



**feeding ... gathering ... carrying ... leading. (Isaiah 40:11)**

September 16, 2014

Dearest family,

Given our attention to the Letters to the Churches in Revelation over the summer, I thought it was important not to lose too quickly the seriousness of their message, particularly as it applied to a culture that was decaying and declining, and to a church that was under assault. So this Fall we will look at the letter that precedes those letters, the epistle of Jude – a letter that is written in the same cultural context with similar urgency. The fact is that after Jude and Revelation were written, within one generation, only the churches in Smyrna and Philadelphia survived; the rest had been destroyed by exactly what Jude is warning about: doctrinal error and moral subversion.

Jude is being written in the same context as the letters we have just studied all summer, and there is no variation in intensity. Jude's context is dominated by the same three major enemies that Revelation identifies:

1. **The beast of the sea:** this is physical persecution – this is the suffering that has to be endured
2. **The beast of the earth:** this is intellectual perversion – the error that has to be refuted
3. **The harlot of Babylon:** this is the moral pollution, the sin that has to be resisted

This was, and still is, the normal environment for church life. Though Jude deals more with the second of these, he does show the integral relationship between all three and the relationship between belief, behavior and belonging. Jude is writing to believers who are pursuing their faith in hard times. That explains why there is in fact so much encouragement in this letter when you look closely. If all you hear is judgment in this letter, and there is plenty of it, then you have not read it rightly.

I dare say that this will not be the most taught book in America this Fall. Squeezed as it is between the much beloved epistles of John, the apostle of love, and the Apocalypse, the Book of Revelation that gets everyone's eyes out on stalks, it does not appear on anyone's list of favorite Bible books. In the first four centuries of the church it seems to have been appreciated by the church fathers, but as one commentator has recently put it: "*If Bible publishers stopped printing Jude it might take years for some people to notice.*" (De Silva) Origen, the great third century theologian, said that it had "*few lines but full of the strong words of heavenly grace.*" Luther was less complimentary: "*in it is nothing special.*" However, he did like to think of it as 'sticking it' to the priests! Mind you, he didn't give Revelation a Book # either! A generation ago it was described as "*the most neglected book in the NT.*" In most seminaries, Jude may get a two-minute mention at the end of the last lecture of the General Epistles class. Another scholar wrote that it: "*suffered from a distinct and intentional neglect in the Christian world.*" That was true, and I suggested a number of reasons for this neglect, including deliberate avoidance. But towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there was a renewed interest by scholars, and in the last few years it is said that no 25 verse section of scripture has attracted more commentary and analysis. Is this telling us something? Strong and positive responses are now being expressed by theologians, at least orthodox ones: "*a thunderbolt hurled from on high...a potent antibiotic...it packs a spiritual wallop!...it is a letter of outrage and we are unaccustomed to this much passion.*"

So before we get into it inductively, on Sunday we did an orientation and looked at five things: the writer, the readers, the reason, the writing, the relevance. (Many of you could not be there, so I urge you to listen to the message to help you get the context for the series. That will be important.)

With regard to the last of these headings, 'relevance', we noted that in his introduction (vs 1-4) Jude spells out two of his key concerns.

1. The grace of God was being changed into a license for immorality
2. There was a denial of the lordship of Jesus Christ

Could there be any two more relevant concerns for the present day church. I spent time suggesting that the state of the world and the church necessitates such a letter. We are engaged in a spiritual battle, and in wartime, in times of threat, like the times we live in, the operative word is security. Thus the title of my first message: HEARTLAND SECURITY. This explains his opening definition of a true Christian – called, beloved and kept. The idea of 'keeping' becomes the thread that is sewn throughout this letter, holding it and us together in threatening times. The letter is about our security in such times. It is about Heartland Security.

It was Jesus himself who spoke most clearly and strongly about the work of the enemy as a thief and a robber. Like those hirelings that Jesus spoke about who "*climb in by some other way*" (Jn. 10:1) Jude describes what had "*secretly slipped in*" among them. (v4) Jude is concerned about breaches of spiritual security. He is concerned that your heart and mind are going to be hacked, and that a virus of wrong thinking and feeling is going to be embedded in your life. Believe me, intrusion of the soul, burglarization of the spirit, comes in many ways. It comes through disobedience, it comes through sexual sin, it comes through neglect and lack of vigilance and alertness, and lack of discipline. It comes through apathy and sleep: as the Proverbs (6:10) puts it, a little sleep, a little folding of the hands in sleep and poverty comes like an armed man.

Like many of you, I have a security alarm system on my home, and it has many helpful protective features. Jude's epistle is a major testing of your spiritual alarm system. Do you hear any alarms going off? He who has an ear let him or her hear! Have you disarmed God's security system? Have you left unsealed what God said to close? Have you left a window ajar to an influence that God said to pull the curtains across, and secure the latch? Have you left your heart's door ajar to someone or something that you should not entertain in your life and heart? Have you given a key (affections, attitudes, actions) away to the enemy giving him rights and authority of ownership to access as if he owns that part of your life? Are you giving an appearance of being secure but though the door looks closed it is not in fact locked – you are living off the latch. You can slip out, and 'it' and 'they' can slip in. Have you pressed some bypass buttons? It's not that alarms won't go off in some places, but you have deadened them in others. Is the alarm of conscience ignored, or hardened, or seared – just bypassed in any area of your life and character? And when alarms do go off, what checkup, what follow up do you do? Do you accept the calls from heaven's monitoring service, from the promptings and convictions of the Holy Spirit, from the pricks of conscience, from the instruction of the Word? Do you deal with the break-ins; do you mend the breaches; do you secure the fold and the family, and the marriage relationship and the sensitivity of the Spirit?

Scripture is full of warnings to watch – and no one has more to say about this than Jesus. (Do your own study of what you are to guard. But at the end of the day it is about us. Jude recognizes that. This is why he begins his epistle by giving us an opportunity to check our personal spiritual security system. Do we know we are **called**? Are we assured we are **beloved**? Do we live as a son or daughter secured in the Father's love and therefore **kept**? This is not a day to live with a false sense of security. This is not a day to allow your spirit to be burglarized by the thievery of sin and deception. This is not a day to be oblivious to the wiles and schemes of the devil, who Jesus said, comes to steal. We will talk a little more in another session about the nature of the security we have in Christ, but let me remind you what Jesus said: "*No one will snatch them out of my hand...no one is able to snatch them out of my father's hand.*"

(Jn. 10:27) I would suggest that you are in two sets of very good hands. The appeal of this letter, and my appeal to you, is keep yourselves in the keeping power of God. So before we go any further in this series, I asked you to treat Sunday's message as a service call to check your security system. I had one in my home last week because there was a problem with a motion detector. It needed a new battery. There are many who may need a fresh supply of the power of the Holy Spirit, at the beginning of this new church year, especially if for any reason there has been a quenching of the Spirit in any area of life. A quenched Holy Spirit, with a resulting personal suppressed or oppressed spirit, does not make for spiritual sensitivity and therefore desensitizes our spiritual alarm system.

Till next time, may you live securely, assured of who you are in Christ and whose you are: called, loved, kept. If the enemy can weaken your signal on any of these you will be vulnerable. But the Lord is able to keep you! If there are any alarm bells ringing for any reason in your heart; if there is any breach of spirit, any breach of God's truth, of relationship with Jesus; let's ask Jesus by the power of His Holy spirit to reset those alarms. In an age of 'errorism' let no one be unassured of their Heartland Security.

Pastorally yours,  
Stuart