

It was a cold and rainy day in the late fall of 1981 in El Paso, Texas. I had built a fire in our family room fireplace to take the chill off the house. As the fire burned down, I put another log on the red-hot embers.

I sat down and waited for it to catch fire. When the room began to get chilly again and the log had not yet caught fire, I went over and began to fan it. All that did was send billows of smoke out into the room. I checked the damper, but it was still open, so I then bent down and blew on it and **POOF!** It burst into flame.

I sat down and that small inner voice that I recognize as the Lord began to say “This is like the church. Those of you who are on fire with the Holy Spirit try to fan those around you, trying to get them to catch on fire, but all you get is a lot of smoke. But when I breathe my Spirit upon the church it will go like wildfire.

Folks, I have carried that word in my heart for 40 years persevering in faith for the church that one day will experience that Holy Spirit breath of God that will catch the Body of Christ up in the fire of revival.

Looking back in history we find that before every major revival there was a time of darkness and gloom when people turned away from living for God and sin seemed to take over the world. Our Old Testament reading this morning about the coming Day of The Lord calls people to return to God with repentance by rending their heart not their garments.

Our New Testament scripture from Jude brings us some very practical advice of how to persevere in faith during a time of darkness and gloom. As the Day of the Lord draws near, God’s judgment will come swiftly to those who continue to live sinful lives while refusing to repent and accept God’s mercy and forgiveness. I believe we are in such a time today. We have had our lives so disrupted by covid and its variants that we are in a time of great upheaval where the masking has tried to quiet the word of God and churches that were considered nonessential left a void for spiritual darkness to get a foothold. Never in my lifetime has the world been so spiritually dry and in need of a spiritual awakening that will usher in a Holy Spirit breathed revival fire.

So, let’s look at the advice Jude, a servant of Jesus, has for us today as we persevere in faith. Jude first admonishes us to build ourselves up in our most holy faith. The first and foremost way to build up our faith is to get to know what God’s word says in the Bible. Reading our Bible daily gives us a firm foundation that will reveal to us a relationship with a covenant God that loves you. Build up your faith by entering into a deeper relationship with Jesus that reveals the power of the Holy Spirit.

I love the fact that this church has learning opportunities to build our faith through the Sunday School studies and the life groups and prayer nights. But there comes a time that God calls us to put into practice what we are learning. We must step out in faith, go out on a limb, and do something that will test our faith in order to deepen it.

During the time our children were in grade school I was a stay-at-home mom. I had decided to clean out my closet and get rid of all my old thread-bare clothes that I had sewn and re-sewn so many times that they wouldn’t hold together any longer. I had only a couple of good outfits left when I finished so I thought I would buy one new outfit each time Ken got paid. It was a great plan, but a week or so later Ken’s company let him go in the process of closing down the company. Now what was I going to do? I was without any means to buy new clothes. I knew God was aware of the situation but in this instance, I was to learn that God was also my provider. One of Ken’s co-workers said she had been cleaning out her closets and wondered if I would like some outfits that she was getting rid of. Ken told her he was sure I would like them.

So, when he went to the car to get them, she handed him a couple of dresses from the back seat. He thanked her for them and started to walk away but she said wait a minute and opened up the trunk where there was not 1, not 2, not even 3 or 4 but there were 7 large green garbage bags full of clothes. There were clothes for the kids and so many clothes that fit me that I had to hang an extra rod in the closet to hold them all. When we finished going through all the clothes, we had 3 large garbage bags of clothes that didn't fit us that we gave to our neighbors who had 10 children. God became our abundant provider when we could not provide for ourselves and in the process built my faith up as I went from reading about God providing for his people to really experiencing it.

Another item Jude lists for persevering faith is praying in the Holy Spirit. People often have trouble finding the words to pray but Romans 8:26 says... *the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.* Praying in the Holy Spirit can sometimes result in our groaning or speaking words in another language. Soon after I received my calling into the ministry, I found myself praying in a language I didn't know. I wondered if it was real or just a bunch of silly babel. One day I was preparing a Sunday School lesson and looking up some words in my Strong's Concordance when I spotted the transliteration for the pronunciation of a word that I kept repeating in my prayer language. The entire phrase I was repeating was "Oh Hear Me High Priest!" Now in my English, I never call Jesus My High Priest but in my prayer language I do. Praying in the Holy Spirit allows you to pray what The Lord's will is for the situation. It is prayer from Heaven to Earth.

Jude reminds us that through all our trials and tribulations that we need to keep ourselves in God's love. Jesus said in his sermon on the mount "Blessed are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of me. Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." Folks the enemy of our soul, Satan wants nothing more than to have us fall away from the Lord when the going gets tough. In those times we need to draw closer to the Lord keeping our mind saturated with the Word of God that pours out his love upon us.

Jude writes that we need to wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring us to eternal life. I don't know about you but waiting is difficult for me especially if it takes me an entire lifetime. We see glimpses of God's mercy in our life when we sin falling short of his glory and we don't get the punishment we deserve. Jesus was sent into this world to take our punishment on the cross. And it will be the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ that allows us to enter into the eternal life he has for us.

The 4 items Jude has listed so far have been about persevering faith in the believer's own spiritual life. 1) Building yourselves up in your most holy faith 2) praying in the Holy Spirit, 3) keep yourselves in God's love and 4) wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.

Now Jude turns his emphasis to the believers being what Nathan Wells called *Gospelizing People*, who are living out their persevering faith by sharing Jesus with others. Jude writes that we need to be merciful to those who doubt. When someone has doubts about the Christian faith it is a great opportunity for us to share how we have encountered God's love in our life and who Jesus is to us. In one of the churches, we were a part of, there was an elderly gentleman who would stand at the outside church door and greet everyone. Sometimes he would strike up a conversation with people by saying "Tell me about your Jesus." If they didn't have a personal relationship with Jesus, he would share his Jesus with them. What a gentle and merciful

way to help those who doubt that Jesus is real. As believers we need to pray for The Lord to encounter those who doubt.

Jude then shares that we need to save others by snatching them from the fire. When God breathes upon the church and it catches with the fire of revival, there will be some who are going to be caught in the fire of God's judgment. They have refused to accept Jesus Christ as their savior and have made a mockery of the faith but even so, God does not want anyone to perish. As God's people we must pray for the salvation of their soul to bring them into the kingdom of God. We need to put on the full armor of God so we are prepared to enter the spiritual battle that will pull down the strongholds of the spiritual forces of wickedness in the sinner's life. Snatching people out of the fire requires attentiveness to listening to God's directions in prayer and then to be obedient in doing what needs to be done.

The last of Jude's advice to persevering faith is to show mercy, mixed with fear to others—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh. God loves this world so much that he sent his only son, Jesus Christ, to become sin and to die on the cross for all sinners, not just some sinners like you and me, but all sinners, even the ones who have committed the most despicable crimes. Here again Jude says we are to show mercy to the sinner but in doing so we must be mindful that we don't get caught in the trap of their sinful life. Jesus defeated sin and death in his resurrection. When we show mercy to the sinner leading them to Jesus, the resurrection life brings them out of their grave of sin into the world of God's love, peace, and joy.

So, persevering in our faith with others Jude tells us to be merciful to those who doubt; save others by snatching them from the fire; and to show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh. Let God's people arise and persevere in faith until God breathes his Holy Fire upon the church once more.