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Series on Jude: The Beloved

Jude 3-16

Title: Hold Fast To Jesus

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Time with Young Christians

Children, what are two of the greatest sentences you have ever heard? Aren't they the ones that moms and dads tell you at night when you're in your PJ's and are about to go to sleep?

Once upon a time and they lived happily ever after

What is your favourite fairy tale, I wonder? Mine is *Beauty and the Beast*. My imagination is captured by this beautiful young woman who sacrifices herself and comes to love an awful beast.

We love fairy tales because they tell us about something beautiful. They stay with us, so much so that we never forget them, even when we get old!

Fairy tales tell us that life is beautiful. That there is goodness. That the world is meant to be made whole.

And what I love most about fairy tales is that their stories help us see the story of Jesus. They help us see the story that Jesus is writing with all of us: that he created a beautiful world, but that an enemy came in, led us astray, and that the world is not what it used to be or should be. But, a hero of the story, Jesus, not only saves us but saves the entire world and is even now making the world beautiful and whole again. Jesus, the great hero, promises to make all things new when he comes back again, and when we "live happily ever after with him" forever and ever.

So tonight, maybe ask your mom or your dad to read you a fairy tale and I bet you'll find a bit of Jesus in that tale . . .

Let's pray. Jesus, thank you for writing our story. Help us to not just read the story you tell, but to live with you in it, too. We love you. Amen.

Sermon

I find it pretty interesting that in our culture, which is starved for ultimate meaning, is struggling under the weight of having to decide for ourselves what truth even is. And yet, I find it even more interesting that in the midst of all of this, some deep sense of ultimate meaning is being found in the

stories we tell. For example, 3 of the top ten movies of all time, *Shawshank Redemption*, *12 Angry Men*, and *The Lord of the Rings* all have this golden thread of redemption running through them. A world of beauty once existed, injustice now exists, redemption is needed, and salvation comes in the most uncanny and uncommon ways. Stories help us recenter our lives, perhaps even recalling a past we did not know we were part of. Stories help us put the pieces back together. Stories stir our imagination to remember that there was goodness and that there can be goodness again. Stories stir us to action so that we live in our context as a redeemed and redeeming people. Stories connect the dots. Stories help us live.

And Jude knows this. He speaks with prophetic imagination as he beckons his readers back in time to remember their history, their passion, their calling, their story. Jude draws on his readers' imagination by warning them about present dangers, toils, and snares and then reminding them of previous stories from their history that solidify this current warning. And what is all of Jude's prophetic imagining and stern historical warning pointing to? Jude has one passion. One guiding light. One hope. One reminder, and it's this: hold fast to Jesus. Hold fast to Jesus. Don't miss the simplicity of this. Don't cheapen the freedom of this. Don't forget the cost it was to Jesus to make it possible for you to hold fast to him. Hold fast to Jesus, Jude pleads.

Jude is not writing about dangers, toils, and snares from the world. He's concerned with people right on the inside who are trying to lead this fragile church astray. And so he admonishes them to contend for the faith lest these intruders lead the church away. So the title of my sermon this morning is simply this: *Hold Fast To Jesus* (slide).

What we're going to do this morning is use the text of scripture as our outline and walk through these verses asking How does Jude contend for the faith and call his readers to hold fast to Jesus? Friends, we have a bit of heavy lifting to do because Jude is a masterful storyteller, but we have to remember that he's writing to a particular group of people, mostly Jews, 2100 years ago. As such, he's going to draw on their imaginations, their passions, their history. This is exactly what he should be doing, but for us it requires a bit of work to understand. Indeed, this is probably the trickiest and "stickiest" of all four sermons on Jude. For example, Jude is going to spend a lot of time talking about angels precisely because the Jews at that time had an utter fascination with angels and so Jude captures their imagination by drawing on angels' stories. Jude will also use scriptures and he even will draw on Jewish history not included in Hebrew Scriptures. For his readers, this would be like using Canada's history in the world wars: something we're familiar with and is part of God's big story, but isn't in the canon of Scripture.

So as we go through these verses, let's simply remember that Jude was not written to us, but it was written for us. We have a bit of work to do in understanding the message, the culture in which that message was presented, and then how it applies to our context today. So come, let's journey together through these verses as we follow Jude in his one driving passion, to hold fast to Jesus. If you have your bibles, please keep them open in front of you as we walk through verses 3-16.

Again, in verse 3, Jude addresses the church as Beloved. He does this to emphasize his strong personal concern for the church. He's quick to call them beloved and he's quick to admonish them that they need to engage in a fight here: a fight for the faith and a fight in the faith. This is going to take spiritual toil. This is going to be a battle.

This faith his readers are to contend for is already solidified even though the church is very young. The teaching of the apostles are being widely circulated in oral form, the teachings of Jesus are being widely taught, and letters are being sent that will soon comprise the New Testament. The

faith has already been fixed and established, making it unchangeable. But, this faith is also under attack by false teachers.

Jude describes these false teachers as ones who come in and act like Christians, but they twist God's grace into a license for sensuality and deny the Lord Jesus Christ, apparently using the gospel teaching about grace as an excuse for ungodly living. And so verse by verse, Jude gives warnings about specific things these false teachers are bringing in. Again, what Jude writes about can bristle our post-modern sensitivities because we don't like to be told that there is right and wrong, we just like to discuss the possibility of my own right and my own wrong. So, let's graciously give Jude the benefit of the doubt to make his case for why the church needs to follow only Jesus through a series of warnings.

In verse 4, Jude warns about **licentiousness**. What in the world is that? Certainly not a word I use in my everyday vocabulary! An attitude of licentiousness is where we think that God's grace is so big that it doesn't matter how we live, we can go on sinning so that grace may abound and Jude attacks that in verse 4. If your understanding of God's grace is making you think that sensuality is okay, you are perverting God's grace. That is not the grace of God that you're thinking about right now. It's a lie and perversion. They pervert the Gospel and deny our Lord—yet they've crept into the midst of them.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a pastor in Nazi Germany, tried desperately to beckon the church in Germany back to her first love, Christ. When Hitler came to power, he was voted in by a population of Catholic & Protestant Christians who comprised 95% of the voting population. Tragically, many of the pastors, on the inside, were swayed to vote for Hitler and lead their congregations to do the same because of the allure of power and success and ease that Hitler offered. All the pastor had to do was align their church's beliefs with the Third Reich. In response to his, Bonhoeffer condemns these leaders, these false teachers, as using the grace of Christ for personal gain and making grace cheap. Bonhoeffer writes (slide),

"Cheap grace is the idea that "grace" did it all for me so I do not need to change my lifestyle. The believer who accepts the idea of "cheap grace" thinks he can continue to live like the rest of the world. Instead of following Christ in a radical way, the Christian lost in cheap grace thinks he can simply enjoy the consolations of his grace."

And so, even our own recent history calls us to be aware of those on the inside who can pervert the Gospel of Christ.

In verse 5, Jude warns about **unbelief** by reminding them of the story of Exodus in which those who did not believe and did not hold fast to God, ultimately did not make it into the promised land, but died during the 40 years of wandering in the desert. So Jude warns his readers to hold fast to Jesus and not forget his saving power. But hold on a minute! There is a wonderful and subtle thing to notice in this verse. Jude is unashamedly pointing to Jesus in the Hebrew scriptures when Jude writes, "The Lord once for all saved a people out of Egypt." The word Lord here is Messiah, and using this name Jude is clearly showing Jesus as Saviour, and as active in the world from the beginning of creation, long before he came in the flesh. I don't want us to miss the profoundness of this, friends. Jude, writing to a primarily Jewish audience, calls his readers to hold fast to Jesus by showing that Jesus is present in their history, actively saving them.

In verse 6, Jude warns about **rebellion** through summoning them to recall the familiar story of angels' rebellion. It's a little obscure to know what rebellion Jude is specifically talking about, but

it could be the rebellion of the angels alluded to in Genesis 6:1-4, if you want to look that up later. Either way, the warning about the angels centers on rebellion against the authority of God and seeking to be equal to God.

In verse 7, Jude beckons his readers to remember a motif that runs throughout scripture of the story of Sodom and Gomorrah and the danger of **lust**. I want to draw our attention to a reference to Sodom from the prophet Ezekiel that helps us understand this story more. In Ezekiel 16:49-50 Ezekiel explicitly says (slide),

“This was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. They were haughty, and did abominable things before me; therefore I removed them when I saw it.”

And so Jude calls back their memory to Sodom to remind the early church to not abuse their prosperity or standing in Jesus. Don't become proud, arrogant, or stuffed up in your Christianity. I like the phrase “stuffed up” because it gives this idea of somebody who is so stuffed with goodness that they don't share with anyone else and it ends up corrupting them from the inside. “Sodom... did not aid the poor and needy.”

If you wanted to sum all of these things up in his opening examples, it would be that Jude is warning the church about self-determination as becoming our highest good rather than worshipping Christ as our highest good and greatest treasure. Jude reminds them to hold fast to Jesus who is the true, the beautiful, and the good. Hold fast to Jesus who is our salvation. Oh how relevant this is for us today when self-determination seems to be the only thing we can cling to as we reject authority, truth, institutions, and all the things the modern man used to have confidence in. Today, our Disney movies that imprint a construct of how to see, live in, and know the world call children to find the hero within, to rise up into this self-determining person who alone can decide what is true and good and beautiful. There is something wonderful we can affirm here, for we know and believe that we are made in the image of God and so there is that wonderful “spark of the divine” in us. And yet, we cannot deny the shame, sin, and separation we feel so desperately. Is it any wonder that we have so much anxiety and depression and isolation in our culture today because the expectation is that we must be our own hero by looking within ... and yet we fall so very short of such a glorious notion.

The original glory for which we are created groans under the weight of shame, sin and suffering and so it is at this moment that Christianity is beckoned to speak to this cultural deficiency through offering a new perspective where it is Jesus who lays aside his heroic divinity and makes himself poor that we might experience his riches.

In verse 8-10, Jude warns that these false teachers commit blasphemy by rejecting authority. Jude calls them dreamers who have gotten caught up in following subjective feelings and desires. Jude doesn't say that dreams, feelings, and desires are bad: for they are good gifts from God. But, if we rely on the gift rather than the Giver, if we look to the gift rather than looking to the Giver, we can wander from God himself in attaching ourselves to his gifts without remaining secure to God.

Next, in verses 11-13 Jude breaks into the seriousness of his warning, with uttering, “Woe to them!” Woe to those who lead others astray! In verse 14 Jude states that eternal destinies are at stake here. This is utterly serious, consequential stuff here. Jude is warning believers that you need to fight, you need to fight the good fight of faith. There's a tidal wave of sin that is taking over this church. Imagine someone with a tender conscience thinking, “Where can I go, how can I escape in this great tidal wave? Is there any hope I can finish well? For knowing my own heart 'I am prone to wander,

Lord I feel it; prone to leave the God I love.’ And if the leaders, the ones I’m supposed to follow, don’t get it right, what hope is there for me?”

And so Jude’s contention here, beloved church, is that we hold fast to Jesus. Where can we go in the great hurricane? We cling to Jesus, who is able to keep us. Earlier in the service, we took communion together, in effect saying, “Jesus be all you said you would be for me. For all my doubts, be my assurance. For my fears, be my strength. For my wandering, be my guiding light. Jesus, be to me all that you have promised.”

If Jude shows us anything, it is that rules and regulations won’t secure you from stumbling. Blindly following our own dreams or teachers won’t keep you secure from stumbling. Filling ourselves to bursting with the grace of Christ and just stagnating in that grace won’t keep you from stumbling. Brothers and sisters, we look to Jesus, who since before the creation of the world, has loved us. Who in the history of Israel, was already in the business of saving and delivering. And who in these last times, has come in the flesh to redeem us and to keep us safe. If you are wondering how to stay safe in Jesus, even this wondering shows a tender heart towards Jesus, a heart that wants to be kept safe for Jesus, to not wander after lust, flounder in unbelief, or turn away in rebellion.

Friends, we simply come to Jesus and say, “Be all you have said you would be to me. I’m open to you, Jesus. Please keep me from stumbling. Keep me in step with the spirit. Keep me in love with your Word. Keep me in fellowship with your church. Jesus keep me in yourself.”

How strange and how wonderful it is that it is ours to receive the work of Christ in us, both at salvation and until the day of our ultimate salvation when he comes with all his holy ones and redeems all things.

So Father, let us rest in this promise, this grace, this assurance. Even as we are warned and are filled with Godly fear from the stories of Jude, let us hold fast to our redeeming Saviour. Keep us tender and open and full of love to overflowing so that the world may know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. Let us not be stuffed up with grace that stagnates and spoils. But let this grace be true and free to run and touch the lives of the poor and needy among us we pray. Do this for the sake of your Son Jesus, and by the power of the Holy Spirit in us. Amen.

Benediction

Children of God

Called by Jesus, the one who keeps you,

Remember to fix your eyes, your attention, your hope, and your heart on this Jesus, who promises to keep you and fill you with great peace.

Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (Hebrews 13:20, 21 NIV)