

Reading: Jude 1-24

SERMON

Urgency (Jude)

Rooting Deeply NOW – Branching Widely NOW. That is our theme for 2010. That is our vision and you will notice that one word is repeated – that word is NOW.

So, with that in mind, let us turn to the book of Jude. I do hope you kept your finger in it when it was read earlier. If not it can be found on page 1231. Jude is a letter of only some 25 verses, meaning it has in the NIV some six hundred words, only around four hundred and fifty in the original language that the New Testament was written in, in Greek. This morning we are going to concentrate on four verses to see about this word, NOW, this sense of urgency. Verse 20

“But you, dear friends, build yourselves 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. 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.” (Jude 1:20-23 NIV)

It is the word near the middle that to me gives a sense of urgency – that word is ‘snatch’. Snatch has the sense of speed, the sense of now, the sense of urgency. But let us look a little more closely at these verses and in them we see four groups of people, so now you know it is a four point sermon.

Dear Friends

The first group is the ones that Jude addresses as ‘Dear friends’. These are the ones he previously addresses in verse 1 as

“...To those who have been called, who are loved by God the Father and kept by Jesus Christ:” (Jude 1:1 NIV)

So we are called by God the Father – loved by God the Holy Spirit and because of the death and resurrection of Jesus kept by God the Son, Jesus. Think about that for a moment and let it sink in.....

That should be so uplifting for us. Our self-esteem should be high because of what God has done for us.

So what are we to do, if God has done all this? We are told in verse 20

“...build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit.”
(Jude 1:20 NIV)

Apparently there were some going around who were preaching wrong things.

- There were those saying that certain lifestyles were alright because they were now free and so did not have to conform to any of God’s laws anymore.
- There were those saying that it is OK to sin now because then you will be forgiven later.
- There were those who were dreamers who would reject all spiritual authority because they were in touch with God directly and know better

But we are not to go down this route. We are to build ourselves up. And that verb ‘build up’ is in the present continuous tense. This means that we should always be doing it – it is not something that we do once and then forget about it, it is something that we continually have to do and so it has to be done NOW.

And how is that achieved? We have as he says a holy faith, or previously he has said ‘salvation’ but we will only know of this if we continue to read the Bible, join with others to study the Bible, like in a housegroup of which there are several at ADBC on several nights of the week, on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday evenings. Look in the weekly sheet. And then to pray, to talk with God on a regular basis. Do you do that? Only you can answer that question.

So why do we need to build ourselves up? For three groups of people.

Those Who Question

The first group is those who ask questions. Verse 22

“Be merciful to those who doubt;” (Jude 1:22 NIV)

“...those who doubt;” is another way of saying “...those who ask questions. There will be those who are exploring the Christian faith who will want to ask questions. Sadly there are some Christians who think that asking questions is wrong and that one should just accept.

Questions are a way of clearing up doubt and so when someone asks questions, we should be merciful, and answer the questions. However to answer the questions we ourselves need to be built up in the faith, to know the answers to the questions. So we need to keep on being built up NOW and to answer questions NOW. It is no good saying to someone to come back next year, maybe next week is OK for a bit of research, but the time most people want to hear the answer is NOW.

Those Playing With Fire

That is the first group. So what about the second group? Those who are playing with fire. Verse 23

“snatch others from the fire and save them...” (Jude 1:23 NIV)

These folk have gone further than having some doubts and so are questioning things – they are actually playing with fire – they have begun to

“... change the grace of our God into a licence for ...” (Jude 1:4 NIV)

The person may say that they are a Christian, but the lifestyle just does not match up to the label they give themselves. They do not see that their lifestyle, things they are doing are necessarily wrong – some have convinced themselves that they are spiritual Christians, but they are suffering from a delusion.

So there is this sense of urgency – this snatching. If a child is walking with its mother along a busy road and the child goes into the road the mother will snatch that child back from the road and onto the path.

You snatch something NOW, hopefully not when the damage has been done, but NOW. There is that sense of urgency.

Then we have a third group

Those Who Preach Wrong Things

These are those who have gone through the fire so to speak and now tell others that they way they life is the way that God meant it to be and they should join them. Everyone else does it so it is OK for us as Christians to do it – we need to get up to date is one argument that is used.

But beware, we need to go to this group with fear. Verse 23

“...to others show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.” (Jude 1:23 NIV)

Why fear? It is because we need to realise that we could be their and this is why knowing our own faith and building up that faith is so important because some are very good at leading others astray. It is not always obvious and sometimes it can be very subtle. We must know our faith or we too could be led astray

But did you notice one word that kept on coming up – that word was ‘Mercy’ We see the word firstly in verse 2 of Jude.

“Mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance.” (Jude 1:2 NIV)

It is almost like a prayer. May mercy be yours in abundance. We need to receive mercy from God and in abundance because we have gone against God. One definition of mercy is:

compassionate or kindly forbearance shown toward an offender, an enemy, or other person in one's power

That is what God does for us. His mercy sent God the Son, Jesus to die for us on the cross. His mercy meant that we can have salvation. And this mercy we are to extend to others.

- To Those Who Question – we have to be patient, answer their questions and at times it will be appropriate to challenge them when we have answered. We need to ask them questions to help their understanding. It is no good giving a lecture every time someone asks us a question, because most of us do not learn best that way and maybe very soon the person will stop asking questions. It is better to have a dialogue rather than a monologue. So in mercy we keep talking to them NOW, helping them see the truth.
- To Those Playing With Fire – Here our mercy means that we want to snatch them out of the fire – that we do not leave them to get burnt. Of course they may reject what we say. We still need to be merciful to them and in our mercy we do not write them off, but speak to them NOW, trying to snatch them from the fire they are playing with.
- And finally we are to show mercy to the Those Who Preach Wrong Things. Even in this situation we are to help them, to guide them, even though there is hate in that situation. Verse 23

“...to others show mercy, mixed with fear—*hating* even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.” (Jude 1:23 NIV)

Hate seems a little strong. How can we be merciful, help someone whom we hate. We can't. But God was merciful to us, but he did not hate us, but we hated him. As Christians we are not to hate others, but to hate what they do. This is what is meant by

“...*hating* even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.” (Jude 1:23 NIV)

We are to hate the sin, but show mercy to the sinner which we can only do when we love them. This can be difficult, very difficult but if it means helping another person to find God, is it not worth it?

Sadly, at time we can be very complacent. We enjoy what we have and why do we need to help someone else find Jesus? But that person is going to hell, and we can help that person NOW. It has to be NOW because tomorrow may be too late.

This is why this year there will various forms of outreach, ways others, our friends and neighbours can find out about Christianity. At present you can take advantage of two Alpha courses, both at church, one on Monday evening and the other on Wednesday mornings. There will be other events during the year, for all the church, for women, for men, but at all we need people and we can only do that if we all talk to our friends, our neighbours, our family even.

Our theme for 2010 is

Rooting Deeply Now – Branching Widely Now

The word is NOW with a sense of urgency, like the White Rabbit.

The rabbit in Alice in Wonderland, he is getting to his appointment because he is late. Sadly for some we already know it is too late to enter the Kingdom of God, but we have a responsibility to others for whom it is not too late to show God's mercy and help them and bring them along to events at church, or at least try.