

**Sermon preached at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Kingstowne, Virginia,  
by Dr. David Fischler, on Sunday, July 19, 2015**

**A CALL TO PERSEVERENCE**

**Jude 17-25**

Last week we took a look at the first half of Jude and in it we saw one harsh message. It was a message that was harsh because it was so important. Jude was writing to some Christians. We don't know where, we don't know what church, we don't know a lot of details, but we know that these were people that were Christians and that the church that they were in – and perhaps others as well – were facing a crisis. That crisis was that there were those who operating in the spirit of the world had infiltrated the church and were seeking to undermine its mission of bringing the gospel message, the message not only of salvation but of transformation of life and of behavior, of attitudes and mindsets, of heart and soul. They were undermining that mission and dragging others away from the truth.

Jude gave us in some detail what it was that they were doing and now in the second half of his letter he gives us some idea of what we're to do about it. After the sermon last week a number of people came up to me and said, "That was a really, really good sermon! Now what do I do about it?" Which is a perfectly reasonable question. The truth of the matter is if you can't answer that question about virtually anything in Scripture then it hasn't done much good for you. The Lord wants us to take His Word and wants us to make it real. So that's what we're going to do today.

We begin that by looking first at verse 17 and what we discover in verses 17-19 is that this should not have been unexpected. There should have been no surprise about what was going on any more than in our own day there needs to be any surprise about what is going on in the church in America, the church in the world, the church right here in northern Virginia even. What we see in verse 18 is a quote, interestingly enough. It is one of the very few instances of a quotation from another part of the New Testament found in a New Testament book. Jude is quoting from 2 Peter 3:3. That verse reads: "Above all you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires." Which is essentially what Jude says. He says that the Apostles – the other Apostles as well as him for that matter – were saying in the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires. Essentially the same thing that Peter is saying in his letter. Now the scoffers to whom Peter refers are those who doubt the Lord and who doubt His promises. They are men who essentially say, "We don't really think that Christ is coming back. As a matter of fact, we're not sure that He's come at all." According to Peter, in that same chapter, he says, "They will say 'Where is this "coming" He promised. Ever since our ancestors died everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.'" Keep in mind, this is not the world. This is not the Roman government. This is not the Jewish Sanhedrin. These are people within the church. And what they are saying is essentially that nothing has changed. "Here we are, supposedly, followers of this Jesus of Nazareth but it's all just the same." There's an ambiguity in what Peter writes when he puts these words in the scoffers' mouths, when they say, "Where is this 'coming' He promised." It's not clear whether they are referring

to the first or the second. And the reference to creation later in that same verse kind of gives the idea that they're suggesting that Jesus came and He was wonderful and He was worth following. Lots of rabbis had followings in those days. He was worth following but nothing has really changed. Everything just simply goes on the way it has always been.

The best construction you can put on this, I think, is that they're saying, "Well, Jesus came and He suffered and He died and He rose again and He said He was going to come back but here it is five and a half minutes later and He's still not back." It's actually at this point probably 20 or 30 years, but what is it that God says? "In the sight of God a thousand years is as a day." Put these people on a clock and we're talking about a miniscule amount of time. And they're already complaining. For that matter, in our own day it's been 2,000 years and once again we've got people saying, "Well, you know He's been gone a long time. I guess He's not coming back." And you want to ask folks like that, because they typically have this belief about the universe, "Hold on, is the universe?" Typically these are folks who would say, "Well, it's 13 billion years old, it's 14 billion years old, it's 18 billion years old." And you say Jesus has been gone and has not returned in how long? Two thousand years? What portion of 14 billion is 2,000? That's really not very long, is it? It is true that it's longer than the time between your breakfast and your lunch, which is about the attention span that most people have these days, if that. But the fact is, even in the best construction, what we're talking about are people who are sowing doubt and who are leading the people of God astray.

Jude warns against these people. Not, again, because they're outside and they're attacking the church from outside. But because they are in the church. He tells them in verse 19, "These are the men who divide you." Outsiders can't divide us. The typical human reaction, even from a perfectly natural standpoint is when a group is attacked by people outside of it they don't split in half. They get closer together in the face of that. Those who would divide us are those who are operating from within. And they do this, he says, "because they follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit." Another way to say that is that these are men who are operating strictly on the basis of the kinds of instincts that anyone would have operated upon before they became Christians. Before you were a Christian there were things that were really important to you. Things like wealth, things like comfort, things like convenience, things like power, things like status. These are the sorts of things that animate "the natural man" as Jude would have put it, or "the old man" as Paul would have put it. So we're talking about people who aren't, in fact Christians. Now he doesn't name them, and I think that's significant because he's not suggesting that it's our business to point to specific individuals and say, "Oh, you are not a Christian." Rather, what he's doing is he's pointing to a group and what they're doing, what they're teaching, what they're leading people toward and saying these are people who are dividing the church, undermining the gospel, putting obstacles in the way of the mission. Their status as Christians, as individuals, is up to God. But what he's suggesting is that those who are seeking to undermine the gospel, those who are leading people away from the truth, that these are people who are operating without the Spirit. Which is to say without conversion.

The unfortunate thing is, and this is why it's a problem, he says "These are the men who divide you." Not "These are the men who attempt to divide you." There's an important difference. The difference, of course, is if they're dividing you they're succeeding. There are those who are listening to them. There are those who are buying what they're selling. There are those who are following them and imitating them. And what was seen in Jude's day is no different from what is seen in ours. There are those in various American churches, and in churches throughout the world, who seek to draw people away from the truth of the gospel and all too often they've succeeded. And they've succeeded in part because people didn't realize that what they were teaching was false. Or it may be because what they were doing or the image they presented was attractive. Or maybe they spoke in terms that people speak of in the world that seemed to make a certain amount of sense. One of the things that has bothered me over the years is the way the word "justice" has been twisted and co-opted by those who don't seek justice. They seek license. They seek license for whatever it is that they desire and they call that "justice." To allow a person to remain in a sinful lifestyle, to never hear the gospel, to be deprived of the opportunity to know Jesus Christ is not just. That's hateful. It's something that ought to tear at the conscience of folks. But apparently, to use Jude's language, one has to suspect that these are folks who are not in fact Christians at all. Or certainly may not be. Or at the very least are preaching and teaching and living as if they're not.

So that's what they're facing. And it is what we are facing. If you think that because you're a member of Faith Church or because Faith Church is a member of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church and that therefore we are immune to this, please, disabuse yourself of that delusion. We are not protected from everything that might be thrown at us. We have not been given a guarantee that nobody else has that somehow or another these storms will pass us by. Keep in mind, Jude's writing to the church in his day. There may well have been people who thought the same thing about their times and about their place, about their congregation or groups of congregations. They may have thought there are Gnostics out there, a variety of other heretics or people who are hedonists and they're trying to get us to engage in various kinds of immorality. But we don't have to worry about that because that's "those people." Those people all have that problem. We can't have that problem. And Jude was telling them, "No, this can affect you." Doesn't mean it has to, but it means that there's a certain vigilance that is required.

So the question is, "How do we deal with the storms that may and, for many of us in the past have, buffeted us?" Well I think we find the answer to that first in verse 3, where we see the theme of this epistle. I'll come to that in a second. Then we see it in verses 20-23. The first thing we see in verse 3 is the call to contend. "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." You remember from last week the faith that he's talking about is not our personal trust in Christ. He's talking about what we have been entrusted with. The gospel message and its implications for life. That is what we are to contend for. Another way that we might put it is that we are to contend for the truth of the gospel and its implications for life. That means standing for truth and it means standing against falsehood and temptation into immorality when

they rear their heads in the local church, in the regional church, in the denomination, in the national church, in the church throughout the world. We are called to confront these whenever we see them and to do so in a loving but forceful manner.

I want to tell you a story. In 2000-2001 I was serving a congregation of the Moravian Church Southern Province when the denomination as a whole found itself in the midst of a controversy. That controversy had to do with a teaching that was pretty familiar in the other mainline churches but which, for whatever reason, no one had sought to propagate in the Moravian Church. And that was that there are many roads to God. Christ is good for you. He's your road. But there are lots of others. In the same way that you can go from here to either the tip of Florida or to Maine on I-95. You don't have to do that. You can take 301 a lot of that way. You can take Route 1 a lot of that way. You can kind of meander through the countryside. And eventually you'll get to your goal. Lots of different ways to get there. And that was what was being taught at the Moravian Seminary and was being taught in at least one independent publication that wasn't part of the denominational structure but it was for Moravians. Well I saw that situation, I listened to the concerns that were expressed by some of my fellow pastors as well as people in my congregation and those in other congregations and I thought we need to do something. We need to take action. You need to understand that Moravians are the least confrontational people on the planet. If there is a way to avoid dealing with a problem, Moravians will find it. So I knew that this was not going to be easy, but I thought it's necessary and who better to take up a moment of confrontation than a Jew from New Jersey who couldn't care less what you think and who is willing to stand up? So I wrote a resolution for the next Synod of the Southern Province. I'd like to read this to you. It'll only take a couple of minutes. I want to read this to you to give you kind of an idea how innocuous this is.

**A RESOLUTION AFFIRMING SALVATION THROUGH CHRIST ALONE  
( has been referred to as pre-resolution 54 )**

WHEREAS Jesus Christ declared that "no one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6) ; and

WHEREAS St. Peter declared that "there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved" (Acts 4: 12); and

WHEREAS Paul wrote that "there is one God: there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself a ransom for all" ( 1 Timothy 2:5-6a); and

WHEREAS the Ground of the Unity, the foundational theological statement of the Moravian Church, states that "with the whole of Christendom we share faith in God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. We believe and confess that God has revealed himself once and for all in His son Jesus Christ, that our Lord has redeemed us with the whole of humanity by His death and resurrection; and that there is no salvation apart from Him" (Ground of the Unity, Section

2); and

WHEREAS the Ground of the Unity further states that "it is true that through the Holy Spirit the recognition of God's will for salvation in the Bible is revealed completely and clearly" (Ground of the Unity, Section 4, Paragraph 3); and

WHEREAS the Church Order of Unitas Fratrum states that "the Unitas Fratrum is committed to the victory of the lamb of God that was slain as the hope of the world. It accepts as its central commission the proclamation of this message in every place where the Lord Himself opens the door" ( Church Order of the Unitas Fratrum, (Chapter III. Paragraph 2a); and

WHEREAS there are those within the Unity who would claim that there are many ways to God, that Jesus Christ is but one way among the many, and that there is salvation apart from him; therefore

BE IT RESOLVED that the 2002 Synod of the Southern Province declares its belief that salvation is found in Jesus Christ alone, and that there is no Salvation apart from him; and further

BE IT RESOLVED that the 2002 Synod of the Southern Province declares its belief that this teaching is in harmony with the teaching of Scripture and of the Ground of the Unity and the Church Order of the Unitas Fratrum; and further

BE IT RESOLVED that the 2002 Synod of the Southern Province declares that teaching there is a plurality of ways to God other than through Jesus Christ is contrary to the Moravian understanding of Scripture and the statements of our foundational documents.

Here's the translation: We as Moravians believe what we as Moravians believe. The truth of the matter is that this is a redundancy. There's no real need for this. It should be a matter of, "Well yeah, of course. The Bible says that. Our church Book of Order says that. Our creed says that. So should we teach that? No, I don't think so." That was the response of one person who stood up and proclaimed it along with some others who agreed with him. It got to the Southern Province Synod and this resolution was assigned to the committee on world mission, at least in part because they felt strongly that this needed to be said for fear that the controversy in the American church would affect the mission of the Moravian Church in Latin America, in Africa and in Asia. When I got to the Synod – I got there a day late because of a funeral – and I walked into the room where the committee was meeting that was considering this, they stood and applauded. I have never been so embarrassed in my entire life. But it was their way of saying, "You have said what needed to be said and nobody else has done so." Unfortunately I got sick during that Synod. I wound up with a really severe potassium deficiency. I actually wound up in the hospital during those four days and had to come home early. And because I was so debilitated through so much of it I was not able to do what needed to be done to properly shepherd this through the process. Leaders of the church, leaders of the

Southern Province, got a hold of this and when they were done this no more resembled what had been submitted than a Looney Tune cartoon looks like *War and Peace*. It said something completely different. They had essentially thrown out everything that was in it and said, “We as Moravians are searching for sound doctrine.” Good luck with that. The chances are pretty good that you’ll be looking for a long time. If you think you haven’t found it yet the chances are pretty good you’re never going to. Because it’s right there in front of your face.

Please don’t misunderstand me. I have not gone through all of this in order to say how wonderful I am and boy, I’m fighting a good fight and you all should be just like me. I’m not saying that. The truth of the matter is that it didn’t take any great amount of courage to do this. One of the things I’ve never understood is why the people at that Synod thought that I was some kind of brave hero. I’m simply saying what we should all be saying. That doesn’t take any courage. It doesn’t even take many brains. Which is a good thing! I was simply doing what I thought God told us to do in the New Testament. Is that really such a big deal? Well apparently in the church today it is. And there are all too many places where if you do stand up and do that you will get shot at. Rhetorical arrows will come your way and pierce to your very soul. And so, be ready for it.

Remember last week that I mentioned that the word translated “contend” here has reference to the fight that we fight in a really intense wrestling match. When you go into a wrestling match you don’t expect your opponent to roll over and play dead. Right? They’re going to fight back. They’re going to come at you. Which means if you’re going to win, you’re going to fight back, too. Now God is going to win, right? Can I get an “amen” for that? Pretend you’re Baptists for just a moment. God is going to win this fight. There is no question about that. In fact, Jude says something later on that makes that very clear. God is going to fight but that does not mean, as is the case in any war, that just because the conclusion is not in doubt that there will not be casualties along the way. And what we’re talking about is trying to minimize casualties and maximize ground taken. And God’s going to be behind that. And what does He call us to do? Well He calls us to contend but in verses 20-23 he offers seven ways to go about that.

First, he says, “Building yourselves up in your most holy faith.” We are all called to continually be seeking to understand the faith that we profess better and better and better. It doesn’t mean we all have to be professional theologians. We don’t even all have to be Sunday School teachers. But we all are responsible for growing in our understanding of what the faith teaches and what its implications for life are. Truth and action put together. And I don’t mind telling you that’s probably not going to happen in just a half hour on Sunday morning. As brilliant and as insightful and inspiring as Neil’s and my sermons are – that was not a joke, okay? – as wonderful as they might be, it’s not going to happen just during that half hour. We all have a responsibility in the other hundred sixty-seven and a half, however many hours there are in a week, to build ourselves up and we do that in small groups, together and we do that individually.

The second thing he mentions: “Praying in the Holy Spirit.” Praying is commended to ensure that we keep connected to the source of our faith and to call upon His power and

wisdom to deal with those who stand against it. If we think that we can do it on our own because of how clever we are, how smart we are, how tactically brilliant we are, we have another think coming. If I had any illusions about that before that 2002 Synod, it managed to disabuse me of them. Because the resolution I submitted was not only twisted out of all recognition, but what it eventually became, passed. Because people went along with what was going on. And part of the reason that that happened was because people were depending on their own strength and their own cleverness to do what needed to be done. Prayer is necessary.

The third thing that he mentions: “Keeping yourselves in God’s love.” This is not just a matter of holding onto God’s love for oneself, but of extending it to others. And to extend it, perhaps even especially, to those who would undermine the faith. You all may or may not be aware but there are people in the churches of America who call themselves Christians who loathe and despise you. They hate you. They would like to see you stripped of your civil liberties. They would like to see you if at all possible herded into an ecclesiastical cattle pen where you can’t touch or harm, in their view, anyone else. If you think I’m joking, go to the Internet – the source of all wisdom! – and look for mainstream bloggers. You can probably find evidence of what I’ve just said among some mainline leadership. But if you look for United Methodist or PCUSA or Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and Episcopal and United Church of Christ bloggers you’ll find that hate in a big fat rush. It may not be put in terms of “I hate Evangelicals!” But it will be put in terms of what you stand for, which is the truth of the gospel. What you stand for is repulsive, it’s unjust, it’s medieval, and it has no place in the modern world. We can give it back to them just as well as they give it to us. We could do that. And in the process we would confirm everything that they think about us and we would send a message to the secular world that watches us as we fight in public. And the secular world would say, “Yep, they’re exactly what we thought they were.” Because the secular world thinks all of that anyway about us. So instead, “keep yourself in God’s love” means keep yourself connected to that love in order to be able to give it to others and perhaps most especially those who would try to undermine the faith. Because, what is it that Paul talks about? Heaping burning coals on the enemy’s head? Well you do that by giving to them the love of Christ. And it will burn them. Either it will burn them the way hell does or it will burn them to purify them and change them and transform them into children of God because, depending upon God’s choice, it will do one or the other. So we keep ourselves in God’s love.

Fourth: “As you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.” The key word there is “patience.” Patience. Jude’s writing to people 2,000 years ago and guess what? It’s still just like that and in fact it has always been like that. We wait and we exercise patience because, quite frankly, we don’t have any choice. God doesn’t look at time the same way we do and even though we’re going to shuffle off this mortal coil in 5 or 10 or 20 or 40 or 50 years, to God that’s nothing. So recognize final victory will probably not be achieved in our lives. Instead we wait. We wait for His mercy to be poured out in final judgment.

Five: “Be merciful to those who doubt.” This is really important. Unfortunately there

are people in every church in America who are listening to the preaching that they are hearing and just don't know what to do with it. They're hearing a contrary message from the culture constantly. Or, perhaps, if they're listening to the kind of guys that Jude is talking about they're hearing a message that affirms that cultural message constantly. And they just don't know what to do. They're being pulled in a half a dozen different directions. That being the case, that being what they're dealing with, we're called to be persuasive voices, but we're also called to exercise mercy to those who waver. To recognize that ultimately it's God who is going to have to work in them to show them the truth.

Sixth: "Save others by snatching them from the fire." There are those who have jumped right off the cliff and were perfectly happy to do so. They've thrown in with cultural voices. They've listened to teachers of error and they've said, "Ah, come get me, baby!" And it's our job to be God's hands and His voices in the world to try to drag them back. And we can only do that if we speak and if we act. If we sit by and let them continue to plummet over the edge, eventually, just like Wile E. Coyote they will go "SPLAT!" Except it won't be funny. It will be for all eternity.

One final thing he mentions: "To others show mercy mixed with fear, hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh." What he's saying is essentially those who have fallen to the temptations to immorality, to the false teachers, are to be offered God's grace and mercy even as we are careful not to fall into similar temptation.

Now I have to apologize. I've gone on for greater length than I had planned. But there is one final word that has to be said, and that's the last two verses of this epistle. It's a doxology. It's not the doxology that we sing every week, but it is a doxology. A doxology is a short hymn of praise to God and this doxology is meant to remind his readers that no matter how grim things look, no matter how much we are encompassed by heresy and apostasy and immorality, God is still in charge. It is He who will keep us from stumbling. It is He who preserves those whom He has chosen, that are mentioned in verse 1, from the wiles of the false teacher. It is He who is able to present us before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy. He is the One who saves us and sanctifies us and gives us joy even in the midst of hard times. He has all glory, majesty, power and authority which He manifests and exercises for our benefit through the person and work of Jesus Christ and no amount of false teaching and no amount of immorality can ever deprive us of that. And for all this, we praise Him.