

Jude 3

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Preacher: David MacPherson

[0 : 00] Today is the 22nd of August. I guess most of you knew that, but I thought I'd share that gem of wisdom. Well, on the 17th of August, just a few days ago so it would appear, six men were summoned before the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh to give a public reading of a document they had been commissioned to produce. The document was read, its contents were agreeable to the parliamentarians, and it was granted the approval and sanction of the parliament with only a few muted dissenting voices. Now, the observant among you will have identified a small difficulty with that report. Parliament is in recess. Now, that's just a fancy word for holiday, and they have longer holidays even than teachers, the parliamentarians. Of course, teachers are worth every day. May I be clear on that before I ostracize many in front of me.

Now, if I were to tell you that of these six men who were called before parliament, one was called John Knox. It would, I hope, become clear that I'm not talking about the 17th of August 2010, but the 17th of August 1560, 450 years ago. The document in question that was read and approved was the Scots' confession, and parliament had, a few days before, instructed these men to draft this document. And they had instructed them in the following terms, and I quote a few of the words that constituted that commission. They were to draft in plain heads the sum of that doctrine which they would maintain and would desire the parliament to establish as wholesome, true, and only necessary to be believed and received within that realm. Now, the adoption by parliament of the Scots' confession on the 17th of August 1560 is considered by some, by many, the birthday of the Reformation in Scotland.

Now, clearly, the Reformation movement predates that particular pivotal moment. Back in 1517, Luther had nailed his 95 thesis on the cathedral door in Wittenberg. And as early as 1525, just a few years later, we have an act of the Scots' parliament against heretics, forbidding the circulation of Luther's work and, I quote, all such filth and vice. Just three years later, in 1528, at the tender age of 24, Patrick Hamilton was martyred at the stake in St. Andrews for preaching the doctrines of the Reformation.

But the birthday is the 17th of August. And of what significance is this anniversary, 450 years later? Of what possible significance for Scotland today, and very particularly for the Church of Jesus Christ in Scotland, for us who form part of that church?

[3 : 47] Well, what John Knox and his fellow Reformers were doing was seeking to bring the Church back to the Bible, to reform the Church. And in producing the Scots' confession, they were submitting to a biblical injunction delivered by a brother of Jesus. And I refer to Jude and to the words that have already been commented on with the children. But let's read the words that we find there in Jude, verse 3.

Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.

This is what John Knox and others were doing. They were contending for the faith once for all delivered, entrusted to the saints. And we must do the same.

What can we learn from this exhortation by Jude? Well, the verse speaks of the faith once for all entrusted, or sometimes translated, delivered to the saints. The faith once for all entrusted, or delivered to the saints. It speaks of what we might call a special delivery.

And I want to order the thoughts that we have this morning around this idea of a special delivery that has been received, and ask some questions about this special delivery.

[5 : 33] First of all, what is it? What is it that has been delivered? What is it that has been entrusted, and who is it entrusted, and who is it from? Who is it that sends this delivery?

Who is it for? Who was it entrusted to? Who was it delivered to? And then finally, what are we to do with it? First of all then, what is it, this special delivery, and who is it from?

Well, Jude is clear. I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted or delivered to the saints. The delivery is described as, identified as, the faith. The faith. This is what was entrusted. This is what was entrusted. This is what was delivered. Now, the word faith in the New Testament is used in two ways. It is that which we exercise in response to Jesus. We, as Christians, have faith in Jesus. We trust in Jesus as our Savior.

But the word faith is also used in the manner that we find it used on this occasion, as the faith, where the direct article is very significant.

[7 : 05] The faith. The faith. The faith as that which is the known and received body of truth about Jesus and salvation through Him.

The faith. That body of truth that was fixed and established by the apostolic teaching of the early church and recorded for us in the Scriptures.

The faith. And as Jonathan was rightly saying, it is in effect synonymous with the gospel or the good news concerning Jesus.

The faith. The good news. The gospel concerning Jesus Christ. Who He is and what He has done and how He is to be responded to by sinners such as we are.

And the faith. And the faith has been delivered or entrusted by God. He is the author of the faith.

[8 : 07] God has not only secured our salvation through the work of His Son, Jesus, He has also taken great care to ensure that the truths concerning Jesus and His saving work have been made known to His people.

God has been faithful and faithfully and faithfully and faithfully and faithfully and accurately recorded for future generations. And before we move on to consider to whom the faith has been delivered or entrusted, we would do well to make very clear that we ought not to expect any further deliveries of truth.

On this point, Jude is very clear. On this point, Jude is very clear. The faith, Jude affirms, was entrusted, was delivered once for all.

Once for all. It's a done deal. The delivery has been made. The truth has been delivered once and for all. All we need to know. All that God wishes us to know concerning His Son, Jesus Christ, concerning the salvation that is to be enjoyed through Jesus has been made known.

It's all in the book. It's all in the Bible that God has given to us. No more fresh revelation should be expected or sought after.

[9 : 33] What is this special delivery? It is the faith. This wonderful body of truth concerning Jesus Christ.

God is the one who has entrusted the faith, who has delivered this great gift, this precious gift. But who is it for?

That is the second question that we want to ponder on or seek to answer. Who is it for? Who was it delivered or entrusted to? Well, Jude gives us an answer to that question also.

I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints. It was entrusted to the saints.

Now, it's good that we just pondered on that for a moment. It may seem obvious or it may seem of little consequence what Jude is saying, but it's very significant.

[10 : 31] The faith was not entrusted to it. It was not delivered to the apostles. We might have expected Jude to express himself in that way. The faith entrusted to the apostles.

They, after all, were the ones who made known the faith. But no, Jude said it was entrusted to the saints. By all means, through the apostles.

The apostles were the vehicle, if you wish, were the instruments that God chose that the faith would be made known, that it would be delivered, that it would be entrusted. But it was entrusted to the saints.

It was entrusted to every Christian. It was entrusted to all Christians. Not entrusted to some spiritual elite or some ecclesiastical hierarchy, that they would look after it and that they would have power over it.

And that they would decide what would be told and what would be revealed to others. No, it was entrusted to the saints. It was entrusted to the most humble Christian. It was entrusted to all the saints.

[11 : 37] All these men and women so beautifully, so wonderfully, so movingly described in the beginning of Jude's letter. To those who have been called, who are loved by God the Father and kept by Jesus Christ.

It was to such that the faith was delivered. It was to such that the faith was entrusted. And it's not our intention, it's not our purpose this morning to ponder on or to dwell on this wonderful description of the saints.

But we cannot but invite you to wonder at and to enjoy this glorious description that we are indeed given of the saints to whom has been entrusted the faith.

We are called by God. He is the one who in His gracious, sovereign initiative has invited us to be part of His family. We are loved by God the Father.

The Maker of heaven and earth loves His people. We are kept by Jesus Christ. In all the problems and difficulties and discouragements of life, in all our own personal failings of which there are many, Jude assures us that we, the saints, God's people, are kept by Jesus Christ.

[13 : 01] We will all cross that finishing line. We will stumble over. We will walk over slowly. We will take two steps forward and sometimes three steps back. But at the end of the day, we will cross.

You will cross, Christian friend, the finishing line. For we are kept by Jesus Christ. It is to the saints that the faith has been delivered.

Were the recipients only that first generation of saints or believers? Jude presumably is speaking about those who at that time had received the faith, to whom it had been delivered.

And certainly I think we can say, we can reasonably and rightly say, that there is a special sense in which the first generation of New Testament saints, if you wish, were indeed the privileged recipients of the faith, of the gospel.

However, we can also say that as the faith has been passed from generation to generation, so each new generation of saints receive the faith and are commissioned to contend for the faith.

[14 : 26] God has graciously ensured the preservation of the faith, even through the darkest generations when there were few saints who could take on and respond to this task.

The faith was, if you wish, rediscovered at the time of the Reformation. And Knox and his friends not only received the faith, but contended for it, often in the face of violent opposition.

And indeed, in the framing of the Scots Confession that we celebrate this week, they were seeking to ensure the protection of the faith from distortion and corruption.

The faith was delivered to the saints. And we too, in our generation, we too have received the faith. And with this privilege comes responsibility.

And that takes us on to our third question. Third of three, you'll be glad to hear. And the third question is this, what are we to do with the faith?

[15 : 43] We've identified what it is, very briefly and very fleetingly, who it is that has given us this delivery, who has handed over the faith.

We've noticed to whom it has been given, to the saints. Indeed, as it has passed from generation to generation, so we too are the privileged recipients of this delivery.

But of very particular concern is to answer this question, what are we to do with it? What are we to do with this precious deposit that we have received, that we have been given, that has been passed on by generation to generation, and has now come to us?

And as we answer that question, I would, at the risk of repeating myself, at the risk of over-emphasizing the point, I would just remind you what we've noted a moment ago, that it has been delivered to the saints, to all the saints, not to a group of leaders or particularly special people who have this responsibility.

No, all the saints are entrusted. And so the answer to this question is important for all of us to take note on.

[17 : 04] What are we to do with the faith? Well, Jude uses two verbs which point to what we are to do with the faith. He uses the verb entrust, or as we've been also translating it, delivered.

But for the purposes of this final question, we will stick with entrust. The faith has been entrusted to us. But also, there is another verb that is significant, and it is this, that the saints are urged to contend for the faith.

So these two verbs that speak of what we are to do with the faith, entrust and contend. Rather than consider each separately, I want to suggest five duties implied or required by these two verbs taken together.

Five duties in response to the question, what are we to do with the faith? The first thing is we are to know the faith.

This may seem so blindingly obvious, but I think it is valid to stress. It is impossible to contend for the faith if we are ignorant as to the content of the same.

[18 : 24] That is so clear. It is so obvious. And just to ponder on this for a moment, God is so good and so concerned to bring us to Himself that it is possible to be saved.

It is possible to have faith in Jesus. It is possible to trust in Jesus with very little understanding and knowledge of the faith. And this is a reflection of the goodness of God.

What you need to know to be saved could be written on one side of A4 very easily. I was just noticing on YouTube, a gospel presentation.

Look it up if you want. Come look Baptist Church. Type that in and see what comes up. Five minutes. Very creatively, very clearly presenting the gospel.

That which you would need to know in order to put your trust in Jesus. God is good. We don't need to be theologians. We don't need to go to seminary. We don't need to spend weeks and months and years studying these things to grasp the truths that are required.

[19 : 35] No, very little knowledge required to be saved, to put our trust in Jesus. And that is true, and we would affirm the truth of that vigorously.

However, if we are to contend for the faith, then we must deepen our knowledge. We must deepen our understanding of the same.

Jude himself is conscious of that. He is addressing Christians, and yet what does he say to them in verse 20? But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith.

You have faith. You are believers. You are trusting in Jesus. But you have to build yourself up in your most holy faith.

We must know the faith. We must study the Scriptures. We must listen attentively to the word preached. We must take advantage of opportunities that present themselves to study the Scriptures, to understand more fully the faith.

[20 : 41] We can read Christian literature that we have in abundance. And we can particularly, as we think today, especially of men of past generations who responded to this injunction, to this exhortation, we can profit from their learning, from their efforts.

We can study the Scots Confession or subsequent confessions. And as we do so, we will grow in our knowledge of the faith.

I would particularly commend parents. I think in this new session of Sunday school, the effort has been made to encourage the children to learn the shorter catechism, catechism, catechism, particularly for children.

And I would encourage parents to encourage their children in that task. And indeed, take the opportunity to learn it for yourself.

If we are to contend for the faith, it is, I think, self-evident and so clearly necessary that we need to know the faith. So that's the first thing.

[21 : 51] But also these words, entrust and very particularly contend, speak of our duty to defend the faith. And the context of the letter, it's a short letter, we've read most of it, but if we were to read it all, and certainly there are difficult passages and difficult statements made in the letter, but if we take it in its totality, the letter is written in the context of false teachers who have come in and are confusing God's people.

We read that in verse 4, for certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only sovereign and Lord.

You see, they are coming and they are seeking to corrupt the faith, to distort the faith, to change the faith, and Jude is exhorting God's people that they must contend for it. They must defend the faith.

Today is no different. The faith is ever under attack. There are those who would dilute the faith, remove from it those things that they find unattractive and intolerable, and there are those who would add to it with what they consider to be improvements or refinements to the faith.

Indeed, one of the principal purposes of the Scots Confession, its principal purpose, was actually to feed and to instruct God's people. That was its principal purpose. But one of its purposes was indeed to defend the faith from distortion and corruption.

[23 : 35] What are we to do with the faith? Well, we must know the faith. We must defend the faith. But we must also announce the faith. We must not simply be on the defensive, simply clinging on to the faith.

That is a danger in our day. We say, oh, these are difficult days and nobody's interested and the church is in decline. Well, we'll cling on to the faith. We'll cling on to it.

At least we won't let go. But to contend for the faith is to do much more than simply cling on to the faith. It is to announce the faith. It is to make it known to those who do not know.

And this concern was to the fore in those who framed the Scots confession. Just listen to a few words in the preface to the Scots confession.

Listen to John Knox and his friends who performed this task. Listen to what they say. Long have we thirsted, dear brethren, to have notified unto the world the sum of that doctrine which we profess.

[24 : 41] Listen to that missionary zeal in these theologians, these reformers. Long have we longed to notify to the world that which we have received, the sum of doctrine which we profess.

They wish not only to defend the faith, but to announce it, to proclaim it. And so the question is posed to us.

What of us? Are we passionate about announcing the faith to Rosemount, to Aberdeen, to Scotland, indeed to the world? The good news about Jesus and the free and full salvation in Jesus for all who would put their trust in Him.

We must know the faith. We must defend the faith. We must announce the faith, but also, fourthly, we must live the faith. We have stressed that the faith is a body of truth that constitutes the gospel, this body of truth.

We have argued also that the framing of the Scots Confession constitutes one historic example of contending for the faith. But the danger is that we might conclude that contending for the faith is purely a matter of doctrinal orthodoxy of creeds and confessions.

[26 : 04] And this would be a mistake. Jude was not, I am very sure, thinking about creeds and confessions when he wrote his letter. His concern was that the believers would, in contrast to the false teachers, live the faith.

This was his concern, that they would live the faith. For him, contending for the faith was not simply an intellectual activity, it was about living the faith. The false teachers gave evidence of their error by the lives that they lived, by the immorality that characterized their lives.

And Jude says, you are to contend for the faith and you will contend for it as you live the faith. This is eloquently illustrated in the manner in which he concludes his letter with an exhortation that we've already highlighted, but we will do so again on this occasion.

Verse 20, But dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.

Be merciful to those who doubt. Snatch others from the fire and save them. To others show mercy mixed with fear, hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh. To build themselves up in their most holy faith involved living the faith.

[27 : 27] Involved demonstrating the faith to others. How are we then to contend for the faith? What are we to do with the faith?

We are to know the faith, defend the faith, announce the faith, live the faith, but one final thing, one final duty that is implicit in what Jude says to us, that it has been entrusted to us, that we are to contend for it.

And the final duty is this, that we are to pass on the faith. The faith has been entrusted to us, and very particularly that word. It has been entrusted to us that we might pass it on to succeeding generations.

We had earlier the picture, the helpful picture of a race. Well, think of a race not where one alone is running, but a relay race. You know what it's like in a relay race?

And somebody has the baton and they've got to pass it on to the next guy. And if they let go, the race is lost. And you know the excitement of will he get it into his hand or won't he?

[28 : 31] He has to pass it on. You see, if he doesn't pass it on, all is lost. And so, we in contending for the faith must pass on the faith to succeeding generations.

And of course, we begin with our own generation. We thank God for our Christian heritage. We thank God for each succeeding generation who received and contended for the faith.

We thank God for John Knox, but also for countless unnamed and unknown saints who have ensured that the faith has continued to be passed on in Scotland through the centuries. We thank God for godly parents and godly grandparents who passed on the faith to this generation. But the big question for us this morning is what about us? Are we passing on the faith? Are you passing on the faith? Are you passing on the faith as you received it? As parents, very particularly, the challenge comes to us. [29 : 34] We, in a very particular way, have this solemn responsibility to pass on the faith. But also as a church, as a denomination, as a congregation, this is our task, our duty, to pass on the faith. And so, as we close, I address you, saints, called by God, loved by God the Father, kept by Jesus Christ, let us contend for the faith once for all delivered to us. Let us know it deeply. Let us defend it courageously. Let us announce it boldly, winsomely, and creatively. Let us live it fragrantly and coherently. And let us pass it on faithfully. So help us, God. Let us pray. We have to thank God's for he

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