

“Keeping the Faith”
Jude 3
Sunday, June 13th, 2021

No one has defended the Christian faith better than Athanasius. Born in 296 to Christian parents in Egypt, Athanasius was ordained to the ministry just as a heretic named Arius was teaching that Jesus Christ was not divine. Christ, said Arius and his followers the Arians, was created higher than angels but inferior to the Father.

Emperor Constantine convened a church council in Nicea in 325 AD to settle the issue, and Athanasius attended. The council’s decision ultimately was the creed we recited together earlier in this service of worship - the Nicene Creed. It teaches Jesus is God. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all divine - one God existing in three names. God, Athanasius believed, became a man and died to provide our forgiveness.

Constantine was not convinced. Athanasius soon became bishop of Alexandria. But, Constantine had him deposed. After Constantine’s death, Athanasius returned in 339, but was again exiled, spending many years in Rome.

Athanasius returned to his church in 346. But, he was constantly hounded for preaching orthodox Christianity. At times, it seemed as if he were the only one preaching orthodox Christian doctrine - thus the phrase *Athanasius contra mundum*, which means “Athanasius against the world.” All told, he was exiled four different times - 17 of his 45 years of pastoral ministry had been away from his congregation.

We owe enormous gratitude to Athanasius. He devoted his difficult life to protecting orthodox doctrine, and thus defending the faith once for all delivered to the saints.

We need more heroes like Athanasius. We live in a time when heroes seem always to be neutralized or discredited by something in their past. That’s why Steve Brown says our heroes ought to be men and women who’ve long ago died. That way they won’t disappoint us!

We’re in the second sermon of 9 exploring the tiny, yet powerful New Testament book of Jude. Jude is tied for the third shortest book in the New Testament with Philemon. The shortest book is 2 John with 13 verses, and the second shortest New Testament book is 3 John with 14 verses. I’ve called the series, “Jude: Contending for the Faith.”

Today, we come to what may be the most well known verse from the book of Jude, the third one. Jude’s words throughout this entire letter call us to mobilize our forces to bone up on God’s Word and proclaim its message to a confused culture. Rather than succumbing to temptation ourselves and withdrawing from society, we are to lace up our boots and confront those teaching erroneous doctrine, especially so within the church.

We dare not open our pulpits to just anyone thinking they have a message from the Lord. I fended off just such a request very recently. We have all we need in this book, the canon of sacred Scripture which cannot be added to, nor taken away from.

It may be helpful to remember that verse 3 gives us the theme of Jude, while verse 4 reveals the letter's occasion.

Jude 3:

"Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints."

So then, what is it that motivates Jude to write this letter? Well, notice the first word - "Beloved" in the *New King James* and *English Standard Versions*; "Dear friends" in the *New International Version* and the *New Living Translation*. Jude's love for those in his reading audience motivates him to write! *But, what did he write?*

Jude was going to write a different letter than he actually did. As he says here, "*I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation.*" We don't know for sure what aspect of salvation Jude was planning to write about; we simply know he was going to write about salvation. That's a big topic when you get right down to it- Jude could have written about:

1 - Why we need salvation - we have all fallen short of the glory of God (**Romans 3:23**). We are hopelessly lost unless/until Jesus finds us. Even so, we still sin, though we've been saved from our sins. We continue to sin in thought, word, and deed. We sin because we don't do what we're supposed to do; and we sin because we do what we're not supposed to do! We may sin less often, but we remain just as in need of salvation because we cannot save ourselves.

We've had two Wonderful Wednesday sessions so far this summer, and I've been quite impressed with some of our children really learning the questions and answers of the children's catechism well. Here's a sampling of some of the questions we've looked at so far this summer:

Q. 28. What is Sin?

A. Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of the law of God.

Q. 29. What is meant by want of conformity?

A. Not being or doing what God requires.

Q. 30. What is meant by transgression?

A. Doing what God forbids.

Q. 31. What was the sin of our first parents?

A. Eating the forbidden fruit.

2 - Jude could have written of In Whom our Salvation consists - Jesus Christ - "There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (**Acts 4:12**). "For *there is* one God and one Mediator between God and men, *the* Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all..." (**I Timothy 2:5-6a**).

3 - Jude could also have written about How we obtain salvation - by believing in Jesus - "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast" (**Ephesians 2:8-9**). "...if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." (**Romans 10:9-10**).

It could have been any of these aspects of salvation, or a host of many other possibilities, as we learned in our long study of Romans in recent months. But something urgent and important interrupted Jude's plan - the need to refute those undercutting the Christian faith

Moving deeper into verse 3 of Jude, we see him write these words, "I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith..."

If something is necessary, it is 'needed' or 'essential'. It's a 'must have' - in Jude's case, it was essential for him to write this letter. And, he wrote this letter to 'exhort.' To exhort is to strongly encourage or urge.

What was necessary? And what required exhorting? **Contending** for the Christian faith. Two more words to describe properly - the first is "contending." It is the idea of athletes who, in an effort to win, find themselves struggling, competing, even fighting with all their might. In conjunction with Jude's appeal to **earnestly** contend means it will be continuous, costly, and agonizing. It will require God's people to stand in readiness and urgency.

Notice Jude writes to earnestly contend for *the* faith. The article "the" is important. We're not talking here about the exercise of personal trust in Jesus. Rather, it is the content of the message taught by the apostles and held in common by all believers in Christ.

Obviously, this means we are to base our contending upon the written Word of God - contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, which teach us what we are to believe about God, and what He requires of us. The early church fathers recognized that creeds and confessions were apt summaries of what we believe. This is why we often include the Apostles' or Nicene Creeds in our worship services, as well as a

Westminster Shorter Catechism question and answer or two, both of which we've participated in this morning's service.

If someone were to ask you what you believe about God and His Church, you could point to a creed or confession, both of which are distillations. We believe the *Westminster Confession of Faith* is the best summary of what the Bible teaches. Confessions are not on a par with Scripture - they can be amended, where the Word of God cannot be. But, in 33 chapters, they spell out what the Bible says on those topics.

God has given us all that He is going to give us in His written word. We have 66 books in the Bible - 39 in the OT and 27 in the NT. There is nothing missing; and everything is here that God intended for us to have. Often, when people believe that God has compelled them to share a word with someone else, they've been enlightened concerning a biblical truth that already exists in Scripture.

It's interesting given all the various versions of sacred scripture, they all have the same books, same order, and message. It has been this way for a very long time. To exercise our faith properly, we rightly look to the word of God, not to some experience that may not be based on it.

In summary, hear the way the *New Living Translation* interprets this verse - "Dear friends, I had been eagerly planning to write to you about the salvation we all share. But now I find that I must write about something else, urging you to defend the faith that God has entrusted once for all time to his holy people." Let's strive to be defenders of the faith that God has entrusted to us

Have you heard of Elijah Lovejoy? He began reading the Bible at age 4, and while very young memorized all of Psalm 119, along with 20 hymns. He later graduated at the top of his class and moved west to St Louis from Maine. While there, he became a Presbyterian minister then also the editor of a weekly Christian publication, the *St. Louis Observer*.

In his opening editorial, Lovejoy wrote that his paper "will seek no controversy, and it will decline none, when by doing so it might compromise the purity of that "faith once delivered to the saints." Lovejoy understood the message of the book of Jude - that not every opinion in the world is equally valid.

The *Observer* became a vehicle for teaching Scripture, relating the news of the day, and interpreting the latter by the former. His editorials became "must reads." Lovejoy wrote often against slavery with blistering editorials. Three different times, angry mobs destroyed his printing presses.

One night in November 1837, a mob of 30 men broke into Lovejoy's house, and one of the rioters shot him. His new printing press was thrown in the Mississippi River, and his hearse was hissed in the streets on the way to the cemetery. Elijah was buried on his 35th birthday. He once noted, "I can die at my post, but I cannot desert it."