

## **CPC, Sunday, 3rd March, 2019 - Raphael Donkor Jr.**

Our Senior Pastor has been walking us through the attributes of OUR PRECIOUS FAITH in the second epistle of St. Peter. I shall be taking the same trajectory of FAITH but only slightly from an ASSERTIVE posture from another Epistle, that of the Apostle Jude.

### **CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH:**

Have you ever felt spiritually constrained that something was wrong but couldn't put your finger to it? I have and you probably have too especially in our age. And yet, it is one thing to know that something is wrong and another to know what it is that is wrong.

The words to which I shall like to call your attention this morning are to be found in the epistle of Jude. Kindly please turn with me to the epistle of Jude. It is a less travelled book right before the book of Revelation so let's give ourselves a bit of time to find it. I should also say there are several deeper themes within this letter that needs more careful background study and that we shall deal with another time. Let us hear God's Word.

#### **Text: Jude 1:1-4 (NIV)**

1 Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James,

To those who have been called, who are loved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ:

2 Mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance.

3 Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people. 4 For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.

#### **Prayer:**

Spirit of the living God, we trust that you inspired the Apostle Jude to pen down these words. May it come alive to us this day in a fresh and living way. Amen.

## **The Problem:**

All over the world challenges to the faith are on the rise, and persecution of the faith is growing. We live in an hour requiring us to “contend for the faith.”

The theme of Jude’s letter comes out from the verse three. Earnestly contend for the faith. But who is this Jude? And why does he warn us sternly and urgently to action?

First, Jude quickly establishes his identity as the brother of James and the half-brother of Jesus because haven experienced salvation hitherto, he is moved by the fact that his Christian friends were threatened by a dangerous heresy that had potential to emasculate their faith in Jesus. This call to contend is rooted in Jude’s conviction that the faith which once was delivered is being challenged by pests and opponents.

Second, Jude establishes his identity because in order to contend for the faith we need to be secured about our identity in the one we believe. Jude realises that our identity is linked by faith in a true story. The story of our only sovereign Lord and master Jesus Christ. A story that his hearers then and even now (you and I from diverse cultures share.

I once read from Timothy Tennent that “For the Christian the work of Christ on the cross is the most fundamental place where our identity is formed. In Adam, we became identified with guilt, fear and shame. In Christ, we are now identified with forgiveness, confidence, and honor” Timothy Tennent. p.92.

## **Our contemporary cultural context:**

Our present culture is desperately faced with many issues of identity. Jude recognises the problem not so much as due to their doing but rather as an issue of faith. A faith that grounds their confidence in who they have become identified with in Christ.

Next Jude says: “to them that are called, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ: Mercy unto you and peace and love be multiplied”

Indeed, Jude further recognises that the days are thinning out on mercy, peace and love because faith is quickly diminishing. So notice Jude invokes first of all God’s mercy over indifference...Oh how we need his mercy today? He also invokes God’s peace over injustice, and last of all he also invokes God’s love over our infidelity.

For today we live in world where it seems we can’t love anymore. We seem to have lost our compassion for our neighbours.

Certainly, Jude does not want God’s mercy, peace and love to diminish in the lives of his

friends. Having established this, He continues;

Beloved, while I was giving all diligence to write unto you of our common salvation, I was constrained to write unto you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints.

For Jude, the injustice, indifference, distress and unease is a faith issue. Everything else is subordinate to it. No doubt we are reminded by the apostle Paul that the chief end of the gospel is to bring about the obedience of faith! (Romans 1:5, 16:26)

### **The Meaning of CONTEND?**

But what does the word CONTEND MEAN? Why is Jude so deeply compelled to alert his friends about their faith?

The word contend in the Greek ἐπαγωνίζεσθαι (epagonizomai), is an athletic metaphor, which means to be spiritually fit. It is also used in Phil 1:27 and Phil 4:3 for men and women in the church who were spiritual athletes, in the cause of the gospel. But even more pressing this verb is most often attributed to things worthy of full effort. The effort expended in a noble cause. In other words, this verb calls us into a very real fight requiring all of one's available energy.

Contend also

... carries the idea of an athlete who in their effort to win find themselves intensely struggling, competing, even fighting with all their might. Is that not our experience today? Do we not feel constrained, uneasy and distressed?

In 2 Corinthians 4:8-10, Paul says,

“We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; 10 always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.”

You would agree with me that...

The church exists today as “resident aliens”, in an adventurous colony in a society of unbelief” - to borrow Stanley Hauerwas word. In our day, unbelief is the socially acceptable way of living in the West. It no longer takes courage to disbelieve.

Even believers often feel like they are losing faith... faith in our age appears to be decay-

ing or cooling. Recent statistics shows that 80% of Americans claim to believe in God but do not obey the Word. Or better Darrel Johnson will say “many believed in the biblical worldview but in practice lived the modern worldview.” It is fine if you worship Jesus in private, they would say just don’t do it in public. Clearly, there are forces in our age that encourages us to take guidance for ethics from the way things are, instead of from the way things ought to be.

### **Earnestly contend for the faith!**

#### **What Prevents us?**

Even more strikingly,

The words of Jesus in the parable of the struggling & persistent widow ...illustrates the burden of this text even more: the unjust judge in Luke 18:1-8 finally granted justice to this untiring widow who put all her energy into a worthy plight for justice. Notice what Jesus says; ...when the son of man comes, will he find faith on the earth? (v8). Many times, we do not persist, enough don’t we?

But what is Jude getting at? Jude is saying;

There is a contest on our faith...do you see it? Jude is saying do not succumb like others have done by denying the Lord. Maintain your faith he says because in Christ we have the upper hand.

Interestingly, although, we are contending in the midst of those who deny the Lord, Jesus assures us in the parable of the wheat and the tare, in Matt 13:30, that;

“Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.”

### **Earnestly contend for the faith!**

Indeed, from the ancient prophets down to Jesus...most of them had to pay for their faith with their lives and quite, Apart from the numerous examples of biblical Martyrs like Paul and Stephen, In the history of the church, Oscar Romero, the Archbishop of El Salvador, who stood against communism and matters of justice in Latin America was assassinated.

In china, it is not unusual for communist to infiltrate a house church and turn all its members over to the authorities.

Vietnamese Cardinal Francis Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan (imprisoned for 13yrs, beatified recently).

These stories of witness and courage in the face of persecution tells us that there is HOPE!

Why? Because,

In the book of revelation, when Jesus opened the fifth of the seven seals John records “I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. Rev 6:9.

For this reason, Jude says,

we must contend “for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints”

Like you and I, the original readers of Jude’s epistle were admonished to take God’s truth personally...and here Jude is reminding us to do the same in our age.

For Jesus said in Mark 13:37: what I say to you I say to ALL! Jesus is saying the same to us even now...this very hour and moment.

This faith which once handed down in an unbroken chain to us must be guarded. But how must we guard and contend for this invaluable faith?

Here again Jude tells us but first he.... Carefully selects three historical events as illustration. The events of Israel’s deliverance from Egypt, Sodom and Gomorrah in verse 5-10 to help us understand that challenges to the faith have always been present and that God has always met them with divine judgement.

In the Old Testament v11-16 three people (Cain, Balaam, Korah) challenged the faith and brought judgement to themselves.

God is calling us live Abraham in a world like Sodom. Jude’s urgent appeal to “contend for the faith’ should quicken our minds for action as well. Today, Communism has fallen...

**Earnestly contend for the faith.**

We are quickly losing the cultural war because we are not obeying the word of God. For every text calls for new step of trusting God by doing what God tells us to do. Darkness seem to be conquering the light because the church has forgotten the message of obedience. We are the voice of righteousness, the light of the world, its salt, the city set on a hill. Sometimes we are afraid to speak because we want to be politically correct...BUT,

Jesus is saying to us “contend because I will protect you, I will keep you DO NOT deny me”

Indeed, In the early church, with martyrdom at hand...people were fearful and were wondering if God will protect them...

Are you wondering if God will protect you in the hour of death? The good news is...Jesus says he will because Jude shows us that He did that for Moses as well as for Enoch by bringing them into the reality of the resurrection. (v.9,14)

Jude is painting and pointing out Good News beyond ourselves. The good news is that believe tramps unbelief any day and for this reason, God has made it possible for us to persevere adventurously in an age of serial perversion.

Jude challenges the cultural assumptions of his day and shows with marvelous precision the opportunity that awaits all who care to stand for the faith. How do we know?

We know because he says in verse 20,

“But YOU dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit”

Eugene Peterson of blessed memory said “Christian faith needs constant maintenance” Maintain your faith, contend for it, do not lose it. at all times, examine yourself to see if you are in the faith. 2 Cor 13:5.

### **So how then do we contend?**

I have four mnemonics to helps us:

Application:

Jude tells us HOW we in our day MUST contend by...

First, CONDUCT (Jude 22)

“BE (emphasis mine) merciful to those who doubt.” We must have a welcoming conduct to those who doubt the faith. Indeed, in Phil 1:27 Paul in prison says, ‘whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel’

Second by our COMPASSION (Jude 22)

Be MERCIFUL (emphasis mine) to those who doubt.

Remember, Jesus words. (Matt 5:7) Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy.

And

Third by our CONSERVATION (Jude 23)

And by conservation, I mean saving others at any cost for it is a noble and worthy cause!

“Save others by snatching them from the fire; to others show mercy, mixed with fear.”

And last of all by CUSHIONING (Jude 21)

And here I mean, keeping ourselves in God’s love. Jude uses the word kept five (x5). In verses 1, 6 (twice), 13, and 21.

“Keep yourself in God’s love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.”

### **Earnestly Contend for the faith!**

Undoubtedly, Jude’s rationale is squared on the conviction that we live in an age that demands contending for the faith. Jude is saying the issue is a FAITH issue. Keep the faith!

### **Conclusion:**

In conclusion, I bet someone would say, “I can’t live like this!” Yes, You can’t live like this. But there is one who did! And through faith in Him you can begin to live like this too.

It is my conviction that an unbelieving world can make a saint out of almost anybody who dares to contend. For Christ’s love and peace are greater than persecution. They are even greater than DEATH!

## **Earnestly Contend for the faith!**

Let us pray...

Mighty God let your grace rest upon these words and may it continue to echo in our hearts.

Amen