

To God Who is Able to Keep

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[0 : 0 0] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 20th of June 1999. The preacher is Paul Barker.

His sermon is entitled, To God Who is Able to Keep, and is from Jude, verses 17 to 25. Have you noticed how many television advertisements are about some form of protection?

On those rare ventures when I switch over from the ABC, almost every selection of advertisements has something about some sort of protection.

Our noses need protection from the sun. Our cars need protection from the sun. And thieves. Our houses need protection from thieves and fire.

The walls of our houses need protection from children drawing on them. Our bodies need protection from the odour of perspiration. Our clothes need protection from wine, beetroot and lipstick stains.

[1 : 0 9] Drivers need protection from other drivers. And so on and so forth. Sun cream, alarm systems, deodorants, paints, soap, fences, police, smoke detectors, insurance.

We all need protection. We all need protection. Everything, it seems, needs protection. The reason Jude wrote this little letter in the New Testament was for the sake of protection.

To protect his readers, Christian people. To protect them from error and immorality. To protect them from false teachers. From false shepherds who would lead them astray.

In the previous two weeks we've seen him describe and condemn the false teachers. Those who are seeking to mislead the Christians to whom he writes.

But now in these last verses he comes to the real point of his letter. Not to describe and condemn. But to protect his readers. You may like to have the passage open in front of you.

[2 : 1 6] Page 994 in the Black Bibles. And we'll find here that he has seven things to protect Christians. Seven things.

The first is captured by the saying forewarned is forearmed. Because he begins these last couple of paragraphs writing to the beloved Christians.

Remember. You've been told, he says. You've been warned already that there will be false teachers in the church. So to be forewarned ought to make you forearmed.

You ought to be on guard. You ought to be on the alert. He says. Remember the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. For they said to you in the last time there will be scoffers indulging their own ungodly lusts.

He quotes there from one apostle. Peter. In 2 Peter chapter 3. But Peter was not the only apostle who warned Christians about false teachers. Saint Paul did the same.

[3 : 2 4] For example when he spoke to the elders of the Ephesians in Acts chapter 20. Warning them that there would be false teachers coming in amongst them. To mislead them. But none of the apostles had made that up.

Because all they were doing were picking up Jesus' own words. When Jesus warned his disciples and apostles. There would be false teachers. People who would come to pervert the truth and mislead Christians and so on.

It is a common warning in the New Testament. That there would be those in the last days who would mislead Christian people. Notice how Jude says that in verse 18.

In the last time or the last days. In 1999. As we anticipate the year 2000.

Or if you're a purist. The year 2001. With a new millennium. There is a growing sense of anticipation in some circles. That this could be the last days.

[4 : 24] That Jesus is about to return. That the Y2K bug is the means by which God's going to bring destruction to this earth. Or something else quite fanciful. There is nothing new in that.

In the year 999 and 1000. Thousands of people thought that the end of the world was nigh. That Jesus was about to return. That they were the last days.

Are they? Are these the last days? Well yes they are. But not because next year is the year 2000. But because the whole period from when Jesus ascended.

To when he returns. Are the last days. Jude acknowledges that because he says. In the last time. That is the time in which he's writing.

Is the last days. The last time. And that was in the middle of the first century. Any period between the ascension of Jesus. And his return. Is the last days.

[5 : 23] And we live in them. As everybody has. For the last 1970 odd years. The mark of those days.

From the ascension of Jesus. To today. And to whenever Jesus returns. The mark of those days. These days. Is false teachers.

Jude describes them again. In verse 19. And characteristically uses. Three expressions to do so. Summarising what we've seen. The last two weeks.

It is these worldly people. Devoid of the spirit. Who are causing divisions. I think it's an ironic description.

These false teachers. It seemed. Claimed a special. Super spiritual knowledge. We saw that in verse 8. Where they. Talk about their dreams. And seem to claim.

[6 : 20] Some sort of. Divine authority. For their words. As though somehow. They have a special endowment. Of God's spirit. Jude exposes. Their stupidity.

Rather than have a special endowment. Of God's spirit. Rather than be. Super spiritual. They're actually devoid. Of the spirit. They don't even have God's spirit.

They're purely worldly. And their immorality. Is evidence of that. Moreover. They bring division. To the church.

And bringing division. Is a sign of the absence. Of God's spirit. For God's spirit. Is a spirit. That brings unity. Though never at the expense. Of the truth. About Jesus Christ.

Well like Jude's readers. Who are reminded. That they ought to know. And be aware. And be ready. For false teachers. So us. Be forewarned.

[7 : 17] And hence. Be forearmed. False teachers. Are to be expected. In our day. Until Jesus returns. And the first step.

Of protection. Is being. Ready for that. And remembering. What we've been taught. In the Bible. Well the second point.

Of protection. Comes at the beginning. Of verse 20. But you beloved. Build yourselves up. On your most holy faith. The image.

Or picture. That Jude is using. Is of a building. And the people. The church. The Christians. Are the building. And the foundation. On which the building.

Is laid. Is the faith. The same faith. That they were to contend for. Back in verse 3. The faith about Jesus Christ. The faith that was.

[8 : 13] Entrusted to the apostles. Initially. That's been recorded. For us in scripture. That's our basis. That's our foundation. As Christians. And as a church.

So the implication. Of the model. Or picture. That's being used here. Is that we must know that. We must stand firm in it. We must meditate. And study upon it.

And understand it. In its depth. And breadth. It implies that we cannot move from it. Sometimes people. Seem to imply. That they start off.

With the basic. Biblical faith. But as they. Grow on. In the Christian life. They move from it. Into other things. But never can that be the case. For Christian people.

Our starting point. Is our ongoing foundation. From which we cannot. And must not move. The faith. Entrusted to the apostles. Recorded for us in scripture.

[9 : 11] The gospel of Jesus Christ. The command. To build yourselves up. On the most holy faith. Is a plural command.

It's not just that. You as an individual. Must build yourself up. On the faith. But that you. As the people. Must build each other up.

On the most holy faith. There is a mutual. Building up. Or edification. That is to be going on. You see. Christians belong together. We're not pursuing.

Our own. Individual. Pursuit of Christian maturity. But we are pursuing. Our own. Corporate. Christian maturity. Building each other up.

Encouraging each other. Supporting each other. Belonging to each other. The implication is that. The person who. Tries to go solo.

[10 : 09] The one who's not part of a church. Not taking an active role. In the fellowship of God's people. Is running a dangerous life. Invariably.

Those who separate from Christians. And try to live the solo Christian life. Wither. And in the end. Their faith dies. This is also a continuous tense.

To build yourself up. Is not a once off action. It's not something that happens. When you are baptized. Or confirmed. It is something to be ongoing. Day by day.

Week by week. Month by month. Year by year. Belonging to God's church. Church. So that's the second thing. Firstly.

To remember. The warnings of false teachers. Secondly. To build yourself up. In the faith. Thirdly. In verse 20. To pray.

[11 : 07] In the Holy Spirit. That doesn't mean special prayer. Or prayer in tongues. Or some. Special. Supernatural. Spiritual way of praying.

It is just a way of describing. Christian prayer. The false teachers. Were devoid of the spirit. They didn't have God's spirit. Perhaps the implication is.

They didn't even pray. But all Christians have God's spirit. And all Christian prayer. Is prayer in the Holy Spirit. Jude here is exhorting.

His readers. To pray. And we're told elsewhere. In scripture. That all Christians. Are prompted in prayer. By God's spirit.

Are given what words to say. And pray. By God's spirit. In contrast. To the false teachers. Who do not have that spirit. Spirit. But the reason.

[12 : 06] Why Jude is exhorting. Prayer here. Is this. Prayer. Acknowledges. Dependence. On God. Prayer. Acknowledges. That we do not have.

All the resources. In and of ourselves. For our own spiritual life. Or perseverance. In faith. Prayer. Acknowledges. That ultimately. Protection. Comes from God.

So pray. Pray. So pray. And keep praying. I guess for Jude's readers.

To see the danger. Of the false teachers. In their midst. Would have given them. Great cause. To pray. Maybe we're more complacent.

Prayer ought to be as urgent. As regular. And as regular. For us. As Jude was encouraging. For his readers. I guess it's a bit disappointing.

[13 : 11] When just out of. In our church. Out of. All our parishioners. Only a dozen or more. A few more. Come to our monthly prayer meeting. We need to pray. We need to pray. We need to pray.

For ourselves. We need to pray. For our leaders. We need to pray. For each other. We need to pray. For our church. For our church. For our church. For our church. That's why. On Tuesday night. We've got a prayer meeting.

To pray for. The selection of a new archbishop. For Melbourne. We need to pray. We need to pray. For God. To protect us.

And our leaders. That's why. Each month. We have a prayer sheet. For the parish. To encourage you. To pray. Every day. For some aspect.

Of our church's life. It's why. We encourage you. To form prayer. Partners. Or prayer triplets. To be praying. Regularly. With somebody else.

[14 : 05] For each other. And for the church. It's why. Later in the year. In October. We'll run a. Seminar workshop. On prayer. To encourage you.

To pray. And pray more effectively. Jude's exhortation. To his readers. And to us. Is pray.

There is no excuse. Not to. And every danger. If we don't. Fourthly.

Keep yourselves. In the love of God. God. The beginning of verse 21. Already in this letter. Jude has addressed. His readers. As those who are.

Beloved in God. In verse 1. And twice more. He's called them. Beloved. In verse 17. And verse 20. But now. He's saying. Keep yourselves. In the love of God.

[15 : 03] Remain in it. It's God. Who's established. The relationship. Of love. It's God. Who's loved you. Now keep in the orbit. Or sphere.

Of that love. Now Jude doesn't explain. How that's to be done. In this verse. But the New Testament. Elsewhere. Makes it very clear. How we keep in God's love. Jesus.

Perhaps most clearly. Of all. Expressed it in John 15. Abide in my love. By keeping my commandments. That is by obedience.

We remain in God's love. When we obey his commands. There's no other way. To remain in God's love. It's not about warm. Spiritual feelings. Or emotions.

That might come over us. From time to time. It's about down to earth. Practical obedience. Of God's commandments. God's bestowed his love on us.

[16 : 00] And the means by which. We respond to that love. And keep in it. Is to obey what he commands. Obedience isn't very popular.

We can see that. Because of the fuss. Created by Sophie Rees-Jones. Pledging to obey. For us obeying God. May not be popular.

But is essential. If we are to be protected. And persevere in Christian faith. There is no other way. To remain in God's love.

To remain in God's love. Than to obey his commandments. The fifth point about protection. Is the second half of verse 21.

Look forward. To the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ. That leads to eternal life. To look forward is. Got a sense of eager anticipation.

[16 : 59] Like a child. Like a child looking forward to. To his or her birthday. Or me looking forward to holidays. And what they are looking forward to.

Is not. Described as. Just heaven. It's described as the mercy. Of the Lord Jesus Christ. Already. Christians are recipients. Of God's mercy.

Already. Recipients of Jesus mercy. And Jude has prayed. For his readers. In verse 2. May mercy. Peace and love. Be yours in abundance. But he uses the expression here.

I think deliberately. To look forward to mercy. And the mercy of Jesus. Is to acknowledge our dependence. On his death on the cross.

For it's there that Jesus mercy. Is extended to us. To forgive us our sins. To establish us as God's people. And to guarantee for us. Eternal life with God in heaven.

[17 : 57] But to look forward to mercy. Acknowledges again. That we have no claim. On our salvation. We come empty handed.

To receive from God. We contribute nothing. And do not deserve. The salvation God has for us. The eternal life. That is kept for us.

And the reason why Jude has used. This expression here. It seems to me. Is that every expression. Of error and false teaching. Involves at some point.

Some claim of self-righteousness. At some point. False teaching says. I have something to contribute.

To my salvation. I have something to offer God. When we begin to think like that. We're on a dangerous route.

[18 : 54] But to look forward to mercy. Is to acknowledge our empty handedness. To acknowledge that salvation. Is entirely a gift of God. From beginning to end.

And that on that day. When Jesus returns. And we stand before his judgment throne. If we try to offer something. We'll receive nothing.

But if we come empty handed. Relying on God's mercy. Then eternal life. Will indeed be ours. There is no relationship with God.

Outside the mercy. Of the Lord Jesus Christ. And as soon as we think. That we do not need that mercy. Then we've broken the relationship.

And we're on the way to hell. Not heaven. So far. Five points about protection. For Christian people.

[19 : 56] Remember. What the apostles have said. About false teachers. Build yourselves up in the faith. Pray in the Holy Spirit. Keep yourselves in the love of God.

And look forward to the mercy. Of the Lord Jesus Christ. Embedded in those five things. Are faith, hope and love. Three key characteristics.

Of Christians. Build yourselves up on the faith. Look forward is hope. And keep yourselves in the love of God. Embedded in these five things.

Are each of the three persons. Of the Trinity. The love of God. The Father. The mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Son. And praying in the Spirit.

The third person of the Trinity. And so far. The five could be summarised. As saying. Take heed to yourself. But now.

[20 : 55] The sixth point of protection. Take heed to others. Take heed to yourself. We've seen. But now. The sixth point. The sixth point.

Is a right way. Of responding to others. And we might think. That Jude's response. To the others. The false teachers. And those who are following them. Would be a simple. And downright statement.

Of condemnation. And have nothing to do with them. But his response. Is somewhat different. To that. There are three groups. He mentions. In verses 22 and 23.

The first group. mentioned in verse 22 he says have mercy on some who are wavering the waverers the doubters the people who are uncertain the people who've become a bit confused by the false teachers the people who are now trying to weigh up what's right and what's wrong don't be swift to condemn such people have mercy on them allow them their questioning and lead them back into paths of truth deal tenderly with them he's saying show them what's true and expose the folly of the false teachers but also recognize that as people waver and doubt for we all do at times as we work through such doubts but stand firm at the end in truth and faith then our faith has grown and strengthened through the questioning process but the second group is different these are people who've gone further down the path of error and falsehood these are ones who it seems have agreed with the false teachers jude says of them in verse 23 save others by snatching them out of the fire there's an urgency and desperation about this people who've gone down the path of untruth and error and godlessness snatch them out before it's too late don't just stand back and and say to them well i'll allow you your questionings and your thinkings but bring them out of the fire pluck them out desperately there's old testament background to this expression just as sodom was destroyed by fire so will those who pursue that path so before it's too late snatch them back bluntly forcefully violently even desperately and urgently recognize the peril in which some people are in and respond accordingly the third group are perhaps even the teachers themselves have mercy on still others with fear hating even the tunic defiled by their bodies this is reminding us that no one is beyond redemption even the leaders of false teaching perhaps certainly it seems to be those who are accepting holus bolus everything that's been taught that's wrong because we've already seen plenty of hints of immorality and wrong sexual lusts being expressed by the false teachers the tunic that's defiled by their bodies seems to resonate with such sexual immorality literally it's their underclothes their underwear and defiled by their bodies that is stained by bodily fluids and excrement and so on it's a pretty revolting sort of expression but have mercy on them with fear with fear keep your distance their sin is contagious follow them too much identify with them too much and you'll be enticed into what they're speaking about and doing don't underestimate the power of the attraction of sin but the verse also has an old testament background that reminds us that God can exchange even the filthiest garments with clean that's why have mercy because God is even yet able to save six things so far about protecting Christian people remember

what you've been warned about build yourselves up in the faith pray in the spirit keep yourselves in the love of God look forward to the mercy and deal rightly with those who are involved in some way or other with false teaching and ungodliness at the end of a film do you stay and watch the credits well I do depending on what the film is but sometimes the credits go on for almost as long as the film every man and his dog seems to get a mention there are so many names sometimes that I wonder whether mine will be there just because I've done something unawares about this film and some of the descriptions of the people I ponder what they're on about I mean who is the best boy and why don't they list the second best boy and the next best and a slightly good boy and then a slightly bad boy

[26 : 31] I mean they have so many names why not list them all at the end of your Christian life what names will be in the credits you could probably start listing dozens your own at the top people who taught you the faith friends, family, church leaders Sunday school teachers and so on and so far all of the six things about protection we've seen so far are about human effort by and large but they are nothing without the seventh point and the seventh point reminds us that really in the end there will be only one name deserving of credit for a life that ends in Christian faith the name of God it will be the only name in the credits for all the credit will belong to him and that's why Jude ends this letter as he does with these famous words full of reassurance full of confidence and comfort and strength for Christians who are being rocked by false teachers these are words to pin yourself on for Christians who are in a church that seems to be scandalized by immorality these are words of strength and reassurance and comfort in the midst of such rocking of the boat for Christians under pressure from error and under threat from licentiousness these are words of guaranteed security forever for it is the safe hand of God that keeps you from falling

Jude is saying yes expend all your effort on those first six things you must do that but in the end the full credit belongs to the God whose safe hand will keep you from falling from falling into sin and from falling into judgment in verse 21 Jude said keep yourselves in the love of God now he says to him who is able to keep you and though they're translated by the same English word keep the original words are different keep yourselves in the love of God is literally to watch but to the God who is able to keep it's to guard it's an active expression and the two go together because it is God whom we watch if we're to keep ourselves in his love but it is God who is actively doing the guarding and the keeping the credit belongs to God and God alone he's the real keeper his hands are safer than Ian Healy's or Adam Gilchrist's nothing falls through his hands they are absolutely safe and sure that's marvellous security isn't it for Christian people isn't that full of confidence for you isn't that full of reassurance as you wonder and ponder as you doubt or waver but God's power is not only able to keep you from falling but actually to make you stand before his presence the last part of the Old Testament the prophet Malachi asked the question we know it from Handel's Messiah who can stand when he appears and the answer no one

Isaiah the great prophet had a vision of the glory of God his presence filling the temple and what did Isaiah do he fell down prostrate before it shrinking away from God's glory cowering in his presence that's the right response to God you see whenever anyone comes close to the glory of God in the Bible they don't walk up boldly but they fall they cower they shrink from the holy and glorious presence of God himself but on the final day Christians will stand in his very presence they will stand without blemish an extraordinary thought no longer with the stain of sin in our lives pure and spotless we will be and God will have no charge against us no accusation to make against us why will that be?

why can we anticipate such an extraordinary thing? because the only God is our saviour the one who saves us from blemish from the stain of sin the one who saves us from the fires of judgment and he does that through Jesus Christ our Lord because it's the death of Jesus that does away with our sin it's the death of Jesus that takes away our blemishes that blots out our stains it's the death of Jesus that secures for us the announcement on that final day that we are acquitted accepted by God himself it's the atoning death of Jesus on the cross that guarantees that on that final day I will stand before God's presence without blemish rather than shrink and cower and fall prostrate before him and only God does that only God makes that possible none of my best effort will enable me to stand before his presence only God has the power to make that so and he's done it through Jesus Christ no wonder we will stand on that day with rejoicing and it's not just a heart that's sort of pleasantly happy because it's a sunny day it is a heart that is overflowing with exaltation with joy unspeakable with joy overflowing our hearts and our lives and our minds no wonder Jude finishes this letter with a statement of praise to God he can't contain himself when he thinks about the God who's done this for him and for his readers for protection in the Christian life trust God sure can for perseverance in the Christian life trust God sure can for confidence to stand on the final day without blemish in the presence of his glory with rejoicing trust God sure can all the credit belongs to him 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 saviour through Jesus Christ our Lord be glory majesty power and authority before all time and now and forever amen to do to■ can with going shall and and he will

Thank you.