

Promised Power to Persevere (Jude 1:17-25)

[Read Passage]

Main Idea: God's preserving power enables us to persevere together until the end of our blood-bought lives.

1. Remember God's Word

It's not easy to jump into the end of a letter, just like starting in the middle of a movie. So here's what's happened in this short letter so far. Jude is exhorting his readers to contend for the Christian faith. He would rather write about the wonderful theme of their salvation. But dangerous false teachers had crept into the congregation. Addressing this took precedence. Verse 4 tells us they were perverting the grace of God, abusing the gospel to allow for a life of ungodly living. "Let us continue in sin that grace may abound." Do you see the danger? Jude then takes 12 verses—half the letter—to describe their immorality in the strongest of terms. At the same time, he assures his listeners that God will surely judge these false teachers.

This takes us to our passage today. Jude tells his dear listeners: all this should be no surprise to you! Look at verse 17: "But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ." And what did they predict? Verse 18: "They said to you, 'In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions.'" All throughout Scripture, God's people are called to remember. Remember God's goodness. Remember God's promises. Remember what God has said! Through his appointed messengers, in the form of this book, God has definitively spoken. Jude here is likely referencing the writings of the apostle Paul. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 3:1-5: "In the last days...people will be lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness but denying its power."

These are the scoffers. They reject any moral authority outside themselves in their pride. Their consciences are not trained by the word of God, but are led by their subjective feelings. They say: "What I want now, I will do." They lack reverence for the one and only holy God. Lovers of pleasure, rather than lovers of God. They are not the blessed man who delights in the law of the Lord in Psalm 1.

Now, if we are honest with ourselves, even as Christians, we are prone to this as well. We succumb to pride. Our consciences need to be constantly recalibrated to Scripture. Don't we all find pleasure in things and people outside of God! // But Jude here is not speaking of Christians who struggle. In verse 19, we see that he is clearly talking about non-Christians. Look with me there: "It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit."

These people cause disunity among God's people. Their doctrine is lacking—what is true. They misunderstand and misapply what is morally permissible—what is right and wrong. They are not able to perceive the things of God because they are worldly, unspiritual. They are devoid of the Spirit. Look at 1 Corinthians 2:14, "The natural (worldly, same word!) person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned." Dead people cannot tell if it's sunny or cloudy. Spiritually dead people, without life from the Spirit, have no powers of spiritual discernment. They are unable to distinguish between what pleases God and what pleases themselves. They cannot help, but give into their ungodly passions. No Holy Spirit, no fruit of love for God or self-control.

These infiltrating influencers are formidable foes. Their lives of apparent freedom are so enticing, so exciting. Like mold spreading over old bread, they can slowly corrupt God's people unhindered. Love for God decays. // But Jude reminds them: "Remember, things are happening exactly as God told you they would." A gospel minister fortifies his people by pointing them back to God's unchanging and trustworthy Word. He doesn't stop there though, leaving them with "I told you so." No, he points them to a divine means of grace to contend for their faith. This is what we see in verse 21.

2. Treasure God's Love

“Keep yourselves in the the love of God.” Jude knew the danger of languishing love for God. When God's people abandon the love they had at first, the bride of Christ succumbs to the world, flesh, and the devil. The Puritan Thomas Manton knew this as well. Listen to the devastating effects of diminished love: “When love for Him cools, we do not guard our heart nor watch our tongue. We go through the motions in public worship because we are just not into it. We confess our sins without remorse. We pray for spiritual blessings with no expectation of obtaining what we ask. We are angry without realizing how dangerous that is. We say prayers for others without sympathy or brotherly love. We give thanks without gratitude.” Exactly what the devil wants.

So Jude exhorts: keep yourselves in the love of God! How, we ask? Jude gives us three ways. Look with me at verse 20: “But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.” Jude doesn't give us four unrelated commands. The central command is to keep. How does the beloved church of God, keep themselves in the love of God? What's the means? By building, by praying, by waiting.

As the scoffers try to tear down the household of God, Jude gets them to engage in a corporate spiritual construction program. Christians are to *build* one another up in their most holy faith. Building one another up in gospel doctrine. Growing firm in their convictions of who God has revealed himself to be in Scripture. Being awed by our Triune providential God. Having an ever deepening grasp of what God has done for us in Christ. // But building not just with the solid bricks of gospel doctrine. Building also with the mortar of gospel culture. Living out the reality of who we are in Christ. Doing the one another's of Scripture: Forgiving and bearing one another's burdens. Comforting and correcting one another. Serving and honouring one another. Together, God's people are to build a firm foundation for the Christian life established upon God's Word.

The second way to keep ourselves in the love of God is by praying in the Holy Spirit. Peter tells us in 1 Peter 2, that we are like living stones, being built up as a spiritual house. Dead stones that have been given life

by the Holy Spirit. Prayer, is the breath of someone alive in Christ. Praying in the Spirit is praying by the Spirit's power and according to His direction. His assistance, and his guidance. We know this familiar text in Romans 8: "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groaning too deep for words." Listen again to Thomas Manton: "Prayer is a work too hard for us. We can babble of ourselves, but we cannot pray without the Holy Ghost; we can put words into prayer, but it is the Spirit who puts affections, without which it is but a little cold prattle and spiritless talk." When we admit that we cannot pray without the Spirit's help, and depend on Him to help us pray, that is the first part of praying in the Spirit.

But there's another essential element: soaking our prayers with the Word of God, the sword of the Spirit. Listen to what John Piper says about this: "If you live in the Word of God, meditating on it day and night by reading it every day and memorizing portions to carry with you all day and savouring them hour by hour, then your prayers will be shaped by the Word. Which means they will be shaped by the Spirit." This is what Pastor Tim has taught me, and so many of us to do: praying by the Spirit's *help*, and praying the Spirit's *Word* in Scripture. Pastor Tim, thank you for equipping us with this vital means of keeping ourselves in the love of God. //

So we build one another up in the gospel doctrine and culture. We pour out our hearts together with the Spirit's power and direction. And we wait together. Verse 21: "We wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life." The unbelieving scoffers only had the present in view: "I want my pleasure now!" But Christians, are to fix their eyes on future reward. We won't receive the just penalty of death for our many sins. Instead of eternal separation from God, we will one day spend eternity in his glorious presence. We wait for this day by crying out together: come Lord Jesus! And we wait together with hope, knowing that hope does not put us to shame, because God's *love* has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. What hope we have as God's people! //

Now Jude knows, that this will not be easy for everyone. Ever the sensitive pastor, he gives instructions on how to engage with these struggling sheep. Look with me at verse 22: “Have mercy on those who doubt; save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.” This is the gospel in action: Christians have been shown mercy by God. Likewise, they are to show mercy to one another. Some will doubt. “Does God really answer my prayers? Is Jesus really better than anything this world offers? What guarantee do I have that I am even saved?” I've heard both children and adults ask versions of these questions. Showing mercy means leading these saints along gently. Not with an air of condescension, but with understanding and patience. Others require a different kind of mercy: snatching them out of the fire. Those in imminent danger of shipwrecking their faith, we snatch them out without delay. We don't play with fire, especially the eternal fires of hell. This mercy is shown with fear. The fear of being pulled down by those who are already sinking in their love of sin.

If God brought you here today, and you are not yet a Christian, you cannot obey this command. You cannot keep yourself in the love of God, because you do not love God. You can't! You might not be here causing division. But you do not have God's Spirit dwelling in you. You are spiritually dead, unable to muster up any desire to love God on your own. You can't conjure up any faith to believe what you are hearing. You can't muster up any willpower to change the way you are living. You're not looking forward to the mercy of Christ that leads to eternal life. All that awaits you is eternity in hell, the absence of God's good presence.

But the good news is that it doesn't start with your love for God. The gospel is about God's love for sinners like you. God's love shown in Jesus by sending him to die on the cross, paying the penalty of death for sin. He tasted death, separation from God, so that sinners like you wouldn't have to. Instead, sinners given the gift of faith and repentance receive life in Jesus. Mercy that leads to eternal life. We pray that God gives you life by his mercy, faith to believe, and repentance to turn to Jesus for your salvation and joy.

Now if you are a Christian, you cannot obey this command either. On your own, you cannot keep yourself in the love of God. But our passage doesn't end here. It finishes, with one of my favourite and most precious verses in all of Scripture. Look at verse 24.

3. Behold God's Power

“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.” We are invited to behold the mighty power of God. God is *able* to keep, to preserve his people until Christ returns. It is *will* to do so. Look with me at verse 1 of this letter: “To those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ.” God has *chosen* his own before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him. In *love* he predestined them for adoption as sons in Christ. And he will *keep* his people for the glory of Christ. That's his sovereign *will*. But he is not like us, having many plans and desires, but not the ability or wisdom to carry it out. No, our God is able! His sovereign, infinite *power* secures the complete salvation of his chosen people.

In the cross of Christ, he *justifies* his people by the blood of Jesus. A perfect sacrifice given for imperfect sinners. The righteousness of Christ covering our filthy rags. Given to those who turn from sin and trust in his substitutionary death. // He not only justifies us, he *sanctifies* us. He keeps us from stumbling, from falling ultimately into sin and error. We can stand no longer than omnipotent God daily bears us up. But we need to stand. When you're helping a child learn how to walk, the child still needs to do the walking. Pastor Tim said at our Wednesday prayer meeting, “there is no godliness without effort.” But in our striving, in our weakness and failing, our God holds us fast. We can *keep* ourselves in the love of God because we are *kept* for Christ and he *keeps* us from stumbling!

And it doesn't stop there! He has justified us by the blood of Christ. He sanctifies us to make us more like Christ. And one day, he will glorify us to be the spotless bride for Christ. This is the utopian picture of marriage we are given in Ephesians 5. We, the blood-bought church, will be presented to our husband in

splendour. Without spot or wrinkle. Holy and without blemish. We will be brought into into the presence of our Master, not in fear or shame, but with great joy!

What does the only God receive for what he has done? Look at verse 25: The endless praise and joy of his people! He receives all glory. He is great in majesty. His reign is absolute. His power is limitless. For all eternity, He will be exalted and enjoyed by His people! Forever our song will be Hallelujah our God reigns! //

Brothers and sisters, how must we live in light of these glorious truths? I want to hone in on one way of keeping ourselves—each other—in the love of God. The amazing responsibility and privilege we have to help one another fix our gaze and affections on God. “Guard someone’s heart” should not just be a phrase we use when dating! It is a task of eternal significance in our lives together. To that end, I want to exhort us to grow in praying in the Spirit together.

If a baby is born, and does not cry, there is cause for alarm. Breathing is the means God has ordained to sustain life. Praying in the Spirit is a definitive sign of spiritual life. Prayer by the Spirit’s power and infused with Scripture is an indicator of a regenerate heart. Affections that increasingly delights in Jesus. Awareness of one’s own weakness and steadily shrugging off self-sufficiency. An ardent love for God coupled with a growing love for his people. As we grow to love others, we see that they, like us, struggle to keep themselves in the love of God. Struggle to be in the Word and in prayer. Struggle in the very basics of the Christian faith. We want to help them, give them advice, be with them. But what I’ve found to be most edifying for myself and my brother or sister, time after time, is to pray together in the Spirit.

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said this: “Never resist any urge to pray.” We have many urges we need to resist. But prayer is not one of them. Take every opportunity to pray in the Spirit with God’s people. Look away from your own resources and draw your fellow saints to the infinite resources of God in Christ. Immerse yourself in the Word of God and be ready to be a conduit of grace through prayer. As the Spirit prompts you to

pray with others, for others, he will bring to mind what you have meditated on. Like a master mechanic selecting the perfect wrench, the Spirit draws out what you have taken in to encourage the saints.

I've lost track of how many times people in this church have encouraged me through praying in the Spirit. This has been in person, online, or through a message. My love for God has been rekindled. My trust in him has been bolstered. I've been given fresh faith for what lies ahead. What a blessing you have been to me. Let us avail ourselves often of this precious means of grace. Praying in the Spirit with one another, for another—that our gaze may be lifted to see the glory, the majesty, the power and authority of God in Christ.