

Build Yourselves Up

November 18, 2007

Exodus 35:20-29; 36:2-7

Jude v. 17-25

We continue our series looking at what Scripture teaches us about being the church. On first glance, our two texts this morning may not seem related; but they both involve exhortations to build themselves up in faith.

Our Old Testament text involves the peoples' response to God's command to make an offering glorifying God for what God had already done – while they were still in the wilderness.

Our New Testament Scripture text is written to exhort new believers to build themselves up in faithfulness – while they were struggling to understand their identity as Christians.

Read (8:45 Exodus 35:20-29; 36:2-7) Jude 17-25

We begin with Jude. Jude is short and to the point. It is among the first letters we have from the early church. Though we are not absolutely sure, the author's self-identification seems to indicate that he was brother to James, who was the first leader of the Christian church in Jerusalem; making him – perhaps – the Jude who was the younger brother of Christ.

Though we do not know the specific audience to whom Jude was writing, it is clear that he is exhorting them to persevere in faithfulness. The question is, then, how can they grow strong and persevere? Jude says, "By building yourselves up." How?

- Pay attention to your relationship with the Living God, and
- Pay attention to your relationship with each other.
- Exodus adds: build yourselves up by giving with a generous heart.

I. Jude tells them to pay attention to their relationship with the Living God.

a. Pay attention to your personal relationship with God by "Building up your most holy faith," he says.

This is not "faith" for faith's sake; as in, "you just need to have faith." Instead, this is a very specific, very concrete, very real faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, trusting in their hearts that God raised him from the dead. That's the "most holy faith."

You see, the problem that Jude identifies is this: People came into the church with the intention of changing the substance of the faith. See what Jude says in verse 4, "For 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."

For people of faith, this is a hard thing to handle. We want to believe in the goodness of others who identify themselves as Christian. However, you can see what Jude is referring to: people begin to want to talk as if God's grace is to be assumed and sin is not important. They encourage tolerance for things God calls sin, fearing that too much clarity will scare people away.

But that is not the gospel: it says God does not really care about sin, Jesus' death on the cross does not have any practical effect on our eternal salvation, and that Jesus is our buddy rather than king and Lord. It is tempting because it seems nice; it is deadly because it denies Jesus.

Jude exhorts new believers to build themselves up in their *most holy faith*. Jesus' death and resurrection is *good* news. Trusting in Jesus for salvation is good. It is the faith that was delivered once for all and entrusted to us.

The world would like you to believe that this "most holy faith" is bad news; that the faith delivered by the saints who have gone before us is mean, judgmental, and angry.

The world is wrong.

The world would have you try to earn your salvation. The truth is: you cannot. The world would have you condemn yourself for your failures. The truth in Jesus Christ does not – it is redemptive.

The most holy faith in Jesus Christ is the only good news: though we are all sinners deserving of death and destruction, God loves us so much that he gave his Son that whosoever believes would not perish but have eternal life. It is the only way of life. Jude tells them to build themselves up in their most holy faith because it is the power of God for salvation to all who believe.

b. Pay attention to your relationship with God by praying in the Holy Spirit.

Prayer is an essential part of the Church's life as it is in the individual believer's life. It is a manifestation of our love and complete dependence upon God; for the Church, it is a starting point.

Prayer is the way we embrace God like a child embraces her mother. In my office, I have a picture of Abigail holding onto Jen when she was about two years old. As an artistic photograph, it's not very good – it's a little blurry, it was not composed or framed well. But what it does show well is Abby's complete joy at being in the loving arms of her mother. This is what praying in the Holy Spirit is all about – complete joy at being in the loving arms of our heavenly Father.

When we pray in the Holy Spirit, we have surrendered and are vulnerable before God. We yield, we do not negotiate. We ask, we do not have anything with which to bargain. We are brought close to God. We are restored. We are renewed. We are built up.

c. Pay attention to your relationship with God by keeping yourself in God's love.

When we want to live within the love relationship with another, there are some things we do and there are some things we do not do. This is not as difficult to understand as it might seem.

On the one hand, one of the greatest joys for a young child is coming home to share something they have done well. Anyone who has a refrigerator full of art knows this reality: the child comes home and cannot contain themselves to show the parents what they have done. Keeping ourselves in God's love is choosing to do the things we want to show God.

On the other hand, one of the most traumatic times in the life of any young child is when they have done something wrong, they know they have done it wrong, and they know that they are going to be found out. The anxiety, the depth of fear, the sheer hopelessness of their situation is evident in their being. The greatest fear of a child in that moment is that they will be lost to their parents; that fear of abandonment. Earthly parents exhibit a bit of heavenly grace when they demonstrate unconditional love for the child while exercising discipline for the behavior.

Keeping in God's love means remembering that grace at all times – now and through eternity – we have been adopted as children of God and made co-heirs with Christ. Jude is telling believers to grow into their true identity as children of the Sovereign God.

d. Pay attention to your relationship with God by living in hope.

Believers are to live in God's love as “they wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring them (and us) to eternal life.”

Although this is a restatement of the first – keeping their most holy faith – it also is a reminder of the promise of God that will reach its fulfillment in God's timing. Believers hold onto the hope of the big picture – of God's big picture – in which God's holy and perfect plans will be realized. Believers live in the post-resurrection world; meaning that they know God's promises will be revealed because he has already demonstrated sovereignty over the powers of this world and death; demonstrated through the resurrection.

Pay attention to your relationship with the living God.

II. Then, Jude tells them to pay attention to their relationship with each other. Here, we move to verses 20-21.

The reminder here is not to be so “heavenly” minded that they are no earthly good. It is a reminder to have more than a “God and me” attitude. We are not just biding time here on earth, there is much that God has prepared for us to do. Jude tells believers live out their faith in real life. How? Be a blessing to others. There are three kinds of people we are called to build up.

- **Build yourselves up by being a blessing to believers who doubt.**

Doubt is a powerful experience for many believers. Doubt is the position of many young or new believers who are being called to take steps of faith. Anyone here ever doubted? Anyone here

been in a tough situation – financially distressed, emotionally broken, physically depressed, or spiritually exhausted – and wondered, “Is God real or am I just fooling myself?”

Being a blessing to believers who doubt means walking with them through their time of trial. You see, confidence comes from going through trials that test faith – and faith is “being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” It means loving one another, it means listening to one another, it means interceding on behalf of one another in prayer, it means encouraging one another.

- **Build yourselves up by being a blessing to believers who are blindly or intentionally sinning against God.**

This may, perhaps, be the hardest of Jude’s exhortations. It means to call others believers to account for their behavior – and be willing to be held accountable for our behavior. This is hard. how can we be a blessing to believers who are blindly or intentionally sinning against God?

Being a blessing to believers means sharing mutual accountability to encourage virtue and restrain vice. We want to restrain vice because sin burns. Hear that again, sin burns.

Sin cannot stand in the presence of pure holiness. Consider the example of Isaiah. When he was brought into the throne room of heaven, “Woe to me! I am ruined! I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips!” Yet God did not leave Isaiah in that state, the seraph came with a live coal and touched his lips, saying, “See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.” Then, God asked, “Whom shall I send?” Isaiah replies, “Here am I. Send me!” Then God says to Isaiah, “Go and tell this people: “‘Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.’ Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.””(Is. 6:9-10, NIV)

This is the same word we are to speak to believers who are sinning; we do them no favors – and they do us no favors – by pretending not to see sin or pretending it does not matter. Be a blessing by snatching believers from the fire of sin.

- **Build yourselves up by being a blessing to those who do not know God; without ever tolerating or accepting their sin.**

Jude’s exhortation includes the call to proclaim the gospel to those who do not know God. Evangelism is an expression of mercy; it also is a statement of God’s judgment with the hope of forgiveness through the atoning blood of Jesus.

Love the sinner as God loves the sinner; hate the sin and do not tolerate it as God hates the sin and does not tolerate it. Love comes first and is the expression of mercy; it is our thankfulness to God for the gift of grace and God’s heart to seek the lost that drives our evangelism. There is no joy in condemning sin; yet, the reality is, there is no joy for the person who remains in sin.

The language Jude uses here is a warning to keep clean – hating the clothing means, “Don’t even brush against sin; keep yourself separate from it. Recognize it, identify it, name it, and do not tolerate it.” Having mercy means sharing the way that those stained by sin can be washed clean by the blood of the lamb. Sharing the good news is what it means to be a blessing to those who do not know God.

III. The Exodus text is an important reminder: building ourselves up in our most holy faith also includes **expressions of a generous heart through giving.**

Faith is not an ethereal or academic exercise; it has practical, tangible, worldly manifestations.

Moses was commanded by God to take an offering of valuable items for the purpose of building the tabernacle. The people were in the desert, having been liberated by God. Moses had delivered one (then the second) set of the Ten Commandments. The covenant ceremony had been held and God then commanded Moses to take an offering. You heard the things that were included: gold, silver, bronze, blue, purple and crimson yarns, woods, oils, spices, incense. These were raw materials for the construction of the tabernacle and the priestly garments. They were given as an act of worship.

Giving money, giving time, giving resources, giving expertise: these are acts of worship. They are not given so that we get something; they are given out of a generous heart for what God has already done for us.

Further, the tabernacle and the priestly robes were constructed for God’s ongoing presence with the people; a witness to God’s deliverance for next generations. They were a reminder to the people who experienced God’s grace, they were brought forth to help construct items for worship for generations later who would remember and trust in God’s goodness through the witness of these tangible items.

In other words, in your giving, think beyond yourself, think beyond yourselves, think about those whom we do not yet know. Through the giving with generous hearts, God will be calling those people to serve faithfully and obediently.

There are a few – but not many – who are here sitting and participated in the original construction of these buildings. Many have already died and gone to their reward. Yet it is our responsibility to add our gifts to these resources they have given as a testimony to God’s goodness. We do so from a thankful and generous heart, knowing that God has already been faithful and that God will use our faithfulness as a blessing to those whose names we may never know.

The irony in Scripture? The people gave so much that Moses had to tell them to stop. They were not concerned with what services the church was going to provide, they were eager and enthusiastic about giving glory to God for who God is and thanking God for what God has done.

Conclusion

In short, Jude's charge is familiar to us. "Love the LORD your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength; and love your neighbor as yourself." Build yourself up by paying attention to your relationship with the Living God. Build yourself up by paying attention to your relationship with each other. Build yourselves up by giving with a generous heart.

And we worship: 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.