

# The Faith Worth the 'Fight'

*3-Year Bible Reading Plan*

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**Bible Text:** Jude 1-8  
**Preached On:** Sunday, March 28, 2021

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This morning, I want to encourage you to turn in your Bibles to the book of Jude. Now I know what you may be thinking, "I don't even know where that is." It's actually one of the easiest books in all of the Bible to find. Go to the last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation, and turn one page to the left. The book of Jude, one of the shortest books in all of the Bible, only 25 verses in length and it's one of those places where if it were not for our present Bible reading plan, you do not naturally gravitate to.

And allow me to share with you as you're turning to the book of Jude, just some background here that might be of interest to you. What we know as the book of Jude was actually the last book of the New Testament that we formally canonized or declared that this is scripture. Now there's several reasons for that, one of which is because almost half of the material of Jude is also recited in what we know as 2 Peter. Another reason is there's two very wild stories that are absolutely, positively, biblical true, one is in verse 9 regarding the body of Moses after his death, and one follows later with the man known as Enoch seven generations from Adam in this incredible prophecy of judgment. And so even though it is 25 verses in length, it did have its day of debate, discussion and controversy, however, that which we cannot deny is this, it probably has a salutation or an ending that is the most incredible and beautiful of any place in your Bible; and secondly, there is more packed in these 25 verses than probably any other 25 verse section in all of your Bible. In fact, today we're just going to read the first eight verses and you're going to discover that there are three very strategic, very lengthy, very theologically rich allusions to the Old Testament just in these eight verses.

Before we read verses 1 through 8 in the book of Jude, today we're going to talk about the faith that is worth fighting for. Now I know when we hear in our culture that idea of fighting or contending or being aggressive in defense of, it oftentimes conjures up kind of a step back of is that appropriate, should we actually be those who are willing to fight or to contend or to wrestle? Can I remind you what we celebrate today, today is Palm Sunday. Today is the day that we look back and we cherish the fact not just that Jesus Christ came riding in with tens of thousands declaring, "Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord," but we also remember his very first act when he got off that donkey. He walked into the temple, he overthrew the tables, he cracked out the whips, he said, "You have made my house a den of thieves." So what better perfect day to

study the book of Jude than Palm Sunday because he's about to encourage us to contend for the faith because much like on that famous Palm Sunday, there are those individuals, they have crept in and they've got the tables set out, they've got the sacrifices set out, and Jude is going to encourage us as Jesus did on Palm Sunday to proverbially overthrow some tables.

The book of Jude beginning in verse 1. It says,

1 Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called: 2 Mercy unto you, and peace, and love, be multiplied. 3 Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. 4 For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ. 5 I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not. 6 And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day. 7 Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire. 8 Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities.

Now last time I checked, that's not make you feel warm and fuzzy kind of scripture, is it? But notice there in verse 3, we should earnestly contend, we should fight for the faith. And so today as we talk about the faith that is worth fighting for, three very simple constructs that we must address. 1. What is this faith? 2. Who is it that has crept in and who is it that is called to "fight for the faith"? And lastly, why did this happen? Why did it happen 2,000 years ago and why does it still happen today?

Let's begin with the "what." What is this faith? I want you to focus on verse 3 and I want you to look at the very last line, "the faith which once was delivered unto the saints." The famed recently deceased evangelist Billy Graham at every conference, training session I ever had the privilege of his ministry leading over the years, continually spoke this truth, that the methods over time most assuredly will change but the message can never change. Aren't you grateful that some methodologies changed? I don't know about you, but I'm a big fan of indoor plumbing and lights. Things have changed from that Upper Room in the book of Acts but hear me clearly, church, the message that I read earlier from 1 Corinthians 15 that he died, he was buried, and he rose again, that message hasn't changed at all. So when we talk about what we're fighting for, hear me clearly: we're not fighting about the color of the carpet, we're not fighting about a time and a procedure and

a means and a ways or a preference, a liking, what we're contending for is that which makes the forgiveness of our sin and the salvation of our soul feasible and possible. This isn't about preferences. This isn't about personal likes. This is about what it's all about, that which was once delivered.

I want you to notice if you go back up just a couple lines, how simple it is, and I think this is humanity or one of our biggest issues. Notice it says for the "common salvation." You know, the church at Corinth is probably more like you and I than we would like to admit. We know it is the carnal church. We know it is the sensuous church. We know it is the rebellious church. But it wasn't just the "acts of the flesh" that they struggled with, in fact, in 2 Corinthians 11 the Apostle Paul makes this statement, he says, "I marvel that you're soon removed from the simplicity that is in Christ Jesus." I don't know about you, but humanity has this incredible way of taking that which is simple and making it unbelievably complex. You don't believe me? Just find yourself in a position where you are to put a child's toy together, an instruction manual that is reserved for a Master's degree in mechanical engineering will come alongside of it. In other words, we love to make that which is simple complex.

Can we for the sake of remembrance, can we go over how simple this is? You know, oftentimes we refer to it or call it the Roman road, the path unto salvation, that which leads us to the forgiveness of our sins. It's a really simple road. Romans 3:23 says, "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." It's pretty simple, isn't it? God's perfect, we're not. We're the ones who've messed up. Romans 6:23, "For the wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Romans 5:8, "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Romans 10:9-10, that "if we believe in our heart and confess with our mouth the Lord Jesus, we shall be saved." It's just that simple.

Common. That means you can have three commas in your income statement or none. It means you could have three post-graduate degrees or not a degree at all. It means that you can be well-revered in a community or be the one who others go to the other side of the street for. It doesn't matter because every single one of us comes to salvation the same way irrespectively of all of those human aspects.

It was once delivered, it is common, but notice the struggle here, he says you need to contend for it, you need to fight for it. Now think about this just historically, you're only 30 years removed from an empty tomb, it's only been three decades since those graves opened up, since that veil tore, since those disciples and apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit and Pentecost took place. Only 30 years but a lot can happen in 30 years and what had happened? According to verse 4, certain men, certain people started creeping in. What did they do? They started twisting, they started turning, making the faith something different than it was ever designed to be.

I want you to notice in verse 4 the "who" here, for these certain men, they crept in unawares, before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and this is important, denying the only Lord God, and our

Lord Jesus Christ. Can we all agree they're not fighting over the color of the carpet here? They're not talking about what style of this or that you prefer. What's happening here is it's been twisted, it's been turned, it's been tweaked so much so that it no longer matches the gospel message.

So who are these people? Who was it then? Who is it now? Allow me because I am one of the unique persons in the room that can do what I'm about to do, allow me to lay blame at the first persona: it's the preachers. That's right. Wherever you see false belief, bad doctrine, erroneous constructs, you can always research and you can chase it down and you'll find a preacher there somewhere, you'll find a prophet, you'll find a whomever. In fact, the book of Jeremiah 3 talks about that the Israelites returning one day to pastors who actually shepherd them. And by the way, you do know one of the most famous passages we've got about a shepherd is Psalm 23 where he says, "Thy rod and your staff comfort me." You know, we oftentimes don't talk about that when we read Psalm 23 but you know what the purpose of the rod was, what? The purpose of the rod was to correct, to get one in line, to make sure that you're in the pen, not out of the pen lest a wolf get you because in John 10 Jesus said, "I'm the Good Shepherd but there's a hireling out there who he'll scale the wall, he'll sneak in at night and he will lead you down a dark dangerous path."

Ladies and gentlemen, it always starts with the preachers and what do they do? They begin to preach, advocate, teach that which is preference, that which is personal, that which is an agenda. In other words, they get off the foundation and all they do is they tweak and turn it to make them or others more comfortable with the situation. How has this happened in "recent days"? All you have to do is turn on or listen to a "biblical" presentation and look for two very simple litmus tests: how often do you hear the word "sin" utilized? We love to talk about prosperity, we love to talk about comfort, we love to talk about health, we love to talk about those things but you do understand we read this week in 3 John 1:2, he says, "I pray for your prosperity but not more than your spiritual health." If you don't hear the word "sin" and you don't hear about the blood of Jesus, then you've got somebody who's twisting and turning and pretty soon you get one degree off and you know where you end up 30 years down the road.

So how is this played out in our culture? It's played out in several ways but really it's the mainstream secular world that has really caught this by the proverbial teeth. Let me give you somewhat of a warning and, again, I understand that a broken clock is right twice a day so this is not in every situation but it's in most of them. If you find yourself where you cannot sleep at night and you turn on the television and there's some type of programming that is speaking of "Christian ideas, biblical thought," and you see New Testament and Old Testament scholars that are being interviewed and you don't recognize their name, I can promise you that's why they invited them. They invited them because they advocate and promote a faith that denies the Lord Jesus Christ.

How many times have you watched one of those late night cable shows and these scholars talk about a sin condition that had to be paid for? How many of them state clearly that Jesus died, was buried, and he rose from the grave? Here's what you usually

hear. "Well, the Bible doesn't really mean what we thought it meant." Or, "Well, that was thousands of years ago. Now we have a better understanding." Do you know what happens there? The same thing that happened in the garden of Eden. Do you remember what happened in Genesis 3? The serpent shows up and says, "Oh yea hath God said? Did God really mean what God really said?" Now the simple answer is yes, the problem is the secular lost world takes those who have crept in, gives them places of prominence and position and then they believe that's what Christianity really is and it gets us where we are right now.

Now you may or may not be familiar with this but we're in the midst of a very tumultuous basketball tournament. You thought I was gonna go pandemic, didn't you? We call it March Madness for a reason and recently we had one of the lowest ranking seeds almost make it where no other 15<sup>th</sup> seed has ever been. A little school out of Tulsa, OK, a school that, to be quite honest with you, if you were to take their "theologians" and myself and we were to discuss the details and the working out of our faith, the way we express our faith, you'd see a lot of differences, you'd see a lot of discussion, but if you got down to what we call the brass tacks, did Jesus die? Yes. Was he buried? Yes. Did he raise from the grave? Yes. Does he give us forgiveness of sins through his sacrifice? Yes. We can hold hands on that. Why is it important? Because there was an editorial in a major newspaper this week where the editor condemned this school for their "fundamentalist biblical stances." Can I share with you what those stances were? That God created you either male or female. Very radical, is it not? The fact that God has designed a plan that you and I are to abstain from physical intimacy with anybody before we get married. Radical biblical concept. That once we're married, we're not to have any intimate activity with anybody else other than the person that we have married. And oh my, this was the straw that broke the back, that just like Jesus said in Matthew 19, that that marriage union is between a man and a woman and that's God's parameters. Now if you've been to third grade Sunday school, that's not radical, is it? Do you know what this editor had to say in this newspaper this week? That any school who held those views should not be allowed to compete in the NCAA. Their views are archaic and listen to this word, despicable. How dare an institution like this even be allowed to compete?

Ladies and gentlemen, I know it's Palm Sunday, I know it's that week we're to celebrate but we've got the same thing going on today as Jesus walked into 2,000 years ago when they were sitting at the tables, and it's time to start overturning some tables. Who of us are going to fight? Who of us are going to contend? Now can I be honest with you, to contend does not mean to be contentious. Let me give you a Meyersism, all right? I am very biblically astute and conservative, I'm just not angry about it. You don't have to be angry about it, you just have to stand for it.

So why did this happen? Why did it happen then? Why does it happen now? Notice in verse 5, there is this illustration of the Israelites in the wilderness. They experienced the same struggle as Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden and humanity even today. God told them, "I got you through the Red Sea. I'm going to take you to the Promised Land." You realize that that Promised Land was 11 days away. How long did it take them to get there? Forty years. Why did it take 40 years? Because they didn't believe what God said.

You see, it always starts with rejecting the word of God. "Yea hath God said?" On all matters not just of faith but the expression of our faith and how often do we find ourselves all twisted up because we get ourselves in the way and we forget what God actually said. They rejected what God said. Do you know what happens when you reject what God says? You rebel. You decide you know what you're doing. You decide to do it your own way. You decide, and allow me to say this, that you are God and that you answer to you and you alone.

Notice the next verse, verse 6, who does he allude to? The angels who left their habitation, they left their first estate. You think back to that biblical story recorded in several places where whom we know as Lucifer, the lighted one, became Satan the accuser. What did he do in Isaiah 14? He said, "I will ascend to my throne above the heavens. I will ascend above the clouds. I will place my throne..." In three verses five times he says, "I will," and you know that you're in rebellion against God and his word when the first words out of your mouth are, "I will do this."

Rebellious. Now think about that for a moment. These are heavenly beings according to Hebrews 1:14, spiritual entities that had always been in the presence of the Lord, always been in the throne room, always experienced that 24/7 glorious worship and yet what did they do? I think John Milton in "Paradise Lost," great literature work, said it best, they would rather reign in hell than serve in heaven. Isn't that where we find ourselves? We reject what God's word says so we've rebelled, we've become our own authority, decide this is what I want to do with and for my life, I'm going to make my own rules.

Do you know what the final stage is? Look at verse 7, it talks about a story that oftentimes those individuals on those late night cable television shows will tell you, "Eh, it really didn't happen the way the Bible said it happened." What does it say about Sodom and Gomorrah? A reprobate mind, that your thinking gets so twisted, so turned, so upside down that you actually think you are in the right when you're completely rebellious in the wrong.

Let me take you back to Palm Sunday. Jesus walks in, or should I say rides in. There's thousands and thousands and thousands waving the palm leaves saying, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." Do you remember what happened as he approached the Temple Mount? Those who were the preachers of the day, those that were the prophets of the day, the Pharisees of the day told the disciples, "Quiet these people down, you're gonna mess up what we've got going here." Jesus gets off the animal, he goes into the Temple Mount, he takes those tables, he overturns them, he takes the whips, he cracks them out and he says, "You've made my house a den of thieves." What was he saying? You've made this about everything that it was never meant to be and right now it doesn't stand for anything it originally stood for. Can we hopefully agree today we find ourselves in a very similar situation, that when someone asks or describes what Christianity is, oftentimes it's those second, those third, those fourth level issues but what is Christianity? Christianity is the fact that Jesus lived, he died, he was buried, and he rose, listen, according to the scriptures, and our faith is trusting that those facts lead to the forgiveness of our sins and the salvation of our souls.

Ladies and gentlemen, we may be 2,000 years removed from what we know as Palm Sunday but actually what goes around has come back around. It was 30 years down the road in Jude's day, it's 2,000 years in our day but we've got the same problem: reject the word of God, rebellion against God, and a reprobate mind that turns everything upside down. Back to verse 3, that which is the salvation of our souls. You know, you've heard me say this before but I'm never going to quit saying it: eternity is too long to be wrong.