

LIVE BY TRUTH: REMAIN **(Jude 20-21)**

More than 35 years ago, well-known pastor and author John MacArthur wrote a book entitled, *Reckless Faith: When the Church Loses Its Will to Discern*. In his book he lamented that the leaders in today's evangelical church have become so tolerant they are no longer concerned with sorting out truth from error. In fact, many are willing to accept people into the church regardless of what they believe, even if what they believe differs greatly from what we've always believed. We act as though all beliefs are equally valid.

He opened his book by telling a story. He and his wife, Patricia, were traveling by car across America. John pastors a church north of Los Angeles, and he tells of what happened while they were driving through our neighboring state of Arkansas. It just so happened that John wanted to buy a quilt for his wife, and out in the middle of nowhere, John saw a sign that said, "Quilts." He thought this must be it.

He pulled in and stopped in front of a house that was little more than a shack. They entered by a screen door and were met by a lovely toothless lady.

When John said they were interested in buying a quilt, the lady brought out one she had been working on. John said it was the ugliest thing he had ever seen in his life. It seemed to him as though this lady had sewn on a four-inch square of every fabric her hands had ever touched. When she showed it to him, he was almost speechless. He managed to say, "My, that is a quilt!" He added that it wasn't the color he was looking for even though every color you could imagine was represented on that quilt.

The lady said she had another quilt her friend had made. John said that quilt was beautiful. It was blue. It made sense to him. He bought it.

While John was talking to the lady, her husband came in and sat in his old chair in the living room. All around his chair were stacks of literature. There were piles of magazines, mailers, books, videos. John engaged the man in conversation and began to sort through the literature. The man's name was Johnny. He had stuff from the Mormons, Christian Science, Roman Catholics, Unitarians, and others. John said to Johnny, "You know, you've got an awful lot of different religious literature here.

Johnny looked up and said, "And there's good in all of it."

At that moment, John realized that this man had done with religious teaching just what his wife had done with fabric. He had quilted his theology because he believed there was good in all of it.

Friends, when it comes to religious teaching, there is not good in all of it. Instead, there is error in a lot of it.

We have been going through the little letter of Jude, the next to last book of the NT. It is one chapter in length—25 verses long. In v. 3, Jude tells his readers that they are to contend, they are to fight for the truth. We are not to fight over the truth. We are to fight for the truth. In vv. 17-23, Jude shows them what fighting for the truth looks like.

Our best weapon against falsehood is truth. Falsehood withers when it is confronted with truth. That is why we must know the truth, and believe the truth, and speak the truth, and live the truth. Instead of living by lies, we are to live by truth. In vv. 17-23 of Jude,

we find three things that are involved in living by truth. We looked at the first of those three last Sunday. The first thing we are to do is to **remember**. We are to remember the warnings that we have been given; in the last days, false teachers are going to go about teaching falsehood. Such teachers will even find their way into the church.

As far as the NT is concerned, the last days began with the resurrection of Jesus. That means, Jude, and Paul, and John, and you and I are all living in the last days. In these last days, there have been no shortage of false teachers. In chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation, the last book of the NT, we find seven messages that Jesus gave to seven churches. Of those seven churches, five of them were fighting against false teaching, and some of those churches lost that fight. Jesus pronounces judgment on them, and those local congregations ceased to exist. Throughout Church history, serious battles have been waged between truth and error, between correct doctrine and false doctrine.

Several months ago, Ruth Ann and I went to a rally of sorts for a Senatorial candidate. He was talking about the battle for our culture. Several times, he made the statement, “When we fight, we win. When we don’t fight, we have lost already.”

Truth is something worth fighting for, and truth is what we fight with. The first step in winning that fight is to remember that we are in a war. When you were born, you were born into a world at war. We should not live our lives as though we are living in a time of peace because we are not. We are in a war. We have an enemy. He is ruthless. He makes no distinction between soldiers and civilians. He is so dastardly that he even targets women, children, and the innocent. He doesn’t fight fair. He fights to win, and he will use every weapon at his disposal, but his favorite weapon is lies and falsehood because if he can get you to believe his lies, he will take you out. That is why we have to fight his lies with God’s truth.

The first way to live by truth is to remember. Our focus today is vv. 20-21. These verses teach us the second key to living by truth, and that is, we are to **remain**. In my version, the ESV, the first two words of v. 21 are “keep yourselves.”

The word *keep* is a big one in Jude. Here, however, Jude throws a curve ball or a change-up. Elsewhere in Jude, the one who is doing the keeping is God or Jesus. Look at vv. 1, 6, and 24. God is the one who keeps us eternally. Here, however, we are called upon to keep ourselves. It seems as though Jude is contradicting himself. In our relationship with Jesus, who is the one who is to do the keeping—Jesus or us? That is bit of a trick question.

In the NT there is a tension between God’s responsibility and our responsibility. Who is responsible for your salvation? Is it God or is it you? That question has been debated for centuries and centuries. It has been discussed and deliberated throughout the entire history of the Church.

Ultimately, I believe God is responsible. Jesus told the disciples, “You didn’t choose Me; I chose you.” In the NT we read what God has done in regard to our salvation. Election, predestination, regeneration, justification, reconciliation, sanctification, glorification—these are all things that God does in the work of our salvation.

While that is true, we do have a responsibility to trust, to obey, to follow, to serve. God can’t do those things for us, but He does work in us to will and to want. He helps us

to believe, to obey, and to follow, and all of the rest. While we do play a part, albeit a small part in our own salvation, we must not pat ourselves on the back. Paul wrote in Romans 12:3, “I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.” God has assigned, He has given to you the faith that you have.

Now, it is up to you to employ that faith, to grow that faith, and to nurture that faith. Just like a muscle, faith grows and is strengthened when it is used and exercised. Just like flabby muscles, some people have flabby faith because they don’t use the faith they have been given.

In Jude 20-21, there is just one verb, and it is the word *keep*, but there are three participles that tell us how we are to keep, how we are to remain in the love of God. God is the One who is ultimately responsible for keeping us, but there are some things we can and should do to keep ourselves in the fairway of God’s love.

I have been playing golf with my brother since I was 11 years old. In all the rounds of golf we have played together, I have only beaten him, maybe twice. Two or three years ago we played over here at Meadowlake. I thought I had him. We both shot a one over 37 on the front nine. After 16 holes we were still tied. On 18, I got a par, and he got a bogey. I shot a very respectable 75 which is good for me. Had we tied #17, I would have won by 1 stroke. We didn’t tie #17. He got an eagle on that par 4 hole, and I got a bogey. That was a three-stroke swing. He won by two shots.

What makes my brother a better player is that he keeps the ball in play. He keeps the ball in the fairway more often than I do. If he misses the green, he doesn’t miss it by much. That day he beat by two strokes, I had more birdies, and I had less bogeys, but I had two double bogeys, and he zero of those. He keeps the ball in play and keeps from scoring a high number.

The NLT renders the beginning v. 21 with these words, “Live in such a way that God’s love can bless you.” If you are a child of God by having given your life to Jesus, God will never stop loving you, but if you are living in rebellion to His word and will for your life, He can’t bless you as He would like. This passage is telling us to keep our lives in the fairway of God’s love so that He can multiply His blessings in our lives and use us as a blessing in the lives of others.

The three participles in our passage—building, praying, and waiting—show us how to keep ourselves or remain in the fairway of God’s love.

We Remain in the Realm of God’s Blessing by Building

Look again at the first of v. 20. This is the fourth time that Jude refers to his readers as *beloved*. If you are loved by God, you are the beloved.

In one of his many books, the late Brennan Manning told the following story:

Several years ago, Edward Farrell of Detroit took his two-week vacation to Ireland to celebrate his favorite uncle’s eightieth birthday. On the morning of the great day, Ed and his uncle got up before dawn, dressed in silence, and went for a

walk along the shores of Lake Killarney. Just as the sun rose, his uncle turned and stared straight at the rising orb. Ed stood beside him for twenty minutes with not a single word exchanged. Then the elderly uncle began to skip along the shoreline, a radiant smile on his face.

After catching up with him, Ed commented, “Uncle Seamus, you look very happy. Do you want to tell my why?”

“Yes, lad,” the old man said, tears washing down his face. “You see, the Father is fond of me. Ah, me Father is so very fond of me” (*The Wisdom of Tenderness*, pp. 25-26).

That is what it means to be beloved. It means that your heavenly Father is very fond of you.

Because that is so, we need to be about the business of building ourselves up in our most holy faith. To understand this, we must keep in mind that Jude is not addressing his letter to isolated individuals. We often misread Scripture because we have privatized the faith. When we read the Bible, we automatically assume that it is telling me how I am to live the Christian life. No. It is telling us how we are to live the Christian life. Whether you like it or not, we are in this thing together. We are to live the Christian life in community with one another.

We think and say that Jesus died for me. Jesus didn’t die for you. He died for His Church. He rose again for His Church. He is coming back for His Church. Until He comes back, we are to be about the business of building up His Church.

At this point, we return to that tension between what is God’s responsibility and what is our responsibility. Jesus said, “I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). Jesus promised to build His Church, and here in Jude He is telling His Church they are to build themselves up. So, who is to build the Church? Is it Jesus or is it the Church? We are to do what we can, trust Jesus to use us, and expect Him to do what we can’t do for ourselves.

When my daughter was pre-school age, she liked to watch Barney. Do you remember Barney the purple dinosaur? I must admit that I was never a big fan of Barney, but I was a fan of my daughter, so I would watch the show with her. I still remember his theme song:

I love you; you love me
We’re a happy family
With a great big hug
And a kiss from me to you
Won’t you say you love me too?

I love you; you love me
We’re best friends like friends should be
With a great big hug
And a kiss from me to you
Won’t you say you love me too?

That is not a bad theme song for the Church. We are family. We're best friends. When we love one another the way Jesus told us to do, that will be an attractive witness to a watching world.

But we can't stay in preschool. We are to grow in our understanding and practice of God's word. To build the Church doesn't mean necessarily to build it bigger. We are to build it broader and to grow it deeper.

We should have a greater understanding of the Word of God this year than we did last year. We should live out more of God's word next year than we did this year. Are we growing in our attention to and practice of God's word?

Let's look at the second way we are to keep ourselves in the love God.

We Remain in the Realm of God's Blessing by Praying

Look at the latter part of v. 20. One commentator wrote, "All praying that is worthy of the name will be praying that is done 'in the Spirit'—that is, stimulated by, guided by, and infused by the Holy Spirit."

This injunction is in line with what Paul taught in Ephesians 6:18. After calling upon us to put on the armor of God and to take up the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, Paul added, "Praying at all times in the Spirit with all prayer and supplication."

If we are not praying in the Spirit, we are praying in the flesh, and God is under no obligation to answer such praying. Instead of asking ourselves, "What do I want?", we should ask, "What does God want?" As we are sensitive to the leadership and guidance of the Holy Spirit, He will help us to know what God wants. Then, when we pray for what God wants, we can be certain that will be a prayer God answers.

Many years ago, the famed preacher from London, Charles Spurgeon preached from this text in Jude and addressed praying in the Spirit. He said, "The very first essential of prayer is to pray in truth, and we do not pray in truth unless the Spirit of God leads our vain minds into the sincerity and reality of devotion." He described such praying as fervent rather than cold. He added, "I could not, however, finish the description of praying in the Spirit if I did not say that it means praying humbly, for the Holy Spirit never puffs us up with pride."

We will not stray far from the love of God if we let Him mold us into a people who pray and whose prayers are led and directed by His Spirit.

There is a third truth about keeping ourselves in the fairway of God's love.

We Remain in the Realm of God's Blessing by Waiting

Look again at the latter half of v. 21. In v. 17, Jude told us to look backward. We are to remember. Here he tells us to look forward. We have to keep in mind that this life is not all that is or ever will be. Jesus is coming back, and when He comes, He will usher in a new world.

When we think about Jesus' return, we often think that He is coming to judge, and He will, but Jude tells us that when He comes, He will bring mercy. Judgment will come to

those who have rejected Jesus. Mercy will come to those who have received Him.

Oddly, thinking about the end of the world and the start of a new one actually gives us the power and the incentive to change how we are living in the present one. I said before that there are many parallels between Jude and 2 Peter. Both give warnings concerning false teachers, but toward the end of both letters, the author points the attention of his readers to the return of Jesus and what that means for how they live now. Look with me at 2 Peter 3:12-14.

In the previous verse, Peter warned that both the heavens and the earth are going to be replaced with a new heaven and a new earth. He uses the knowledge of that fact to encourage his readers to live lives of godliness and holiness. In these three verses (vv. 12, 13, & 14), Peter uses the word *waiting*. We usually think of waiting as a passive thing. For Peter, waiting is not a matter of sitting on your hands or twiddling your thumbs. Waiting is a matter of actively living for Christ now because you know that He is coming. Waiting means you are looking for His coming, and you are living your life in the knowledge of that life-changing truth.

In your minds, go back to when you were living in your parents' home. Suppose your parents told you they are coming back at 8:00 and they want the house to be clean. Let's also suppose that at 7:00 you are around and notice that the house is a mess. What are you going to do? Are you going to sit down, say to yourself, "Oh, they probably didn't really mean it" or are you going to start cleaning?

Jesus is coming back. If you are living for Him, that is not a reason to be fearful. That is cause for celebration and a motivation to keep living for Him.

Keep yourself in the fairway of God's love.

Friday, I was at the bank and there was a long line. As I waited used my phone to check my Facebook account. I read the following story, and after I read it, I thought to myself, "I'm going to tell that story to close Sunday's message. Here's what I read:

Every once in a while, a ewe will give birth to a lamb and reject it. If the lamb is returned to the ewe, the mother may even kick the poor animal away. Once a ewe rejects one her lambs, she will never change her mind.

These little lambs will hang their heads so low that it looks like something is wrong with their neck. Their spirit is broken. These lambs are called "bummer lambs." Unless the shepherd intervenes, that lamb will die rejected and alone.

Do you know what the shepherd does? He takes that rejected little one into his home, hand-feeds it and keeps it warm by the fire. He will wrap it up with blankets and hold it to his chest so the bummer can hear his heartbeat. Once the lamb is strong enough, the shepherd will place it back in the field with the rest of the flock.

But that sheep never forgets how the shepherd cared for him when his mother rejected him. When the shepherd calls for the flock, guess who runs to him first?

That's right, the bummer sheep. He knows his voice intimately. It is not that the bummer lamb is loved more; it just knows intimately the one who loves it and has experienced that love one-on-one.

So many of us are bummer lambs, rejected and broken. But Jesus is the Good Shepherd. He cares for our every need and holds us close to His heart so we can hear His heartbeat. I am a bummer lamb loved and adopted by the Good Shepherd.

How about you? If you want to be one who lives by truth, remain in the love of your Shepherd.