

# Jude: Built Upon the Most Holy Faith

## by Rev. Dr. John C. Tittle

### Prayer of Illumination

O God, our guide,  
set your path clearly before us  
and lead us to follow you willingly and joyfully,  
for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

### Background

In Russian lore there's an important character called the *yurodivy*, which means "holy fool" or "fool for Christ." *Yurodivies* were spiritual whistleblowers. They weren't too concerned about fitting in. The holy fool was similar to the Hebrew prophets who revealed painful truths in unconventional ways. The Holy Fool called their neighbors to live life in a Kingdom that's not of this world. They were eccentric, but there was a depth and purpose to the mission of the holy fool. It was said that the holy fool "laughed at the world by day, but wept for it by night."

Ivan the Terrible was on a rampage in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. A number of towns were left destroyed in his wake as he moved toward the town of Pskov. Only one person stood up to Ivan the Terrible—the *yurodivy*, the holy fool Nikola Salos. As legend has it, Nikola Salos offered the Tsar a piece of raw meat out of hospitality. Ivan objected that he did not eat meat during the fast. Then Nikola delivered the zinger: The Tsar did a far worse thing in devouring the flesh of Christians. Startled by the encounter, Ivan the Terrible did not touch Pskov, left the people of that town in peace, and instead returned to Moscow.

In many ways Jude can be seen as a *yurodivy*, a holy fool, a church jester who doesn't suffer fools lightly. In the Catholic church, St. Jude is the patron saint of lost causes and underdogs. Jude's letter is a fascinating read—packed with allusions to scenes of judgment from the Hebrew Scriptures and nods to long-lost and obscure apocalyptic Jewish books. Church tradition tells us that Jude was one of Jesus' four younger brothers, mentioned in Matthew 13:55. The book begins with:

*Jude, servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James.*

He doesn't draw attention to Jesus being his big brother. The letter is then addressed to all believers:

*to those who are called,  
to those who are beloved in God the Father  
and kept safe for Jesus Christ.*

After his greeting, Jude functions like a medical doctor, providing a spiritual diagnosis for the early church. I'm going to give you the bad news first, then I'll give you the good news.

First the bad: spiritual communities are as vulnerable to illness as our physical bodies. When our physical bodies are sick or injured, pain immediately gets our attention—and we do something about it. It was time to call 911 for the church. Jude makes no bones about it and vividly describes these toxic teachers as:

- Irrational animals
- Waterless clouds
- Wandering stars
- Autumn trees without fruit—twice dead and uprooted
- Wild waves of the sea foaming with shame

Jude doesn't stop. He also rattles off a succession of examples from Scripture of debauched, disloyal, and divisive behavior that will be held accountable by the Living God.

But then Jude dramatically changes his tune at verse twenty, pivoting from the bad news, to the good news. He reveals there's a cure for the church's malady—it's not terminal! There's a divine treatment plan. We the people of God have a 100% chance of beating this with the Great Physician by our side.

The last five verses of Jude are some of my favorite verses in all of Scripture. I agree with one commentator who said if we didn't have the book of Revelation, Jude's last five verses would be a pretty amazing way to conclude the New Testament.

There was a tradition in the early church at the public reading of Jude's letter I'd like to resurrect this morning. The hearers would join in out loud with the reader at the "Amen" at the end of the letter. I invite you to do that with me with the last word in Jude's letter.

*Let's hear now Jude's charge and benediction:*

### **Scripture: Jude 1:20-25 (NRSV)**

But you, beloved, build yourselves up on your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit; keep yourselves in the love of God; look forward to the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. And have mercy on some who are wavering; save others by snatching them out of the fire; and have mercy on still others with fear, hating even the tunic defiled by their bodies.

Now to him who is able to keep you from falling, and to make you stand without blemish in the presence of his glory with rejoicing, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority, before all time and now and forever. "Amen".

***The grass withers and the flower fades,  
but the Word of God endures forever.***

## SERMON – Jude: Built Upon the Most Holy Faith

We just heard The Four Commandments of Jude to help us move forward with a healthy and vibrant faith defined by faith, hope, love, and prayer. Let's take a closer inspection of each of them.

### ***First, build yourselves up on the most holy faith.***

Immanuel, we're a people who build each other up, not tear each other down. Our Christian faith inspires us to seek unity, rather than division. Following in the footsteps of the Prince of Peace, we seek peace and pursue it, rather than create rifts. We're in this together—we've got each other's backs. We enjoy a salvation that we all share in common.

Our lives are to be built upon nothing less than the solid and sure foundation of the most holy faith—first revealed in Christ, and passed to the apostles, and from there passed on to the church. This bedrock of our lives isn't something manufactured by human beings. It's not based on personal opinion. Our life foundation is God-given, sturdy and sure.

Our most holy faith is sacred because it's *entirely different* and utterly unique because of not only the message that it teaches, but the transformation it produces in our lives. Our most holy faith is not merely a mind-changer, it's a life-changer!

### ***Second, pray in the Holy Spirit.***

The Spirit inside us prays through us. Instead of relying upon our own resources, we cry out to God for help, wisdom, direction, and blessing upon our lives and decisions.

In prayer we lament for the world's suffering, we plead to God for loved ones we're worried sick about. We pray for our enemies. We ask for forgiveness. We pray for our daily bread. We're to pray without ceasing.

Christians are a praying people.

- Prayer reminds us that we're utterly and entirely dependent upon the God who cares for us and protects us. We're not alone in the universe. It's a way to commune and communicate with our Creator.
- Prayer grounds us—reminding us that we can offer to God our limited resources in exchange for God's unlimited resources.
- Prayer takes our insufficiency to God's sufficiency. We pray because prayer changes us.

### ***Third, keep yourselves in the love of God.***

God is love. We love because God loved us first. God never stops loving us. But we have a responsibility to remain in God's love. Let not God's love for you be an unrequited love. Don't let God's love for you be a tragic love story. Jude reminds us that we need to be careful not to lose our moorings, or wander away from God's love.

This isn't easy this day and age. There's something in the air we breathe that discourages faith and encourage disbelief. Participation in faith communities is declining in the West. I have friends around the country—who are now ex-missionaries and former worship leaders, because they got disillusioned and drifted away from not only church, but even faith.

I think we all can think of people we know and love that this happened to. Maybe you're struggling right now with faith. Listen to Jude—the patron saint of lost causes and underdogs:

- God hasn't given up on you and God hasn't stopped believing in you.
- Keep yourself in God's love.
- Don't stop believing.
- Keep swimming against the current.
- Contend for the faith without being contentious.
- Resolutely choose every day to be a loving person—resist bitterness and hatred.

The warmth of God's love keeps our hearts from growing cold.

Jesus put it this way, "I have loved you, abide in my love." He also says, "If you keep my commandments you will abide in my love."

***Fourth, look forward to the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ.***

Beloved in Christ, we're a hope-filled, forward-thinking people. Keep alive the fires of Christian hope. Don't succumb to despair. Storms will come, but they won't engulf us. When you find yourself in the crucible, look forward to Christ's mercy. Look up and look to Christ for deliverance and grace in times of difficulty. Trust. And then extend Christ's mercy to those around you.

Just like the doctor's mandate from the Hippocratic Oath, we believers must promise to *Do No Harm*. Do no harm through sins of commission and do no harm through sins of omission.

Live out Jude's Four Commandments by having mercy on the wavering. We're saved to serve, and elected for empathy. We show our love for God by our love for others, realizing all the while we haven't arrived.

There are situations when Christians function as first responders—with compassion and care snatching people from burning buildings or rescuing others lost at sea. If you do this, just make sure you have your fireman's gear on first. And don't give false alarms.

It's tempting to avoid this important part of our faith—we don't want to appear judgmental or alarmist. Other times we just don't want to make waves, seem old-fashioned, or meddle in people's lives ... *I don't either*. And yet think how cruel it is to stay silent when a loved one is making a really, really bad decision that can only lead to a train wreck. So use discretion, humility, and tact. That heart to heart conversation could be the kindest thing you ever do for them. You don't want to have regrets that you didn't speak up when you needed to.

But probably all of us have missed the warning signs one time or another—and God is merciful when we just didn't see it coming. We've got to also remember sometimes people just won't listen and they keep going. We have to entrust them to God. And we're all in good hands. God's looking out for us—God has our backs.

Jude tells us that God is here to keep us from falling. Sometimes we shoot ourselves in the foot. Sometimes others try to trip us up. Sometimes the path before us is a treacherous one.

In these times I think of David in Psalm 94 who said,

*When I thought, my foot is slipping,  
your steadfast love, O Lord, held me up.*

The Greek word for "keep you from falling" (Jude 1:24) is fascinating. The word is often used for sure-footed horses that do not stumble. In the slippery and dangerous terrain of our crazy world, "God is able to steady us to live non-stumbling lives." Our God helps us to stand strong, stand tall, and stand forgiven before his glorious presence when our time on earth is through. When God sees us, he sees Jesus. We're a spotless sacrifice to God's glory! All fear is cast away.

Jude tells us we're also to stand with great joy! Even in the midst of all the pressures of life, through the challenges of contending for our most holy faith in a cruel world, we stand joyfully and victoriously, celebrating with the redeemed.

Our God is more than able to deliver—he exudes from his being and character splendor, majesty, good power, and total sovereignty. To him and him alone belong all praise, honor, and glory, now and forevermore!

*And all God's people said,*

***"AMEN!"***

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