

“Building on THE Foundation in 2019”

Jude 17–25

Rev. Michael Wichlan

December 30, 2018 • Evening Sermon

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, may You open our eyes that we might behold wonderful riches from Your Word in this study, for we pray this in Christ’s Name, Amen.

Jude 1:17–25 says [17] *But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. [18] They said to you, “In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions.” [19] It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit. [20] But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, [21] keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. [22] And have mercy on those who doubt; [23] save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.*

[24] Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, [25] to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

My family is so grateful for the welcome we have received here at this church and it’s a privilege to bring you God’s Word in this study. The question is does the foundation you build upon matter? This is what I think Jude is asking us here and of course the answer is ‘yes.’ Ravi Zacharias in 2002 preached at the United Nations International Prayer Breakfast and his host picked him up at the airport. They were driving past a new building called the Wexner Center for Performing Arts on The Ohio State University Campus and the host said ‘This is America’s first post-modern building’ to which Zacharias asked ‘what is a post-modern building?’ He responded ‘The architect said he designed this building with no design in mind and when the architect was asked why, he said ‘if life itself is capricious, why should our buildings have any design and any meaning?’ So he has pillars that have no purpose. He has stairways that go nowhere. He has a senseless building and somebody has paid for it.’

Zacharias said ‘So his argument was that if life has no purpose and design why should the building have any design?’ The host said ‘That’s correct’ to which Zacharias said ‘Did he do the same with the foundation?’ And there was utter silence. Zacharias then said ‘You see you and I can fool with the infrastructures of as much as we would like but we dare not fool with the foundation because it will call our bluff in a hurry.’ Amen to that. Jude is calling us to look upon the foundation that we build upon.

Jude is the brother of James, the half-brother of Jesus and a companion of Peter and he compassionately writes to the church to strive for and struggle after the faith. Jude 1:3 says [3] *Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write **appealing to you to contend for the faith** that was once for all delivered to the saints.*

False teachers, ungodly people had crept into the church unnoticed who would pervert the grace of God in Christ to the point that they would use it as a license for false living. They were scoffers who mocked God and would pervert His grace to live life the way they wanted to live

life, showing contempt and disdain of those in the church. They would create divisions within the church by drawing people to themselves rather than to the Lord. They would say ‘Follow me and the world’s values.’ They were devoid of the Spirit, meaning they did not bear the fruit of the Spirit in their lives. They would deny the Lordship of Christ.

So Jude’s letter is very much a gracious warning, not only against false teachers as Jesus, Matthew and John did but unbelief has been present from the beginning. Unbelief and scoffers will be present in the end as well, Jude says, for we are living in the last times. We know Christ is returning and Jude says He will bring judgment on all. The Christian faith will always be challenged and threatened by falsehood and false living. While Jude is concerned about the false teachers who have crept in unnoticed, he seems to be more concerned for the church and its influence of the false living and witness around the world.

Over 2,000 years later this small letter from Jude still stands very clear to us today in the church. We must all understand that apart from the great love of God through the saving grace of Jesus Christ by the power of the Spirit, our hearts are prone to wander. They are prone to leave the God we love, as the hymn writer puts it. Because of sin we are prone to build on other foundations other than Jesus Christ Himself – the Solid Foundation. He has given it to us by His grace as He has handed it down to us through the Apostles’ teaching through the Word of God to us today.

As we close out 2018 and enter 2019 Jude is exhorting us with tender pastoral care and calling us to search our own lives for how we live today. He is exhorting us to look at what foundation we are building upon. What a great time to do this as we enter into a new year and to think about that foundation. In this letter of Jude he gives us the profile of those who build on the foundation of faith which is Christ. This is the foundation that cost Jesus His very life. Jude gives us five commands in Jude 1:20–25 of a profile of one who builds on the right foundation.

The first one is in Jude 1:20 where he tells us to build yourselves up. In a sense he is saying build upon the foundation of your faith, in our most holy faith. What is he talking about in faith here? It is the body of Christian doctrine, the core teachings of the Apostles that were handed down through the inspired, infallible, holy Scriptures, that were breathed out by the Holy Spirit and given to us through Christ.

Question two in the Westminster Shorter Catechism says, what rule has God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him? The answer is the Word of God, which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him forever. It is our only rule of life. It is what Christians believe in order to build upon the foundation of Christ.

Paul talks about this in Colossians 2:6–7 which says [6] *Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, [7] rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.* Thanks be to God that the survival of the foundation of the Gospel does not depend on the strength and power of the church. It is actually reversed. The survival of the foundation of the church depends on the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

One commentator says ‘the only way to defend the Gospel is to grow in it as we understand its truths and put them into daily practice in our lives. The faith is not only a truth to defend but also the truth by which we are to live. When we live by it we maximize its effectiveness.’ It means that we stand on every promise of God’s Word – the only lens through which we can see the world clearly. It means as God’s covenant people we are to build ourselves up in the most holy faith in the context of community as the church – to study the truth

of God's Word together, to sharpen one another with the Word, to work out together what it means to live out the Christian life by the grace of God in Christ.

This is why membership is so important. I love that Briarwood puts an emphasis on membership. There are a number of churches who don't have membership anymore and I think that is an error in the church. When we join a body of believers we are planting a stake in the ground and we're saying that we are part of this larger body, this community of believers and we have responsibilities speaking into my life and I have responsibilities of speaking into their life. This is where we find our identity, grow in grace and build on this foundation in Jesus.

The second profile Jude gives to building on this right foundation found in Jude 1:20 is that we are to pray in the Holy Spirit. How are we to build in this faith in Jesus and grow in our knowledge of Christ? It is only through the Holy Spirit working in and through our lives. Think of what the Holy Spirit does in the life of a believer? J.C. Ryle in one of his sermons gives ten things the Holy Spirit does in the life of a believer. One is the Spirit quickens our hearts, meaning He breathes life into us spiritually. The Spirit teaches our minds. He guides us in the truth of God's Word. The Spirit leads us to the Word, meaning we are taught by the Spirit to feed on God's Word. The Spirit convicts us of sin. He opens our hearts and eyes to the corruption that sin has in our hearts. The Spirit draws us to Christ. He leads us to Christ. He unites us to Christ. The Spirit sanctifies us, meaning He makes us holy. He causes us to bear the fruit of the Spirit. The Spirit makes people spiritually minded meaning He sets our hearts and minds on the things of God. The Spirit produces inward conflict, meaning the Spirit wages war on our behalf.

John Owen said 'be killing sin or it be killing you' which he based on Romans 8:13 which says [13] *For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.* Killing sin is our job but it's the Spirit's work in our lives. The Spirit makes people love one another. Faith is foundational but love is at the core. Finally, the Spirit teaches us to pray. We need the grace of the Holy Spirit to preserve in the faith and so He uses prayer as a means of grace in our lives. So we have the Spirit of adoption and we cry 'Abba Father' and to this end it's why we pray without ceasing. It is why we continue steadfastly in prayer in the power of the Holy Spirit. Think about the brokenness of the world around us for it shows us why we must pray. We are called to pray for our own hearts to remain faithful to the Father's Word and to His call. We pray through the power of the Spirit and through His Word that others would come to saving faith in Christ where we live, work and play and it's through Birmingham and the farthest reaches of the earth.

The third profile John gives us in Jude 1:21 is that we keep ourselves in the love of God. Now there is nothing we can do or bring to the table that would earn God's love yet we are called over and over to wash ourselves in the vastness of God's great covenant love for us through Christ, because we as glorious ruins are day by day being restored in His image. So we respond to God in love and to one another. What does He mean by this?

I want to give us an illustration. We are all creatures of habit and so we like our stuff a certain way. We sleep on the same side of the bed. We have the same pillows around us. We sit in the same place at church but you get my point. James K. A. Smith in his book *You Are What You Love; the Spiritual Power of Habit*, builds on this thesis that we are what we love because we live toward what we want and desire, meaning we are what we worship and we worship what we love. Love is a virtue and it's learned through imitation, practice and habit. For the heart to love God, others and what God loves it requires recalibration, reformation and reconditioning over and over because we are prone to wander.

So how does are love get aimed and directed toward this end. Smith says that is does so through immersion, practices and rituals, we might say or habits that will fundamentally shape who we are. As Christians, what I think he means, is that we immersed ourselves into worship and into community. Community here is being in a deeper sense of discipleship like our Sunday school communities and small groups and through the means of grace – the Word, sacraments and prayer. All of which are means of sanctifying us more and more to love God, ourselves and others.

Smith goes on to say that the body of Christ, the church, is the place where God invites us to renew our loves, reorient our desires and retrain our appetites. Again, we go back to membership and that's why it's important. It is where the Holy Spirit comes in because too often we look for the Spirit in the extraordinary when God has promised to be present in the ordinary. We keep looking for God in the new as if grace was always bound up with the next best thing, yet Jesus encouraged us to look in the simple, those things we are to wash ourselves in over and over again, like worship, community, discipleship – the means of grace.

As creatures of habits whose loves have been shaped by what Smith calls secular liturgies – things of the world, the flesh, the devil – then the best gift God could give you is Spirit induced practices that will reform and retrain our loves. That is what worship, community and the means of grace do in our lives. So God meets us where we are, as creatures of habit, who are shaped by these practices and through them He invites us into His community to practice those in the very body of His church.

I want to encourage you to make it the main goal in 2019 to immerse yourself in the Lord's Day worship and community and that means getting involved in a Sunday school community and small group to immerse into a deeper level of community and to feast on the means of grace. I would also ask that you encourage others to do this as well. Feast on His Word in the coming year. Feast on the sacraments. Feast on Him by faith and drink in His grace. Feast on Him through prayer.

The fourth command Jude gives in his profile is in Jude 1:21 when he says to wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. The hope we have in Christ's return is what Jude is saying motivates us to build on the faith, live for Christ and to build on His firm foundation. We wait expectantly for Christ's return. We are living in the in-between times, the already and the not yet of His Second Advent. We are called to live each day in the freedom of our salvation through the beauty of the Gospel of grace, purchased for us by Christ through His death and resurrection, because He set us free from guilt, shame, condemnation of sin. He has called us to put on display through our daily life the mercy of God that He has shown us in our lives. We persevere as we wait for the return of our King because He is coming soon. How are we to respond?

Jude gives us the fifthly, in three ways how we are to respond to those building on worldly foundations and it's to show mercy to the lost as we see this in Jude 1:22–23. We are to show God's unmerited favor because we are ourselves have been show God's unmerited favor, great mercy. Phil Reichen says 'We ought to respond to God's mercy by becoming merciful ourselves. It seems to me someone who understands the wonder of God's mercy would seek to become a living demonstration of it. One way to test your grasp of God's mercy is to ask how you treat other sinners. Certainly, God holds sinners responsible for their sins but He also reaches out to them in mercy. If you really understand the doctrine of God's sovereign mercy you will not be judgmental or proud. You will become a messenger of God's mercy.'

I'd like to give you another illustration by the late Leonard Cohen. He was a poet, laureate, a folk singer and the writer of his most famous song 'Hallelujah.' One of his friends wrote this about him, 'Leonard was above all in his music, his poems, and his tone of life the lyrical advocate of the finite and the flawed. He was possessed by a lasting sensation of brokenness. He was broken, love was broken, the world was broken.' In Cohen's anthem there is a line that says, 'There's a crack in everything and that's how the light gets in.' Think of all the brokenness around us and all the cracks in people's lives because of sin. God wants to use us in their lives to shine the light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ into those cracks. We do this by God's grace as we seek to become messengers of His mercy and in a sense to make the Gospel attractive through our lives to a lost and broken world.

So Jude gives these three types of broken people. He says first there are those who doubt or are wavering. So we are called to show mercy and persuade them as they have maybe been confused by worldly living. We do it by speaking truth in love. When you take your wife into a jewelry shop to find a new ring, what does the jeweler do? He pulls out a black cloth and polishes the ring as he sets the ring on the black cloth so that you can see the beauty of that diamond, because he wants the wife to like it so that the husband will buy it. Think about it like that. We are like that jeweler, polishing the Gospel so to speak, and displaying it on this black cloth in such a way that it's attractive to those around us so that it shows them the beauty of who Christ is. He is that Diamond and that's who we want them to see. They will know we are Christians by our love.

The second group of people who are in danger of being burned by sin are those in the fire of sin and death. God uses us to help rescue these people with a sense of urgency. We are still speaking truth in love but just as a father would snatch his child out of the street and out of the path of danger so we too are to snatch those who are in worldly and false living. We are to snatch them out of the grave of sin and potential death. At one time in our life we were headed at breakneck speed toward the precipice of the Grand Canyon, ready to run off to fall to our death, were it not for the grace and mercy of God to literally reach and grab us by the neck and pull us back to save us from eternal death and damnation. It's by His mercy that He has done that. Because this has been done for us we are called to help others see this in their life. Maybe we are to speak truth in tough love.

This third group are those who have gone astray and become dangerous not only to themselves and others but also to the faith. Some are even in the church itself but Jude calls us to show mercy to them as well because after all no one is too far gone for God, are they? There is no one out of His reach. Jude tells us not to associate with their sin out of fear of being pulled into it ourselves for we hate the sin yet we plead for God's mercy on their behalf for they too are image bearers of God.

This is important for us as leaders and shepherds of Christ's church. Think about how we can do shepherding in such a way to keep our sheep from this worldly living or going down this path that leads to destruction. I call it proactive shepherding. As we seek ourselves as shepherds to live transparently, to be vulnerable before our sheep and to build deep relationships with our sheep, will help us here. When we do this, our sheep will see that we don't have it all together either and will then bear things about their lives. If you're married it's important to include your spouse in this. Some of the sweetest times I've have found in shepherding the sheep is when my wife and I do this together with other couples in marriages. We don't have a perfect marriage and I know there are zero perfect marriages in the world. All I have to do is ask a wife. I believe this is what discipleship really looks like.

So as we think about the theme this year in leading and focus on discipleship in this coming year, what is discipleship? It is investing in such a way that we're going to a deeper level. As shepherds we have to get to a deeper level with our sheep and it means that we have to go deeper ourselves. So how can we invest the lives of our sheep at a deeper level? We need the grace of God to help us in this, to show us where we need to grow personally as we seek to shepherd others and as we build on this right and firm foundation but the thing that has been most humbling to me in a right view of the fear of God, is that one day, I as a pastor, shepherd, husband and father, will stand before the Lord God Almighty and He will hold me accountable for how I've shepherded the sheep. That is scary in a good way because it shows me that I can't do it myself. I need the Spirit to lead me as I'm shepherding the sheep. We all do in that regard.

I just want to end by asking, where do we get the power to build on this solid foundation? Jude gives us this in this beautiful doxology that is at the end of verse 1 and verses 24 and 25. Jude 1:1b says [1b] *To those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ.* This points us back to the firm foundation of our faith. Think about the fact that we are called for that is God's past grace in our lives. It is His effectual call of the Father on our lives, calling us by grace through the Spirit to the Son who captures our hearts and calls us His own. It's His irresistible grace and that's a beautiful picture.

It's the grace of the Gospel that brings us salvation and gives us the faith to build on Christ. He goes on to say that we are loved by God the Father. We are recipients of His unmerited favor, His love, His grace and He has redeemed us. He has adopted us as sons and daughters into a community of believers. His love will never let us go.

Thirdly, Jude says we are kept for Jesus Christ. Imagine that. There is nothing in all of this world that can keep us from our Savior. He keeps us in His grips and that's how we persevere. Jude 1:24 says the Christ keeps us from stumbling which is His present grace, meaning that God is going to complete His work as we see in Philippians 1:6 which says [6] *And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.* We put no confidence in our flesh. We count all as lost to gain Christ and Christ alone. It's God's present grace that sanctifies us and sets us apart for His good works. It's His grace that produces in us a new kind of people – Kingdom citizens of King Jesus. He alone is able to keep us from stumbling or falling.

Finally, Christ will present us blameless before God's glory with great joy. This is His future grace. Think about that. He will present us blameless before the throne of our Creator and we will have great joy forevermore. So when Christ returns God's work is complete in us and we'll be in His glorious presence forever. So whose foundation are you building on? Are you building on God's foundation which is Christ and what Jude is calling us to or are you building on the world's? There are times when we are building on the world's if we are honest with ourselves.

Jude calls us to build on this solid foundation of Christ alone and he calls us to fix our eyes on Him, the Author and Perfector of our faith. Let's do that in this coming year by His grace and for His glory. Let's pray.

Prayer: (This is a prayer out the *Valley of Vision* of the Puritan prayers)

Lord, the length of our days does not profit us except that our days are lived out in Your presence, in Your service and to Your glory. Give us Your grace that precedes, follows, guides, sanctifies, sustains and aids us every hour so that we may not be one moment apart from You. May we rely on Your Spirit to supply every thought, speak every word, direct every step, prosper

every work and build up every inch of our faith. Give us Your desire to show forth Your praise, testify to Your love and to advance Your Kingdom throughout Birmingham and to the farthest reaches of the earth. We launch our boats on the unknown waters of this new year with You Father as our Port, You Jesus at our helm and You Holy Spirit filling ourselves knowing that we can trust You to lead us where You will. Guide us to heaven with our loins girded up, our lamps burning, our ears open to Your calls, our hearts full of love and our souls living free in Your grace and mercy. Jesus by Your grace sanctify us, comfort us, teach us, guide us, shape us and grow us and build us on Your strong and firm foundation. We worship You and know that Your triumphant over the grave brings us eternal joy as Your children, knowing we will one day be with You forever, Amen.