Christ, I had the idea that being called, was like being invited. Back in the day when there was one phone in the house, it would ring and whoever would answer would have to inform the rest that this call is for you. Someone wants to talk with you. Now, you could refuse to take the call, but at least you were asked. That is not what Jude is talking about. This calling is more like being called by mom for dinner. When mom called for dinner, it was not merely a nice gesture on her part inviting me to come, if I wanted, when I wanted, to eat however I wanted. This calling was more of a summons that overruled whatever I was doing at that moment. It did not matter if bases were loaded and there were two outs and a 3-2 count and I was pitching or batting. Her summons meant drop whatever you were doing and run home, now.

When Jude talks about the called, he talks about it the way Paul does in Romans 1.6-7; 8.28-30; 1 Corinthians 1.1-2, 9, 24; Galatians 1.15; 1 Thessalonians 2.12; 5.24; 2 Thessalonians 2.14; and 2 Timothy 1.9. This is referring to the individual calling or summons of the Holy Spirit to believe the gospel. Before the foundation of the world was laid, God chose those who would believe in him (Eph.1.4). Then everyone that he foreknew and predestined, he called (Romans 8.28-30). That is, he arranged the details of your life in such a way that you heard the gospel. It might have been from a parent, from a Sunday School teacher, from a preacher on the radio or youtube, from a pastor in a church, from a friend in school, but you heard the gospel and you believed the gospel. You believed because God called you. God summoned you. God drew you. God opened the eyes of your heart and gave you the faith to believe and you believed. Everything that you have, spiritually speaking, was given to you. This is so sweet! You and I cannot take credit for anything can we? This is gloriously humbling. We are the called. The ground is level at the foot of the cross. None of us can take credit for anything that got us here. And why are we called? Because God loves us! That is a sweet and glorious reality.

Grammatically, the next two phrases (beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ) describe the called. And they only add to the sweetness.

B. Beloved in God the Father

And why does God love us, because He chose to! If I were God, I am not sure I would have chosen me. There are many who are way more gifted and talented than me. But, those whom God calls are those who are beloved.

We know that our culture has a rather poor track record on making promises and then keeping them. People simply do not want to make a commitment in case something better comes up and then they don't want to keep the commitment because, well, often they just don't feel like it. That will never happen with God. You will never hear God say, "Hey, I'm just not feeling it today, sorry." "Yea, that thing I said about always being with you? Well, another gig came up and so, hey, you're on your own, but it's been real and fun. Catch ya later." "That line about going to prepare a place for you and coming back for you? Well, in the moment it seemed like a good idea and it made you feel good, right? But, after thinking about it a little more I've decided that I need a little more personal space and some me time, so, eternity isn't going to work out quite like you thought – yea bummer, I know." Aren't you glad God is NOT like us?! But what I just described is how the pagan gods were. No one ever knew for sure what kind of a mood they would be in. God is not like that. The called are beloved IN God the Father.

It's discouraging when you see movements within Christianity distorting the truth about morality, sexuality, and core doctrinal issues. We are accused of being on the wrong side of history, but they forget that history is His Story. And being beloved in God the Father means that we are ...

C. Kept for or by Jesus Christ. (both are true-by = the sealing of the Spirit for = the purpose is the enjoy Christ

We will get home. We will make it home. We will finish the race. We will keep the faith. It is not based on the strength of our grip, but we hold on to the one who has an unbreakable hold on us. If I could lose my salvation, I would. But thank God, he does not leave my salvation ultimately up to me. I believe because he gave me the faith to believe and I persevere because he gives me the grace to do so and I look to him and trust in him because he gives my heart affection for him.

III. Sweet and beautiful fruit (2)

Here is a blessing, a wish, and a prayer. *May mercy, peace and love be multiplied to you.* The more you grow in Christ, the more mercy, peace, and love should mark your life. It is needed. This is a good and needful prayer for us to pray for one another. In Jude's day, people were fracturing the church and some naïve people were being swept up in it. The believers are called to have mercy on them and in their mercy seek to rescue them from error. When a season of fracture occurs, a church hurts for a while and is in need of peace. Peace to sooth the wounds and peace between people who were caught up in some of the splintering, fights, and issues. And of course love. Loving God and loving others more than we do ourselves is not naturally in us. We need to pray this for others, desire this for us, pray this for ourselves and desire this for

ourselves, even as we look to God to as the source of this mercy, peace and love. This is the kind of people we are called to be even as we seek to stay true to what is true.