

The Fight for Faith

For those of you who grew up on Bible stories, you no doubt have a favorite or two? Its usually a story that you not only love to hear over and over, but you no doubt pretended at times when you were a kid that you were there taking in and experiencing all the action. (Yes for me it was always an action story.)

The one story that always hits the top ten would have to be the story in Judges, when Gideon rallies an army of 300 men out 32,000 who had enlisted.

You can read about it in Judges, but briefly here it is, God tells Gideon that He wants him to get together an army and go up against the Midianites who were about 135,000 strong. Gideon did as he was asked and found 32,000 men willing to fight even against such horrific odds. When Gideon goes to God that evening to find out His strategy for such a small army, God promptly tells him that he has too many men.

I love that Story; I mean it makes me laugh every time I even tell it. Can you just see the look on Gideon's face, or the look on the reaction from the soldiers, when Gideon tells them that they can go home if they have family or farming matters to attend to?

But after all the whittling down, when God was finally satisfied, only 300 men remained. And now Gideon could take them into battle. That morning when Gideon said his prayers, he was probably thinking, "God I hope you know what you're doing".

But in the story, Gideon never wavered he just kept doing what God asked him to do even when It sounded somewhat unorthodox in the ways of battle. And there he is one of the hero's of faith mentioned in Hebrews 11.

But our attention this morning is directed at the little Book of Jude, not Gideon and not Hebrews. So why do I bring it up?

The reason I bring this up is because, this story along with many other stories like it were very familiar to the Jews and early Christians. Even in their day, battle cries were not uncommon; they knew the seriousness of defending the wall, or holding a line. And that is where we begin with Jude.

This is not the letter that Jude wanted to write, he wanted it to be a warm hearted, celebration letter. Congratulating everyone in their Christian walk, and affirming their salvation in Christ, but apparently the warnings of Peter and Paul were not sinking in. Because even after the harsh discourse of Peter, which Jude recites almost verbatim, we come to realize that the false teachers and prophets are just as prevalent. So Jude calls for all those called by God to step up to contend for the faith.

Listen what he says in Vs. 3 and 4.

³Dear 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. ⁴For certain men whose

condemnation was written about^[b] long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.

In the Message Bible, it's translated "I urge you to fight with everything you've got"

Jude's making a battle cry, but it's different in what all of us would expect. Different in 3 ways.

1. First of when scripture was written, it was written to be read out loud. Which means that while this letter is being written to those called by God it is also being heard by the "Infiltrators". Imagine that, here's the general calling his troops to war and giving them their battle plans while the enemy is standing right alongside of them. Whose Idea was that?

⁵I'm laying this out as clearly as I can, even though you know all of this well enough already and shouldn't need reminding. Here it is in brief: The Master saved a people out of the land of Egypt. Later he destroyed those who defected.....

Do you get the picture, Jude was intending for the false teachers to hear. Which helps us to understand the kind of battle this was.

2. The Fight for Faith is not a Faultfinding Mission. This isn't our time to go excommunicate those who have misguided and misinformed those whom they have influence with. It also isn't our time to go tell others what they are doing wrong and how bad this sin is in their life. Let's go back to that same slide of vs. 3-4.

³⁻⁴Dear friends, I've dropped everything to write you about this life of salvation that we have in common. I have to write insisting—begging!—that you fight with everything you have in you for this faith entrusted to us as a gift to guard and cherish. What has happened is that some people have infiltrated our ranks (our Scriptures warned us this would happen), who beneath their pious skin are shameless scoundrels. Their design is to replace the sheer grace of our God with sheer license—which means doing away with Jesus Christ, our one and only Master.

(I want to say briefly right here, that yes there are times when we as a body of believers need to come in love to those who are destroying the body of Christ, and sometimes they need to be removed from their area of influence, but that is addressed in Matthew 18 and is not the context of Jude.)

You see what Jude is saying is these infiltrators do not get Grace, they have misunderstood it and now they use the "idea" of grace or the appearance of grace to justify their license to go after the lusts of the flesh. He then uses the body of his letter to explain how when we don't understand grace we quickly fall into a black hole of corruption and emptiness.

If we understand Grace, I mean really understand Grace it changes the way we pray, the way we worship, the way we look at other people and most definitely the way we respond to God. It's a whole new motivation for our behaviors.

Mark 1:

¹⁴After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ¹⁵"The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"

Listen what it says in Ephesians 2:4-10

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.

The first step in understanding Grace is we need to Repent. All repentance means is “a change of direction”, a change of mind and heart. If we really want to accept God's grace we start with repentance. Here we all are, deserving justice so we plead for mercy and He gives us something better, Grace.

⁶And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— ⁹not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Do you see that last part, “We are God's workmanship”

When we come to better understand Grace our eyes are opened to our Purpose. We realize our place, though not deserved is along side of Christ, we begin to understand confidence, and contentment in our living and working for Christ.

Jude knows that these “infiltrators” have heard the letters from Paul, Peter, James, John and now he levels his ultimate battle strategy.

3. The Fight for Faith is life of open arms. The third thing that we often miss about Grace is that it causes us to become like Children. Have you ever watched a child get a gift? Just try it, go into a room full of children and say, “I have a present for you”. Very few will stay in their seats, and you will have all of their attention. But you know who is the worst at getting gifts; Adults. We are terrible at it, why? Because we don't want to owe anyone, or go through the trouble of thanking someone. But Grace is a gift from God, NOT BY WORKS, but FOR GOOD WORKS so that no one can boast.

Jude is saying that our final blow to those who have infiltrated our ranks is that we live our lives as open receptors for God's grace.

It is what will keep our minds fixed on service to others – instead of using the Body of Christ for personal gain.

It is what will keep us from doubting God's call for our lives when the seeds of one discontented whiner rallies a storm of chaos and dissention.

It is what will keep us content and solid in God's love while others run to the latest and greatest next big thing.

Look what Jude writes in the final part of his letter:

17-19 But remember, dear friends, that the apostles of our Master, Jesus Christ, told us this would happen: "In the last days there will be people who don't take these things seriously anymore. They'll treat them like a joke, and make a religion of their own whims and lusts." These are the ones who split churches, thinking only of themselves. There's nothing to them, no sign of the Spirit!

20-21 But you, dear friends, carefully build yourselves up in this most holy faith by praying in the Holy Spirit, staying right at the center of God's love, keeping your arms open and outstretched, ready for the mercy of our Master, Jesus Christ. This is the unending life, the real life!

Do you realize what the battle was for those in Gideon's army? No swords, no shields, no sticks or stones. All they carried with them was a trumpet and a large pot that covered up their torches. Let me tell you what the real battle for them was, besides trying to hold on to all that. The battle was just 2 things, trusting Gideon that he really got this right from God and keeping that flame going while they ran down the side of that mountain. Everything else was taken care of; everything else was in God's hands.

Let me tell you, If Gideon would have had Jude's closing I believe he would have read this to his army of 300 men.

24 Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy,

25 To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen

Jude 24-25 KJV