

“Snatch others from the fire and save them” (Part One)

Reflection 33 in the series “Salvation: The Quest”

Jude is a fascinating but small book near the end of the New Testament that still packs a big wallop. It’s a one-chapter book but it’s given to exhortations like “Snatch others from the fire and save them” (verse 23), which sounds more than a little ominous, more than a little frightening. The book was written likely – we’re not sure but it’s likely – by a brother of Jesus called Judas back in the Gospels (Mark 6:3; Matthew 13:55). And we’re not quite sure where or when it was written though 2 Peter 2 substantially repeats it (all of it) which makes us suppose a date in the early 60s. We take its first audience to be Jewish Christians because there are so many references to Jewish history and Jewish stories, even perhaps Jewish legends.

In fact, its references to non-canonical sources are at least interesting, maybe noteworthy. In verse 14 Jude cites Enoch, not from Genesis but instead from a long intertestamental book, *I Enoch*. Don’t check your Bibles. It’s not there. It was written in the first or second century before Jesus and was well-known in the time of Jesus but never canonical, that is, never included in Hebrew or Christian Scripture. Jude also cites a legend concerning the burial of Moses. You may remember that Moses died alone somewhere on Mount Nebo in the land of Moab (recorded in Deuteronomy 34). A book called *The Testament of Moses*, now lost to us, tells of a dispute between the archangel Michael and Satan over whether Moses deserved to be buried. Satan claimed he didn’t, or at least didn’t deserve to be buried by angels because he had once murdered a man (Exodus 2:12). To which Michael replied, “The Lord rebuke you.” Jude’s point is that Michael treats even Satan with respect and leaves judgment to God. Which is better than some people Jude knows who treat no one with respect. And with that we get to the point of the book.

Jude had wanted to write a happy book, in verse 3, “about the salvation we share.” And salvation is always great. We are saved. We are healed. We are filled increasingly to the measure of all the fullness of God. In God we live and move and have our being. We feel our oneness with God. God’s life pours into us, streams of living water flow out of us. Salvation is always great, and that’s what Jude wanted to write about. But instead he writes (now in verse 4), “Certain men whose condemnation was written about 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.”

So now Jude urges his readers to “contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints” (verse 3). And that is the point of his book. *Contending for the Faith* was the name of a little name-calling rag that came out in the years I was at Harding Graduate School of Religion. It prided itself on outing all the liberals and progressives in the Churches of Christ. We students would rush every time it came out to see if anyone we knew was named. Of course if they were they became instant heroes. As I’ve grown older though, it seems to me that the writers of papers like that are less like Jude and more, at least in some ways, like those Jude warns against.

But warn he does! He calls them godless (verse 4). They’ve changed the grace of our God into a license for immorality (4). They’re like the angels who rebelled against God (6). They’re like

Sodom and Gomorrah given up to sexual immorality and perversion (7). They're dreamers; they make stuff up (8). They pollute their own bodies (8). They reject authority, even sacred, celestial authority (8). They speak abusively against whatever they do not understand (10). They do what they do for their own personal profit (11). They're like Cain, like Balaam, like the rebel Korah in the wilderness (11). They are blemishes at your love feasts, the communal meals of the early church (12). They are "clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted – twice dead" (12). They are "like wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever" (13). They are grumblers and faultfinders (16). They follow their own evil desires, their own passions (16). They divide you (19). They follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit (19). And Jude says: Such people have always been predicted and their fate, their doom, is certain.

But here's what you do, Jude says, to his readers (now in verses 20 -21):

"Build yourself up in your most holy faith
and pray in the Holy Spirit.
Keep yourselves in God's love
as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ
to bring you to eternal life."

Keep yourself in God's love. And here's what you do with those who are susceptible, vulnerable, disturbed by divisive people, perhaps influenced by them, perhaps tempted to give themselves up to sexual immorality (now in verse 22):

"Be merciful to those who doubt;
snatch others from the fire and save them;
to others show mercy,
mixed with fear
– hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh."

Keep your own guard up. As you seek to rescue others, be aware of your own vulnerabilities.

– Dale Pauls

Part Two (of two) next week