

Title: Living in the last times
Text: Jude 17-23
Theme: How do we live now?
Series: Jude
Prop Stmtnt: The nearness of Christ compels us to live urgently and intentionally.

Read text:

We are coming to the end of this book written by Jude, the younger brother (half-brother) of Jesus. Verses 17-23 are like a plan of action. Jude reminds his readers that what is happening and will happen in their churches with respect to false teachers is to be anticipated. So, when it happens, don't let it sink your ship. In fact, there are a few things that you need to do.

1. **Remember** (17-19)

In contrast to the grumbling, malcontented, loud-mouth boasting of the false teachers, Jude turns his attention back to the faithful. "But you" is emphatic, directed and personal. He, again calls them beloved which he used twice at the beginning of this letter which reminds us that the tone of this letter is deep affection. While Jude's warning are clear, his heart is tender and his love is deep for these believers. Warning and love not only can go together, they do.

Jude commands these beloved believers to remember the predictions of the apostles. To remember here means to take to heart what was said. When Jude says to remember he is saying to think about and consider. Some of the apostles predicted that false teachers would arise whose lives would be marked by scoffing and following evil desires. So, remember what they said and think about it. If some of the apostles said this, then we should accept the hard fact that this will be part of the story of the church until Christ returns.

Let's say that your child is 12 months old and is not sleeping through the night. So, at your next pediatric visit you mention this to your doctor who says that no matter what she tried (and she's the doctor) her kids didn't sleep through the night until around 18 months. This news does not make your kid sleep through the night, but you are somewhat relieved that you are not a terrible parent, right? That's what Jude is helping us with. It is like finding out that your favorite pastor who preaches fabulous sermons on-line, or on TV has a church full of problems. You're not happy about that, but relieved in the sense that there is no church nirvana, yet.

Responding to false teachers and bad influencers in the church is an ongoing challenge for believers. This happened to these believers in the 1st century and Paul said that it is only going to increase in the last days. But, even though we know it is going to happen, it is still difficult to go through. By the way, notice the words "in the last time" (18a). Jude viewed his time as being in the last time or the lasts days. From the Bible's perspective, ever since the ascension of Christ, we have been in the last days. Christ could return at any moment. Let me speak to that for a minute because there are two lenses we need to see this through. 1) It has always been the last days. Believers have always felt as if things were tough and were getting worse, and they were right. Therefore, believers have tended to view events as being evidences of the formation of a one world government, the rise of the antichrist, a one world economy, which has for some

created a sense of urgency and there can be a healthy urgency with that. The danger comes with assuming that these are the final hours of the last days and that we should all go get cabins in the U.P. and hide-out for the next seven years. 2) The truth is, every day is closer to the end even though the end may be 6 months, 60 years or 600 years away. We don't know when the end will be, but we know that God knows and is working out his plan and that we are in the last time and should not assume that things will continue as they have indefinitely because at some point they won't. Noah built the ark for 120 years. At some point, the message of impending judgment that echoed with every blow of a hammer became background noise to his neighbors. But, there was a point when the animals went into the ark, when Noah and his family went into the ark, when God shut the door and when it began to rain. The patience of God should never be interpreted as the complacency of God.

So, given the fact that there will be grumblers, malcontents, scoffers who follow their own ungodly desires, people in the church you trusted, became close to who stabbed you in the back caused divisions, turned out not to have any real affections for Christ and when it came down to it, were devoid of the Spirit, what do we do? That is what Jude addresses now. We have to guard our own hearts and we have to look out for others. But how do you guard your heart when you feel like you have been burned and taken advantage of? One of the fallouts of false teachers is how their influence either cools your love for God or it deforms it.

Jude described one of the effects of false teachers is the divisions they cause. People take sides, say things, hurt one another and the conflict leaves scars. You can get crusty, hard, and self-protective or you can be hyper-critical and fault-finding. Jude tells us about a better way.

2. **Rekindle** (20-21) (Keep yourselves in the love of God)

This is so good, so useful and so necessary. While we need to be aware of the real and present danger of false teachers, we must pay careful attention to fueling our own love for God. But, if we only focus on the failures of others, we will never grow in our love for God. Love for God will never be fueled by constantly finding fault with others. So, here are three things that we need to do for our own soul-care. But, let's start with an assessment, a quick spiritual survey.

On a scale of 1-10 how would you rate your love for Christ?

On a scale of 1-10 how would you rate your joy?

On a scale of 1-10 how would you rate your passion to share the gospel?

On a scale of 1-10 how would you rate your desire to see unreached people groups get the gospel?

On a scale of 1-10 how would you rate your prayer life? your thought life?

On a scale of 1-10 how would you rate your influence on others for the gospel?

On a scale of 1-10 how much do you think like and live like Christ?

Can we all agree that we have some room to grow, right?

Here's my point. If all we do is defend the faith against false teachers, and point out how we don't do things like others, we will not necessarily grow in our affections. While we have to protect the flock, our goal in protecting the flock is so that we will grow in our love for Christ,

our dependency on Christ and our reflection of Christ. Verse 20 begins affectionately with Jude calling these believers, beloved. He loves them. His heart for them is warm. He stated at the beginning of this letter that he really wanted to write to them about our common salvation but he found it necessary to write appealing to them to contend for the faith. This may be because Jude himself was dealing with false teachers and he saw firsthand the results. So Jude issues this command: Keep yourselves in the love of God. That is why point #2 is Rekindle. Following the command to keep yourselves in the love of God are three participles that describe how we do this. But, let's talk about the imperative to keep yourselves in the love of God. What does Jude mean by that? Well at the beginning of the letter he describes how we are loved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ. So, there, the emphasis is on being loved by God and being kept by God. Is Jude saying something different here? Do we have to keep our salvation as if we could lose it if we do not keep a firm grip on it? The ultimate truth is that we are kept by God and because we are kept by God, we persevere. So, the exhortation to keep yourselves in the love of God is the command to live in view of your salvation and keep growing in the faith. Here is a great example of the balance of the sovereignty of God and human responsibility. We are kept because of God's sovereignty. The Lord knows those who are his and he will not lose any of those the Father gives him. But, all that the Father gives him will come to him and will follow him. Jesus said, My sheep hear my voice and they follow me. So, we avoid apostasy because of God's grace in our lives, but God's grace motivates our trust and obedience. God's grace does not eliminate my responsibility to persevere, it energizes and fuels it. That is why we need to build ourselves up in the most holy faith. How do we put fresh wood on our spiritual fires in order to stoke a white-hot fire for God?

A. Building yourselves up in your most holy faith

This means to build upon the foundation of your faith. You cannot exhaust the gospel. How does the gospel affect the way you parent? How does it affect the way you work? How does it affect the what you live for? How does it affect your art, your view of forgiveness and relationships? Can you be assured that you are in Christ? I love to read and study about the gospel not because I am preparing sermons but because my souls is anchored by the gospel to Christ. This is my life! And when I invest affections of my life on the gospel, my footings are deepened. Invest time in learning more and more about the gospel. Read good books on the gospel, we have a number of them in the bookstore and I put together a short recommended list for you and posted it there. Read good books and share it with others. Building yourselves up is in the plural. Faithfulness, perseverance and sanctification are team sports. Covid is not gone yet, but it is going. We need to get back to more opportunities for teaching, for learning, for growing and for praying.

B. Praying in the Holy Spirit.

Praying in the Spirit is what praying is. We cannot pray unless we are praying, dependent upon the Spirit and by means of the Spirit. And while we should pray personally, there is a congregational emphasis here. We are to pray and we are to pray together. This past fall we had a church-wide prayer meeting on the Wednesday night before the election. It was so refreshing for all of us and so needed. Praying together is one of the weapons that the Lord has given us to help us keep ourselves in the love of God. That evening was so good, we decided that we are going to do more of these. Our next one is Wednesday night, March 17. We are going to gather for a one-

hour prayer meeting. How does the idea of gathering for prayer affect you? Is that attractive? Is that off-putting? Can I point something out? If the idea of gathering together with other believers for prayer is of no interest to you, is it possible that you really do not know Christ? There are certainly some times when I do not feel like praying, but to go days without praying is no different than an atheist, right? Praying and praying together is such a gift that God has given to us to keep our souls warm with affections for Christ.

C. Waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ. (return)

The third participle is waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ. Here, Jude is speaking of the return of Christ. For unbelievers, the return of Christ will be judgment and it will be terrifying. For the believer it will be mercy that leads to eternal life. Again, think of the encouragement that we can offer to one another when we remind each other, that it won't be long now. We'll be home soon.

I recently met Joe Reed, an associate pastor at a church in northern Minnesota. When his daughter, Alice was 4 years old, she was diagnosed with cancer and as part of her radiation treatment she was on steroids. As a result, Alice was always hungry. Joe said, "All she could think about was eating. She would close her eyes at night dreaming of breakfast, and end each meal asking for more. There was no reaching 'full' on her tummy gauge. ...it was so hard trying to calm her down while she was miserably obsessing about food. Then we discovered the word 'later.' Alice, you can have more Cherrio-Bear later. You can have 'crispus chicken' later. Yes, you can have noodles later. And wouldn't you know it, it actually worked. She would say, 'ok,' and for a while anyway, that was that. She trusted us that the food was coming, and so long as the promise was there, she could, and did endure. I was always surprised that it worked. But so long as we held up our end of the deal and 'later' actually came, she was ok with putting up with a little misery in the present for some happiness in the future." Beloved, we wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ. He has given us his Word. He will come for us. The promise is there. We can and will endure. Keeping ourselves in the love of God is needful so we can help others.

3. Restore (22-23) (Look out for others)

A. Have mercy on the doubters. (22)

I take this to mean that we should have mercy on those who were unduly influenced by the false teachers, either by being taken in by them, or being burned by them and being lied about and then had to leave the church only for the church to find out that it wasn't them, it was the false teachers who had created these divisions, etc. Be patient. The gospel is still true and will always be true. God's Word is true and will always be true. Genuine believers will come back around, we can and must be patient. They will have to sort things out and sift through some of the false teaching and get some things back in order. In some cases, we may need to ask forgiveness because there were situations that we did not address fast enough or clearly enough. I've needed to ask forgiveness for how something was handled that had my finger prints all over it.

In Jude's day, the world considered mercy to be a weakness. For Jude to call the church to be merciful to those who were postured as adversaries in the church would have been very counter-

cultural. In many ways, it still is. But, God is merciful and our tone with one another should reflect that.

One of the sweetest things that I get to experience from time to time is when people who walked away because they felt hurt, burnt, or let down in some way, come back. They are usually hesitant at first. Sometimes they are apologetic or embarrassed, but when they are welcomed with mercy and kindness, the reunion is sweet. Do you know of some people who have been burned? Who are not connected anywhere? Who need to come back but wonder how they will be received? What does “have mercy on the doubters” look like? What can you do that is merciful? Send them a text? Drop a note? Something more? Check in on them? Jesus talked about leaving the 99 and going after the 1. Wasn't 99 good enough? 99% is a good percentage, unless you love 100, then 99 doesn't cut it. The doubters need mercy. For others, the response is more critical.

B. Be urgent with those in danger. (23)

There are two groups of people in danger. 1) Those who were so deeply influenced by the false teachers that they were in danger of abandoning the gospel. 2) The second group is those who are immersed in sin and showing no regret. We are called to snatch the first group out of the fire, which I take to be a reference to hell. Go after these people because their souls may be at stake. Snatching them out of the fire means to respond with some urgency. But, be aware. “Hating even the garment stained by the flesh” is a phrase that describes the warning, not to be taken in by or seduced by the sin that has seduced others. Show mercy, but with fear. Many of these false teachers used their influence to pursue immorality. They had elaborate arguments as to why this was okay for them. It is tempting for those investigating corruption, to be corrupt and accept payments to look the other way. It is tempting for those who are rescuing people from sin, to be drawn into it.

What is your overall impression of the book of Jude? I see an early leader in the church, who realizes how important Jesus is, how important his gospel is and therefore how critical it is for the churches to protect the gospel. This man loves deeply and therefore is willing to fight and defend what is right. He knows that there is no one like Christ and no one can be forgiven of their sin and made right before God apart from the gospel and Jude will do everything he can to defend that and not let churches lose that. There is no hype, no sensation, no need to create energy. The gospel does that very well and needs no help from us. But in our day we have traded in a church that is serious about the gospel and serious about purity and in its place we have pursued church as an event, a show, an experience. Jude sees the church quite differently. He sees people who take their relationship to God very seriously and therefore, their relationship with one another very deeply and personally. What he describes as the life of the church (22-23) sounds a little too radical for those who would rather have about \$3 worth of God. But, Jesus is not a soft teddy bear. Jesus plays for keeps. And that's good because soft teddy bears cannot bear our sin on the cross, defeat it by death and then break out of a tomb with the keys of death and hell. It's all or nothing and Jude gets it. I pray that we do as well.