

In 2019, a movie was released called “Yesterday.” I don’t think I’ll spoil it for you in the next few minutes, but it’s also like 5 years old now, so if you haven’t seen it and I *do* spoil it...well, I think that’s kind of on you. 😊 It’s a romantic comedy about a guy named Jack, who is a struggling guitarist/singer and songwriter. He gets in a bad accident, wakes up in the hospital a while later, and comes to realize that he seems to be the only person who knows or remembers the music of the Beatles. It’s like they’ve been erased from history, except in his mind.

So, he starts performing and recording the songs of the Beatles. In one scene, Jack is recording the Beatles’ song, “Hey Jude.” And the recording studio folks have some advice for him on the song. So, watch this short clip from “**Yesterday.**” Clip can be viewed here if you’re reading online and care to watch: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4PGdBc4h_sM

I love that scene. I love that movie, though like any PG-13 movie it’s got some language that probably most of us Jesus followers have evicted from our vocabulary, so there’s my warning...but it’s a pretty great movie with an absolutely blistering rendition of “Help!” And the movie will probably make you tear up some if you’re prone to that like I am. So now you’re fully warned. Now, you might wonder, what does that have to do with the Bible and today’s passage? Here’s the connection: **“Hey Dude” is just a slightly changed “Hey Jude,” which is a song of encouragement in the face of trouble and challenge...which is what the letter of Jude is about as well.** The song was written by Paul McCartney for John Lennon’s son, Julian, when John and his wife Cynthia got divorced; Paul didn’t want Julian to be scarred by that event and afraid of venturing into his own love relationships. In fact, the original lyric was “Hey Jules” (short for Julian) but it got changed to Jude.

I’ve always thought a sermon based on the book of Jude would be fun to connect to this song. But then I remembered the “Yesterday” Hey Dude scene when planning this sermon last summer, and I just couldn’t help myself

to go with the “dude” language from the movie for today’s sermon title. I think my sermon planning last summer was the week before or the week after Vacation Bible School, when I was “Pastor Gamer Dude,” which is a variation on the theme I do every year of “pastor *such and such* dude,” because the only type of character I can reliably imitate is a stereotypical surfer persona. So, anyway, it all kind of coalesced to end up with a sermon title today of “Hey Dude, Don’t Let Me Down.”

And whether you’re a totally bodacious dude or a dude-ette: **We all need people around us who will “be there” and encourage us in the face of challenge and difficulty.** Just like the song, that’s what the letter of Jude does. Jude writes his letter to encourage a church. Now, the name “Jude” is a shortened version of Judas, and it’s the name “Judas” that is actually used in verse 1 of the letter. The most famous Judas of the New Testament is Judas Iscariot, who killed himself shortly after betraying Jesus. So, he’s not the author. There are five other people named Judas who are mentioned in the New Testament. The one who fits the author’s profile here is one who the gospels of Luke and John tell us was a disciple of Jesus and was the brother of the disciple James. So, Jude, the letter writer here, could very well be *that* Judas. It’s hard to say for sure: Judas was a very common name in Jewish culture, since it’s just a slight derivative of Judah, which was the name of the southern Kingdom of Israel. So, it’s a rich Hebrew name, and the point is: who this Jude is, is a matter of some speculation.

But, with that brief intro and background, let’s dive **into the first sixteen verses** of the book of Dude. I mean, Jude. Sorry about that! 😊

So, we’re going to dive into things in verse 3. This verse, with some support from the first couple verses as well, is crucial for understanding the rest of the letter. **The reason verse 3 is so important is that the rest of the letter is challenging on several levels and doesn’t *sound* encouraging as I’ve said this letter is intended to be, *unless* we remember verse three throughout it.** In fact, if you’ve got a Bible with subheadings that have been added by the publishing company – which other than the chapter and verse numbers, those subheadings are probably the next most helpful thing to finding our way around the Bible – but if you’ve got one of those subheadings before verse 4

it probably says something like “The Sin and Doom of Ungodly People.” That doesn’t sound encouraging at all, does it? It sounds like something a lot of people would rather not read, in fact. But it all flows out of verse 3.

So, verse 3 states his purpose for writing, and what he tells them is that he felt compelled to write and urge them “to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God’s holy people” (Jude 1:3). The people to whom he writes are some of those “holy people” who have been entrusted with this faith, and are to “contend” for it.

Last Sunday, as you know, two teams “contended” for the title of Super Bowl champion. They went out on the field and battled. Each team knew when they stepped on the field it was going to be a battle. And it was a battle – even went into overtime, as you probably know. **It’s the same in our journey of faith as we follow Jesus: we *have* to contend for our faith.** There’s nothing easy about it. If you think following Jesus is going to be easy, then you probably won’t make it very long as a Jesus follower.

And the contention is two-fold: there’s a contention with external stuff: stuff that’s outside of ourselves. So, this would be worldly influences that seek to tempt us and draw us away from Jesus. And then there’s internal stuff: our own internal struggles and weaknesses and things that we are susceptible to. Frequently the external and the internal go hand-in-hand. So, as disciples of Jesus, we each have to contend for our faith, to stay on the straight and narrow path of following Jesus. It’s not easy.

That gets us to verse 4 where he identifies the problem that he’s heard they have, and the problem is one that has become an internal problem, in the church. There are people among them in their church body who “pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord” (verse 4). And then, starting with verse 5 and going on for the next several verses all the way to verse 19, Jude goes back and forth between examples of battles of old they’re familiar with, and the battles they’re currently experiencing.

So, for instance, in verses 5-7 he lists several examples from the Old Testament of people who sought to “pervert the grace of God into a license for immorality” – whether it’s a lack of belief by the Israelites even after God had delivered them from the hands of the Egyptians, or angels who were rebellious and didn’t keep in their positions God had granted them, or the sexual perversion and immorality of Sodom and Gomorrah. These are things they were already familiar with, where people tried to twist God’s grace (and truth) into something it wasn’t intended to be. So: With that backdrop, he brings it back to their current situation in verse 8 when he writes, **“In the very same way, these people pollute their own bodies, reject authority, and heap abuse on celestial beings” (Jude 1:8).**

Then verse 9 refers to a story from history about Moses. It’s actually not in the Old Testament but apparently something with which they were familiar, and then verse 10 comes back to their current situation. Then verse 11 is back to the Old Testament, with three examples of bad behavior – Cain, Balaam, and Korah. We may not all know off the top of our head who each of these people are or why Jude lists them here, but Cain is in Genesis 4, and Balaam and Korah are in the book of Numbers. Suffice it to say, they are not positive examples for us of faith.

Then verses 12 and 13 then return back to the current situation. It’s like a tennis match back and forth between history and the present day as he writes. These people who have infiltrated their church are blemishes at their “love feasts” ...which is an odd-sounding phrase to us, like it belongs in the free-love hippie movement of the 60’s or something...But it’s the plural noun form of the word “agape” which, as we discussed a Sunday or two ago, is this word for “love” that Biblical writers essentially invented to convey the kind of love that we are to have for one another. The other Greek words for love weren’t right. Agape is a selfless, sacrificial love, that sets aside our needs and rights and personal priorities for the love and benefit our neighbors, especially for the purpose of them knowing Jesus. So, when they get together as a church, these people aren’t selfless as agape is; they’re the opposite – they’re selfish, boastful, and a whole lot more that is not in alignment with agape love. And so, these people who have infiltrated their ranks are bringing

these gatherings down. They're twisting them into something that isn't honoring of God or each other.

For sure this letter of Jude raises some questions – there are some obscure references, like the mention of Moses that's not in the Old Testament; there are things mentioned such as the angels and the contention with the devil of the archangel Michael, and so forth that make us wonder just what this book is about and what is Jude referring to. But when you remember that he writes to encourage the readers to “contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted God's holy people,” we realize then that: **Jude is helping them (and now us) to see three things about this “contending for the faith.”**

1. This contention for the faith is an old one. The battle by God's people against both internal and external threats and temptations is not a new one. It didn't start with their situation. And it's the same with us. When we're battling something that's seeking to derail our faith, or if we had stuff going on in our church that was unbiblical and divisive (which I'm not aware of any specific things like that here at Rose Hill), it helps to gain some perspective to realize this is not new. This is not just us getting picked on. It's not just your faith or your relationships where the struggles exist. They've gone on for centuries and centuries.

2. Although this contention involves real people who have slipped into their church, the contending really is a spiritual contention. It's not about the people themselves. This is important to remember because unlike a football game where the goal is to beat the people on the other team, the goal for us in our contending for the faith is not to beat the people but to beat the spiritual forces. We actually want to lead people toward Jesus, not beat them up with Jesus. So, there's a spiritual battle going on, and we see that laced throughout this letter of Jude. And by the way, in case any of us think Jude is just kind of an odd duck in regards to this, this isn't just Jude who teaches this. Paul writes about this frequently. And Jesus frequently speaks about the spiritual nature battles of his ministry and that his disciples will have.

So: people aren't the problem. It's stuff in the spiritual realm that we're battling; that's where the problems are. The good news is that the spiritual

realm is *also* where the solution is: God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So, the contention for our faith is a spiritual one.

That brings us to our third and most foundational element to contending for the faith: **3. In order to contend for the faith: our identity and our unity must be rooted in Jesus.** Given the spiritual nature of the battle from point #2, this should come as no surprise. But these people who have infiltrated their church deny Jesus as Lord, according to verse 4. That right there is the root problem in their church – these folks haven’t found their true identity in Jesus. This doesn’t mean non-believers aren’t invited to come hear about Jesus – absolutely they are. But the people who are teaching and shaping and influencing the church need to be disciples of Jesus who genuinely desire to have Jesus as Lord of their lives.

So, do we really desire Jesus to be Lord, or is he Lord in name only? Christianity with Jesus as “sort of lord” or “almost lord” will never contend well for the faith. When Jesus is Lord, when our identity is found in him, everything else in our lives and in our church is submitted to him. All of the other identities we might have...all the labels we might apply to ourselves come *after* our identity in Jesus. At least they should. When they don’t, we have problems. Some of *my* labels and identities (and you might resonate with some of these) are: husband, father, son, brother, friend, pastor, athlete, musician, and onion-hater 😊. Most of us in the room have a shared label and identity of “American”, and on this President’s Day weekend it’s good to remember that that one is beneath Jesus as well. As Jesus followers our first pledge of allegiance is not to the flag, but to Jesus. Our identity as “American” is below our identity as “Jesus-follower.” Nothing against our country, of course. I’m grateful for our freedoms as I’m sure all of you are as well. But that doesn’t change that our identity is first found in Jesus.

So, as Jesus-followers, we’re in this together, and we are now some of the holy people entrusted with contending for the message of Jesus. We’re counting on each other in our journey of discipleship to Jesus. I need you, you need me, we need each other to help keep us on the straight and narrow path of following Jesus. We have to encourage one another in this contention, including to make sure we contend against the spiritual forces of evil, and not

against flesh and blood. We need that encouragement. With Paul McCartney, we could each sing, “Hey Jude...” or “Hey John, Hey Jeff, Hey Barb, Hey Linda...” Or in the language of the movie, Yesterday: “Hey dude, don’t let me down.” Let’s not let each other down. We each have a part to play, a talent to contribute, a time to give, a word of encouragement and correction ...something that will help us contend for the faith in the spiritual realm to lead one another, and others, toward Jesus. Because here at Rose Hill, and hopefully in each of our lives, Jesus is Lord, and we want to be all about Him. Let’s pray...Amen.