

A Long and Joyous Obedience in the Same Direction

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[0 : 00] Before we get into the Word of God, let me say a quick prayer and ask for the Lord's blessing. Heavenly Father, remind us afresh this morning that your Word is true.

And whether we think it or not, or whether we know it or not, this is the true food that we need this morning. Lord, we thank you that we get to hear your Word.

And by your Spirit, Lord, we ask that that Word would go into our souls, that we consider it and obey it. And Lord, trust that when you say it will produce fruit in our lives, that it truly will.

So we give this time to you this morning in Christ's name. Amen. We moved to the area from the downtown. I mean, we're living in Ottawa, but we moved to the West End four years ago this upcoming June.

And one of the first things after we moved in and settled and we painted everything is I decided I was going to build a guest room in the basement. Have I framed anything in my life? No, I didn't.

[1 : 07] I ordered a bunch of wood. I picked it up. I put it through a window just because our basement's a bit tricky to get some 8-foot, 10-foot beams down there.

Anyways, I framed it up. It took me a while. And then I left it for like a year and a half, two years. That's it. That's all I did. I didn't even wire outlets.

I didn't think of drywall. I got discouraged or distracted. Probably both. I did not finish the job. About a year and a half, two years later, I finished the job with the help of actually my barber, which is kind of random, a point that doesn't need to be made in the sermon.

But anyways, he helped me. And we finally got it finished. It turned out I did a terrible job. So it was probably a good thing that I didn't complete it.

But it wouldn't be the first time that I began a project and didn't finish it. I have started things. And whether, again, distraction or discouragement, I tap out.

[2 : 18] I just leave it. It's half done. It's a half-framed room, metaphorically speaking. It reminded me this morning, or leading up to this morning, that it is so easy to start things, especially around January.

It is so easy to start things, but very, very challenging to finish. We're going to wrap up Jude this morning. There's been a warning and an encouragement to the church to love Jesus so much so that we would be willing to contend for the faith that was once delivered to all the saints.

Jude has reminded us that there will be false teachers at every age, something that is not new to the history of God.

If you remember, Jude gave us examples from the Israelites who were rescued from Egypt going into the Promised Land, and how there were false teachers and grumblers and rebels and the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, even the angelic beings who were rebels pushing against the authority and goodness of God.

For 23 verses, we have learned about judgment and warnings. And, if I'm honest, I'm a bit weary of the content. A lot of judgment, week after week, can be heavy.

[3 : 45] It has been heavy. And, the thought of contending indefinitely seems awfully hard and difficult. I put this out to you. Do you wonder, as I do, genuinely, sometimes that you might not be able to make it to the finish line of your faith?

That whether Christ comes back, or you are either a person of riper years, as the prayer book calls older folk, or some kind of accident, whatever, whether you meet your end in this life, or Christ comes back, do you ever wonder if you have the strength to make it to the end?

Or, have you simply started a faith journey only to not complete it? Given the topic and content of the letter, verses 1 to 23, save for a couple verses here and there that are wonderful sources of encouragement, especially verses 1 and 2, verses 24 and 25 seem like nice words to incorporate at the end of a very intense letter.

Jude will bookend the letter with nice encouragement, talking about us being the beloved of God, and it seems fitting.

However, these aren't just nice words that Jude bookends the letter with. They actually serve two huge purposes for us. The first, it's a relief and balm in times of struggle and doubt.

[5 : 27] We've talked about struggle and doubt a number of times over the past few weeks, and like I may mention just a few moments ago, a lot of talk about judgment and struggle and doubt.

Warnings are good, but nonstop warnings can be heavy. So, verses 24 and 25 that Brad read, they're balm to our souls, they're encouragement to us.

The rest for our weary souls. When you are tempted to rebel, when you are tempted to look elsewhere, to compromise on the truth of God's word, to not obey what God has called us to live out, this is balm for us, this is help for us, but it's also a preparation.

It's preparation for a long, faithful walk with Christ until either he brings us home through death or his return. It's a preparation in the same, to live out this faithful walk.

Eugene Peterson wrote a book on discipleship, and he entitled it A Long Obedience in the Same Direction. That's the Christian life. And this is what Jude is preparing us for, a long obedience in the same direction.

[6 : 55] Understanding that there are times of struggle, of valley, of discouragement, where we don't feel God's presence or even feel like engaging with him at all.

Jude is preparing us for this long obedience in the same direction. So Jude prepares us for a long obedience in the same direction by drawing our attention to two fundamental aspects of Jesus in verses 24 and 25.

Very simple. What Jesus does and who Jesus is. After our time in verse 24 and 25, I hope you will see with me that Eugene Peterson, although that's a wonderful way to talk about the Christian life, I think he should have added a very small but very significant adjective to his title.

It should have been this, in my humble opinion, a long and joyous obedience in the same direction.

Because verse 24 and 25 will help us to have joy for a lifetime as we venture with the Lord.

So let's jump into it. What Jesus does. Look with me at verse 24. This is what it says. 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.

[8 : 19] We might be tempted to skip to what Jesus does here. That he will keep us from stumbling, present us blameless.

But what does Jude tell us right before that? He says this. Now to him who is able, Jesus is able. This isn't just a comment on what he can do.

It is a comment of, I mean, our second point is who Jesus is but this is a key point for what Jesus does because he is able. It speaks to our Savior not being a weak Savior.

He does not suffer fatigue nor does he lack power. He has great abilities and powers. But it's not that Jesus has this great power because he was weak at some point and had to augment his weakness with great power.

It's not like Jesus came upon some source of his strength and that's how he is powerful, how he is great.

[9 : 30] but rather that he has always been able. He has always been strong. He has always had such great power. In fact, he is great power.

What do I mean by that? To say that Jesus doesn't just have power but he is power, it's an expression of Jesus' divine simplicity and if that confuses you, just stick with me for a moment.

This doctrine of divine simplicity is key to Christianity, key to the orthodox faith, the key to understanding who God is. And it means that Jesus, God, the Son of God incarnate, but really the entire Godhead, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, he exists not as a changeable being in which he acquires knowledge or power or abilities.

He never lacks. He is who he is and in that way, God has the attribute of salvific power from the very beginning.

There was never a time where God, the Son of God, ever had a point in his existence where he was not able to save.

[10:51] It is not as if God, the Father, sent God, the Son, who took on human flesh and then was somehow empowered by God the Father to do the salvific work of dying on the cross and saving us from our sins.

He always possessed such power. therefore, it is not that God has the attributes of salvation, but he is salvation himself.

It is not that God has the attributes of being powerful. He is power himself. it is a very important point because in some areas we are made in God's image, so we share in some of the qualities of who God is.

We have a rational mind, for instance, but there are other qualities where we do not share in God's qualities, and this is one of them. We are people that lack.

We are people that are finite. We are people that are not all-powerful, and sometimes we can augment our lack of power or lack of might to accomplish things that otherwise we wouldn't be able to accomplish.

[12:09] You go to school to learn great things. You don't have those great things inherently inside of you when you are born.

You have to acquire them from outside. Not so with God. He is the source of all knowledge, of all power, of all might. And therefore, to talk about God and his attributes is to talk about God himself. In the same way that God was able to speak creation and it was so, so too is Jesus able to keep and present us. Jesus is able because he cannot be otherwise.

That is excellent news because it means we have the ultimate savior, savior, the ultimate person in our corner who cannot fail and cannot be overcome and cannot be thwarted and cannot be emptied of that power because it is who he is.

Jude tells us here that Jesus, this Jesus, is able to do two things, one negative and one positive. the negative thing, he keeps us from stumbling but the positive thing is that he presents us blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy.

[13:30] And friends, he could not do this if he was not able. If he did not have the power, if he was not the power himself. Let's look at these two things that Jesus is able to do.

Let's look at the first thing, that he is able to keep us from stumbling. Jude has urged us to keep watch for false teachers. He urged us to contend for the faith, to keep ourselves in the love of God, to show mercy to those who doubt.

This is the call of faithful living. But who in this room or on earth, in all of God's church across the world, across space, in the history of the church, across time, could ever keep the call perfectly? Who is the faithful one who can keep God's commands perfectly? It is not me, and it certainly is not you. We can't, by sheer grit, keep God's commands, stand true to the faith, consistently abide in God's love and compassion all of our days.

We're bound to trip up, we're bound to fail, even though those whom Christ has saved are free from being slaves to sin. We are not yet glorified, we are not yet made perfect, so we are bound to trip up, we are bound to stumble.

[14:59] Jesus knows our weaknesses, he knows our propensity to get weary, he is aware of the nature of temptation that wears on us day by day by day.

this doesn't take him by surprise. Again, divine simplicity, he knows everything, he is knowledge itself. This does not surprise Christ.

So how wonderful is it to hear that Jesus is able to keep us from stumbling, literally to guard us from falling. It's as if he is so close that when we are bound to stumble, he will not let us fall.

His grip on us is certainly tighter than our grip on him. We are reassured here that as we seek to obey, he is able to uphold.

He sees that we strive and we ask him for strength, often times we try to do it on our own, with our own might, we fall, we stumble, he sees it and yet he upholds us.

[16:12] He guards us from falling. What a wonderful thing to be assured of. It is not a license to sin, but a recognition of our brokenness, our fragility, spiritually speaking.

It is a promise that Christ doesn't start renovation projects, only to abandon them. He doesn't begin a work in your life and then he might run out of money or time or effort.

He doesn't say, this person is driving me crazy a hundred times, two hundred times, they don't get it. Yeah, they say sorry, they seek forgiveness.

I'm growing weary of this person. He doesn't say that. He is there. He will catch us as we stumble. He finishes the works. He begins. But he doesn't merely keep us from stumbling, does he? If so, we would still be in an eternally bad predicament, unable to solve the problem of being unworthy and blameless and therefore disqualified from being with God forever.

[17 : 32] So what does Jesus do? He doesn't just keep us from stumbling. He presents us to God, the Father. The question is, how can sinful people like us stand before a perfect God in his presence?

Jude, once again, he flexes his biblical knowledge. A couple words here that, again, if we could double-click them, we could spend a whole sermon series on looking through some of these biblical references that Jude gives.

But this is some of the allusions Jude refers to here. So throughout the Old Testament, the presence of God, it was a terrifying thing. No human could stand in God's presence because God is holy and we are not.

He is pure and we are not. We read in two places in the Old Testament, one in Malachi 3 and Psalm 15, that essentially say the same thing.

I will read just in Malachi 3 verse 2. But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fuller's soap.

[18 : 52] Who can stand in the presence of almighty God? Is the question that is asked. It is a rhetorical question because the answer is nobody. Who can stand, and what is implied here, and not flinch or not be destroyed, or not be cast down, or not fall into great terror before the presence of God?

And the answer is no one. No one can genuinely and uprightly stand before the presence of God. Even more when we see instances of scripture where people stand before God's presence.

Think of Isaiah in, I mean, this was just a vision, Isaiah in Isaiah chapter 6. He is overcome with grief over his sins and fear, dread, in front of the presence of God.

And yet, Jude is telling us that Jesus cannot only keep us from stumbling, but present us before the presence of God in a worthy manner so that we are not completely undone.

Friends, Jude is using language that points to cleansing. Again, we can't do a deep dive this morning, but Jude has envisioned the sacrificial system in the temple where the high priests on behalf of the people only enter into the symbolic area that is where the presence of God truly is, only when their sins are removed and cleansed, where they are made blameless before God.

[20 : 29] Jude is saying here that we can stand before God. Why? Because we are blameless, we are blemishless, we are spotless, we are faultless.

Why? Because Christ has taken our sin, he has atoned for our evil, he has made us pure and right before Almighty God.

We can be blameless before God because we are now enveloped in Christ, we are in the blameless one. And therefore, we are able to stand before the presence of God without flinching, without being undone.

In fact, if you look with me at the end of verse 24, sorry, yeah, verse 24, that we are in the presence of his glory with great joy. There's no fear, it is this beautiful, wonderful picture of happiness without end.

In fact, it, again, Jude here, an allusion to the ultimate banquet that will happen at the end of the age where the lamb who was slain before the foundation of the world will be united with his bride, the church, and we will dine in this incredible marriage supper for all of eternity.

[21 : 55] And it's all because of what Christ does. We can't get this from within. This is something that can only be given to us from without.

This is a bit of a problem though, because I'm sure many of us, whether it be fitness or wellness influencers, whether it's blogs or YouTube or Instagram, they, at least some of them, suggest that there is a holistic purity that is available.

Work out harder. Meditate harder. Eat clean. No processed sugars. No chocolate. Organic. Be kind. Do more.

Think harder. Say less. Say more. Set up boundaries. Remove boundaries. There's a lot of advice.

And that advice sometimes can be excellent advice. I mean, don't unsubscribe this afternoon. But it's a fallacy to think that true holistic purity and righteousness can be achieved by us willing it, by us doing it, by us making tweaks and incorporating new things that we have to still do that we need to exercise greater agency and greater willpower.

[23 : 21] If the problem was simply a lack that could be reformed or something that could be acquired, we would have solved many societal ills and solved the issue of a lack of transcendence and a lack of meaning a long time ago.

Yet as we progress, we have this annoying habit of simultaneously regressing. not all progress is bad, of course, but all progress that seeks to do what only Christ can do, it is going to be a terrible, terrible slave master to us.

Friends, what Jude is saying and what we all know deep in our DNA is that we desire to touch the divine, but we are entirely unable to do so by our personal and collective strength.

Jude reminds us that the cross of Christ is the only means by which we can know, be with, and enjoy God. We can stand in his presence again without flinching, without being undone, with great joy, without being overcome with dread.

and it's only because of what Christ does for us on our behalf. We embrace by faith. Jesus is able.

[24 : 44] He is able to keep us from stumbling. He is able to present us blameless in his presence for eternity with great joy because Jesus is the only God, Savior, and Lord.

And this gets us to our second point. If that is what Jesus does, who, who, Jew will remind us of who Jesus is. Look with me at verse 25. To the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, authority, before all time, and now, and forever.

Amen. Notice first that Jesus is explicitly declared to be God. Biblically speaking, you cannot disentangle God, Savior, and Lord.

They are all titles and terms that describe who God is. We can talk about them individually, we can talk about God individually, and what it means to be a Savior individually, and what it means to be a Lord individually, biblically speaking, but we can't talk about them as if they are separate from one another.

God, who is the one who saves, can do so because of his power and rule. And the one who rules with ultimate power is God. So they're all connected, they all feed into one another.

[26 : 11] It's like a circuit in a sense. You can't remove one aspect of God being God or Savior or Lord and expect God to remain God or him to remain Savior or him to remain Lord.

and again we see Jude hammering home biblical truths with a triplet. It's kind of his thing, but it's helpful. Jesus is God, Savior, and Lord.

This is the one who keeps you and presents you. This is the one who will not leave you or forsake you. This is the one who has made a way for you, who has no business being in the presence of God to stand in the presence of God.

When we consider what Jesus has done and who Christ is, can we somehow hold back praise?

And I mean really understand this truth goes into us, into our souls.

It begins to change us. The result will be praise. This is a helpful thing why we are about not going hardcore with theological language necessarily, although I talked about divine simplicity, but why we're very intentional about doctrine in this church, because right theology leads to right doxology, that is, right understanding of who God is and what he has done and who we are in light of that and his creation and his ordering of everything, it leads to a proper expression of praise.

[27 : 47] We don't worship Jesus only, or God the Father only, or the Spirit only. We worship God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit.

Jesus isn't just a man, nor is he God, but just in the appearance of a man, he is fully God and fully man, so we worship the incarnate Son of God. It's important that we get our theology right, or at least strive our best by God's strength together to get that right, so that we may praise him correctly, and this is what Jude is doing.

He has described what Jesus does, who Jesus is, and it results in this gushing out of praise to Almighty God.

And what does Jude say here in verse 25? To the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, authority.

You kind of hear the voice, continue to rise before all time, and now, and forever. This is throughout the Old Testament, this doxology. I mean, it's in maybe slightly different form, but King David says

this, the Apostle Paul says this, Jude says this, all of heaven proclaims it.

[29 : 10] This is what we'll say before Holy Communion. Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord, God of hosts, heaven and earth are full of your glory. continually proclaiming God's goodness and his glory and his dominion and his majesty forever and ever and ever.

You don't have time to, again, double click on glory, majesty, dominion, and authority. Worth your time if you have any kind of study tools to do a deep dive into that.

But it paints a picture, it communicates to us that Jesus is all powerful, that he is magnificent, that he is the Lord of all, he's the unchanging creator God, he is worthy of your praise.

And it also communicates to us that even when the godlessness that we see and that we feel and that we lament in our own lives seems to grow and threatens to overtake us, our Savior and our Lord and our God, he is unchanging.

His grace is not emptied, his dominion is not shaken, his majesty is not tarnished, that he is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

[30 : 30] This is what it says here, before all time and now and forever, there was never not a time when God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit did not enjoy glory, majesty, dominion, and authority.

Nothing that the world, the flesh, or the devil can do can change that. That's called rock solid truth, that's a foundation that is unshakable, a truth that is worth building your life upon, and praising God forever.

So in conclusion, God has promised that we will be with him for eternity, knowing full well that apart from him, we have no business standing in his presence, yet, we will not stand in fear or anxiety, but blameless and with exceeding great joy, able to bless his name, echoing Jude 24 and 25 for eternity.

never feeling like we are needlessly in repetition, that we are just vainly speaking words, but forever embracing the goodness of God in praise.

Given that life is perilous, and a long obedience in the same direction is fraught with disobedience and considerations of quitting, verse 24 and 25, they remind us that God, our Savior, our Lord, Jesus himself, he is able to sustain us, and he will finish the work that he began, and we will be with him in glory forever, and that he delights in doing so.

[32 : 28] the marriage supper of the Lamb is this beautiful picture in John's Revelation, the last book of the Bible, if you turn one page, it's Revelation chapter one, and it's this beautiful picture of the culmination of salvation, where there will be endless feasting and joy and excitement, no more tears of sorrow, it's everything that we could hope for, everything that will give us great meaning, everything that points to all of our deepest longings, that is our future forever.

And this morning, as we gather around the table, we, in a sense, rehearse that. The table is this beautiful reminder for us that Christ has died for our sins and risen again to new life, but it also points us to the marriage supper of the Lamb, that one day we will be gathered around a table, with each other, and with Christ, and it is all because he is able to keep us from stumbling, and to present us blameless in his presence with glory and joy.

Let us pray. Father in heaven, thank you for