

The Fire Alarm
Jude 1:1–3
August 16, 2026
Bellevue Baptist Church

This morning, we begin a two part series in one of the short books in the Bible—the book of Jude, which contains just 25 verses.

Let me show you where it shows up in the storyline of Scripture.

Here you can see the entire New Testament, the back of the Bible, which begins with the Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—the four eye witness accounts of Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection. Then you can see the single history book, Acts, which tells us the story of how the church was born and began spreading across the world. Then, there are all these letters—13 written by a person named Paul, then 8 more by various authors. Jude is the last letter before you reach the book of Revelation, the future-oriented book, that finishes the Bible and focuses on the end-times.

So this is where we are—Jude. And what is Jude about? This little book is referred to by some as the fire alarm of the New Testament.

I remember as a kid in elementary school, when we would have a fire drill every year. I liked fire drills because we’d have to miss half of math class to perform this mandated procedure! When the alarm sounded, no one was surprised. The teacher had already given us a heads up. She said, “When you hear the alarm, stand up calmly and walk single file as you exit the building.

It always sounded simple enough, but when that deafening noise began, it still made my heart race and it motivated us to do what we’d been told to do.

This is why Jude is called the Fire Alarm of the New Testament because here we find instructions and warnings about what we must do when false teachers threaten to burn down the belief system of the church. What we believe matters, and Jude had heard that some bad teachers had begun spreading false doctrines and he urged them to respond. Don’t just sit at your desk and pretend you don’t hear the alarm. Respond!

Let me read the first three verses, and then we’ll go from there. .

**Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James:
 To those who are the called, loved by God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ.**

² May mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you.

³ Dear friends, although I was eager to write you about the salvation we share, I found it necessary to write, appealing to you to contend for the faith that was delivered to the saints once for all. Jude 1–3

Now, let me stop right there and draw your attention to important pieces of information, right from the start. Pay attention first to the author, the sender. What does he tell us about himself?

First, he was a servant.

The actual term is bond-servant. In the Greco-Roman world, slavery was widespread. To be a bond servant was to be bound by a Master, or under the control of another. In this case, Jude says that he has become a volunteer in the bond-slave industry, but with one clear distinction. He is a slave unto the Lord. Jesus is his Master.

Who was in control? That question was settled. As a Christian, he no longer woke up each day with the burning question: "Does my life have meaning? or "What purpose do I serve on the planet?" Those questions had clear answers. Jude was here for one reason only—to fulfill his assignment on Earth, before he entered eternity. His job was to do whatever Jesus Christ told him to do.

And that is the essence of what it means to be a Christian. You are not called to live someone else's life. You are not to covet what the Lord has assigned someone else to do. You are to look inside and see the gifts that God has given you, and leverage those gifts for His glory. In Luke 2:49, the twelve year old Jesus is found in the temple, Mary and Joseph worried sick, and what did he say to them? "Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?"

That's the attitude we should all have. We are to put our eyes on the work that the Lord has given us to do, refusing to be distracted by what God has assigned others to do.

Another great story to illustrate this principle comes from the book of John. Jesus is now a grown man, and his top leader Peter is walking with him one day. Peter is told by the Lord that he will die a martyr—that the end of his life will be painful. He will be led away, to a place he does not want to go. He will be tied up and bound, and Jesus doesn't want him to be surprised.

The Lord says, "Peter, when this happens, follow me!" Peter actually takes this news in stride, but then, he notices another disciple John just behind. He essentially says, "Ok, if that's the way I've gotta go, then "it is what it is"—but what about him, in what horrible way will he pass into heaven?"

Jesus responds emphatically, "If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you, Peter? As for you, follow me." Peter was still learning what it means to be a bond-servant.

Jude, a bond-servant of Jesus Christ! (circle it again)

Now, what else do we learn about Jude? He is the brother of James.

Why does this matter? It matters because James was the half-brother of Jesus. Which means Jude also was the half-brother of Jesus. He is being humble here. He is avoiding the appearance that he's bragging about his high position. There's no tooting-of-his-horn in saying, "Hear ye, hear ye, I'm one of the guys that got to grow up with Jesus."

Now why do we say half-brother? Here's why: Jude's biological father was Joseph and his biological mother was Mary. Jesus had a biological mother, Mary, but his male DNA did not come from Joseph. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit. Hence, the half brother language.

What's important to know is that Jesus' siblings did not start out as servants of Jesus. They were skeptics. In the Gospels, we are told about certain moments when Jesus was teaching with authority, and the people gathering round him grew. He was a magnetic preacher, but his own family members were no-shows. Mark 3:20 says:

Jesus entered a house, and the crowd gathered again so that they were not even able to eat. ²¹When his family heard this, they set out to restrain him, because they said, "He's out of his mind." Mark 3:20-21

Jude was one of those brothers, who was a skeptic for a season, before finally putting his faith in Jesus.

So that's a little information about the author, the person sending. Now, what can we learn about those receiving?

Look with me at the end of v.1.

To those who are the called, loved, by God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ.

The recipients of this letter were called, loved, and kept.

Let's explore each of these words: the called. What does it mean? It means that God initiated the relationship. Christianity did not begin when you found God. It began when God came looking for you. Salvation is not something we can pat ourselves on the back for—it is not something that should give us a feeling of achievement, as if we have the upper-hand on others. Salvation should be a deeply humbling thing, to think that of all the people in the world, God has revealed Himself to you in an undeserved way.

Think about the typical family tree. If your family tree were likened to a real tree, I'll bet you it looks like this. From a spiritual perspective, here's how most family trees appear. Jesus said "narrow is the gate that leads to life and few find it." Most human beings are not interested in giving their lives to Jesus Christ.

Most of the branches in most family trees bear little to no fruit. They are barren. But every now and then, a green branch appears. There is no good reason why that one, and not the one next to it. Salvation blows wherever it pleases, Jesus said.

Why did you receive the Gospel? Why were you in a place where your heart was tender to God, at the moment the message reached you? Why did you grow up in a free country where the Gospel of Jesus could be freely shared? Why are you part of the called, while others are not?

The Apostle Paul looked at his family tree, at all the Jewish people in his bloodline, and he lamented that most of them were lost and headed to an eternity apart from God. He said,

I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the benefit of my brothers and sisters, my own flesh and blood. Romans 9:2-3

Why does he say this? Because he knew his salvation was a result of a collision with Christ—one that he did not initiate. The Lord Jesus had reached in and given him a new heart, like the prophet Ezekiel had prophesied. Ezekiel saw the day when the Lord would remove the heart made of stone and replace it with a heart made of flesh—a soft heart that wanted to love and obey God. That heart transplant was a spiritual miracle. Paul knew it, and he wanted all of his family members, and his Jewish friends to hear the call of the Savior.

Jude wants to remind these people that their lives were changed by the love of God the father for sinners. Notice that second phrase. Loved by God the Father. It's easy to skip right over those five words, missing their monumental meaning. What is the reason that we have hope as Christians today? The answer is so clear: God's relentless tenderness toward sinners.

Is there a scene in Scripture more tender than the moment Jesus intervened on behalf of the adulterous woman? There she was surrounded by all the judges, the men who acted like they had a perfect report card in heaven. Jesus steps in and says, "Let he has no sin cast the first stone." He reaches down and pulls this woman up. He rescues her from the self-righteous accusers, but then calls her to a higher standard of holiness.

Go and sin no more. God has shown his mercy to you, now show your allegiance to him. Live the God-focused life.

Those people that Jude wrote to—he didn't want them to forget that they were loved by God the Father.

They had been called. They were deeply loved. And finally, they were kept. Notice the word kept. In John 10:27, Jesus says:

My sheep hear my voice, I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. John 10:27

Here we have the clear teaching of eternal security. Can a person lose their salvation? Not if they had it to begin with. Once a person is born again, they cannot be unborn. Romans 8 says that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. Once a person is in the grip of God, no man, no demon, no devil can ever snatch him from his hand.

Why? Because God supplies the power for us to continue. The way you can know if someone is truly born again is simple—did they reach the very end, with their faith in Jesus in hand? Or did they drop Jesus off when the going got tough, when his teachings were too narrow, when obedience came at too high a price?

Jude reminds his readers of these three things before leaving verse 1. You are called, you are loved, you are kept. All three words bring comfort to us today.

So, now we know the sender, and we know the recipients. How about the purpose? Why is he writing? The answer comes in verse 3:

³ Dear friends, although I was eager to write you about the salvation we share, I found it necessary to write, appealing to you to contend for the faith that was delivered to the saints once for all.

Notice how he says, “I sat down intending to write one kind of letter, but ended up going in a different direction. The topic I wanted to tackle was the salvation we share. That would have been the kind of letter that put smiles on faces.

This is like the good-hearted dad who decides to swing by the bakery on the way home from work. He has purchased a batch of their favorite cookies, something that will make them happy. But when he walks in the front door, his wife wears a scowl, and the kids have been sent to their rooms. It’s an icy atmosphere, and he knows—those cookies are going to his coworkers the next day.

That’s the way Jude makes it sound. He wanted to write something that would make them smile, but the Spirit led him to write something more stern. He says: contend for the faith that was delivered to the saints once for all.

That word “contend” is an athletic term. It’s like telling a boxer: raise up your gloves and fight! Don’t just stand there and take punches. Give it back to him.

But how does this match what Jesus said in another place—to “turn the other cheek?”

When Jesus told us to turn the other cheek, He was talking about personal offenses. He was saying: Don’t seek revenge. Don’t return insult for insult. Don’t make it your mission to settle every score.

But when the truth of God is under attack, when the church is drifting away from Christ, when false teaching is leading people astray, another approach is warranted.

Somebody has to sound the alarm, to stand up and say, “That is not what God has said.”

The early church constantly faced this challenge. Everywhere the gospel went, false teachers followed. One of the most dangerous false teachings in Jude’s day was the idea that God’s grace gave people permission to live however they pleased. The logic went something like this: If Jesus has already forgiven my sins, then why worry about holiness? If grace is free, then obedience doesn’t really matter. If God loves me no matter what, then I can indulge whatever desires I want. In other words, they turned grace into a license for sin.

Without resistance, this message could have ruined the growth of the early church, because whenever grace becomes an excuse for disobedience, the gospel itself is being distorted. And here we find the reason this letter still matters today. The names of the false teachers have changed, but the temptation hasn’t. Our culture still wants a Savior without a Lord. Forgiveness without repentance. Grace without holiness.

And Jude says, "Fight for the faith. Protect the truth. Hold on to what was delivered once for all."

And notice how Jude ends this sentence: "...the faith that was delivered to the saints once for all."

This is one of the most important phrases in the entire letter. Jude is reminding us that the faith has already been delivered. It has already been handed down. It is complete. It does not need to be reinvented, revised, or updated. The gospel doesn't require a software update every few years. God isn't in heaven releasing new versions of Christianity. Version 1.0 was sufficient.

The faith we follow today is the same faith that was preached by the apostles, embraced by the early church, defended by the martyrs, proclaimed during the Reformation, and passed down from generation to generation until it reached us. The methods of ministry change. They should.

Think about all the ways that Bellevue today is different than Bellevue 50 years ago, back in 1976.

Back then, church newsletters and bulletins were pecked out with a typewriter. I was born in 1976, so I remember taking typing class in high school and learning how to insert a page into the machine. And how to use White-Out. Man, that stuff sold back then!

In 1976, the church had a thriving cassette tape ministry. Raise your hand if you have never popped a cassette into your radio? Fancy people had zip-up cases that held all their tapes. We don't do this today.

Back in 1976, we put giant bows on the boys who sang in the kids choir. I don't know about your sons, but I don't think mine would be particularly fond of sporting these enormous bows as they walk onto the stage to sing. Thank you Ian Alexander for being the poster boy today.

The methods have changed! The message has not. Jesus Christ is still the Son of God. He still died for sinners. He still rose from the dead. The church does not have the authority to rewrite the faith. Our assignment is to receive it, cherish it, defend it, and pass it on intact to the next generation. This is why Jude sounds the alarm: if something has been entrusted to us by God Himself, then it is worth protecting.

Now, with my time remaining, let me raise some questions that rise from this text:

Excellent Questions

How can I contend for the faith without becoming argumentative or harsh?

That's an important question because the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5 does not include contentiousness. It is not a virtue to be known as grumpy, defensive, combative, or constantly looking for a fight. Some Christians seem to believe that if they are offending people, they must be doing something right. But that's not always true. Sometimes people are offended by the truth, and we should be prepared to live with that, but other times they're offended by our tone.

I think the Apostle Paul gives us a wonderful example of how to be winsome, while also being bold, in Acts 17, as he reasons with the philosophers of his day at the Areopagus—a place of high learning and intellectual debate.

Acts 17:22...

Paul stood in the middle of the Areopagus and said, 'People of Athens! I see that you are extremely religious in every respect. For as I was passing through and observing the objects of your worship, I even found an altar on which was inscribed: To an Unknown God. Therefore, what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you... Acts 17:22-24

Obviously, Paul goes on to say more, but for the sake of time let me stop here and make a few notes. There are several things Paul does that help us contend for the faith without becoming harsh.

First, he was a student of the culture. *"For as I was passing through and observing..."*

Paul took time to understand the people he was speaking to. He knew the Scriptures, but he also understood the society and its long-held beliefs, its idols. There's an old saying, "seek to understand before you seek to be understood." Paul models that humility here. Later in the message he even quotes one of their favorite poets, which shows that he read their authors so he could speak their language. He had taken the time to understand the people he hoped to reach.

If we want to contend for the faith, we should know the Christian worldview well, but we should also understand the world our neighbors live in.

Second, he searched for common ground. *"People of Athens! I see that you are extremely religious in every respect."*

Notice what Paul does not say. He doesn't begin with, "You pagan idol worshipers!" Instead, he starts with something that they have in common. He says: *I see that you are extremely religious in every respect."*

I see that you subscribe to a higher power. Me too. In fact, I saw your altar out there that said: *"To an Unknown God."* Paul essentially says, "You people are a lot like me!. Wow. We are all theists—we have this in common, the idea that the world was made by supernatural powers. Great evangelists are often great listeners. They look for ways to bond with the people they are trying to reach.

Third, he was bold. *"Therefore, what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you."*

Notice he is not afraid to proclaim—I proclaim the answer to you! I have good news! Paul now presents evidence.

Later on in the chapter, in v.31, Paul says: *"God has provided proof of His power by raising Jesus from the dead."* Acts 17:31

Paul doesn't spend the entire conversation discussing philosophy. Eventually he gets to Christ. Eventually he speaks about sin. Eventually he speaks about judgment. Eventually he speaks about the resurrection. He lovingly but clearly tells them the truth. That's the balance we need.

Paul models a commitment to truth without disrespect toward those who disagree. He was firm in his convictions and gracious in his approach.

And in my view, this is still the most effective way to contend for the faith today.

- **Why should I trust Christianity's claims over other religions that also say they possess truth?**

That's a thoughtful question, and it's one every honest person should wrestle with.

If you look at a map of the world's major religions, you'll quickly notice a pattern. Most people tend to adopt the dominant religion of the place where they were born. If you're born near the birthplace of the prophet Mohammed, you probably subscribe to Islam. If you were born in India, you probably follow Hinduism. In you were born in another portion of South Asia, you likely follow Buddhist beliefs. The pressure to conform to your culture, to your family's tradition is real.

Which means Christians, if we are objective, we must wrestle with the reasonable question: am I a Christian only because I was born into a Christian territory? Do I believe Christianity simply because I grew up in a place where people believe the Bible?

The answer here seems obvious. You should not believe Christianity merely because your parents believed it. You should not believe Christianity because your grandparents believed it. You should not believe Christianity because you were raised in church. You should believe in Christianity because you've examined it for yourself, because you've read its claims, because you've compared its explanation of reality with the alternatives. You should believe in Christianity because you've studied it and it rings the bell of truth.

As the great preacher Charles Spurgeon famously said:

The truth is like a lion. You don't have to defend it. Let it loose; it will defend itself.
–Charles Spurgeon

I've always loved that image.

When something is true, the burden of proof is on its side. An encouraging truth for Christianity, something that separates Christianity from the other major world religions is what you see here? Notice **how Christianity has moved across cultures, over time.**

All of the major world religions have spread beyond their places of origin, yes, but notice where their greatest concentrations remain. Hinduism is still overwhelmingly centered around India. Buddhism remains predominantly Asian. Islam is truly global, but its greatest concentrations still stretch across North Africa, the Middle East, and large portions of Asia.

Now look at Christianity. Its center of gravity keeps moving. It began in the Middle East. It moved into Europe. Centuries later, it jumped the ocean and spread across North America. And today, Christianity's center of gravity has shifted dramatically beyond the US. Now the wild fire is growing in Africa, in Latin America and in parts of Asia.

Why does Christianity keep moving? Because Christianity is not ultimately tied to a region, a race, or a culture. It seems to flourish wherever people become hungry for grace. Jesus said, *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs."* The gospel takes the deepest root among people who know they need what they cannot provide for themselves.

Christianity doesn't stay where it was born. It goes where it is wanted.

And sometimes that means that as one culture becomes prosperous, comfortable, and self-sufficient, the fire grows dim there, and the Holy Spirit winds blow toward those on Earth who are humble.

The Gospel message is well-received in regions of the world where people are not too proud to take God's handout. As one author puts it:

Christianity...

It is for the wobbly and weak-kneed, who know they don't have it all together.

It is for the inconsistent and unsteady, whose cheese is falling off their cracker.

It is for poor, weak, sinful men and women, with hereditary faults and limited talents.

It is for the bent and bruised, who feel that their lives are a grave disappointment to God.

If Christianity were a kind of bait—if it could be put on a hook, and thrown in the water, we know what kind of fish will bite. The broken kind.

Failure, and loss, the death of a dream, or a sense of desperation—these things lead us to the heart of God. No one gets to heaven, on a winning streak.