

God, the Assurance of the Faithful

If you have your Bibles today, turn with me to the book of Jude. We are finishing up today in our study of this great letter and probably one of the greatest doxologies ever written, written by Jude, and brings to conclusion this tremendous book which I'd like to read for you today beginning in verse 1:

Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James,

To those who have been called, who are loved by God the Father and kept by Jesus Christ:

² Mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance.

³ Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints. ⁴ For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.

⁵ Though you already know all this, I want to remind you that the Lord delivered his people out of Egypt, but later destroyed those who did not believe. ⁶ And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home—these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day. ⁷ In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.

⁸ In the very same way, these dreamers pollute their own bodies, reject authority and slander celestial beings. ⁹ But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not dare to bring a slanderous accusation against him, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!" ¹⁰ Yet these men speak abusively against whatever they do not understand; and what things they do understand by instinct, like unreasoning animals—these are the very things that destroy them.

¹¹ Woe to them! They have taken the way of Cain; they have rushed for profit into Balaam's error; they have been destroyed in Korah's rebellion.

¹² These men are blemishes at your love feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm—shepherds who feed only themselves. They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted—twice dead. ¹³ They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever.

¹⁴ Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men: “See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones ¹⁵ to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in the ungodly way, and of all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against him.” ¹⁶ These men are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage.

¹⁷ But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold. ¹⁸ They said to you, “In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires.” ¹⁹ These are the men who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit.

²⁰ But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. ²¹ Keep yourselves in God’s love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.

²² Be merciful to those who doubt; ²³ snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.

²⁴ To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy— ²⁵ to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

Let’s pray for a moment.

Lord, these are very comforting words to realize that no matter what happens in this world we can have complete assurance because our assurance is in God, not in ourselves, not in men, not in abilities, not in powers or kingdoms, but our hope is in you. I pray today, God, that you will help us to see today that God is the assurance of the faithful and we’ll thank you. In your precious name, Amen.

When our kids were little, Karla and I tried to be involved in their public school classrooms as much as we could. Karla would engage a lot in the classroom, and I usually spent time with them at lunchtime recess. Lunchtime recess was a lot of fun. Kids played games, kickball, and a host of things, but one of their favorites was playing basketball. It was especially nice when the kids were really little like first, second, third grade because it would seem like they’d always get in a game with the fourth, fifth, and sixth graders at the time. The little guys would love it when I would be there, and they would ask me to play because I can control the entire game.

Now, it’s a real ego boost when you’re two feet taller than your nearest competition and you outweigh them by 150 pounds and you used to play basketball. It was fun because the kids knew that no matter how far they got behind, dad was in control. He could let the other team get ahead little bit, make it get close, then at the right moment, if I kept my eye on the clock, I could always bring the team back for victory. They loved it when I played because they learned that no matter how far they were behind they had assurance they were gonna win as long as dad was in the game. Their confidence was not in their ability. It was in mine.

That's the assurance that Jude was talking about when he wrote to encourage these faithful believers that no matter how far behind you feel, victory is assured because victory doesn't depend on us. Victory depends on God.

For the last few weeks we've been studying this hard-hitting and encouraging letter by the Lord's brother, Jude. It was written to urge the faithful to contend for the faith that was being threatened by false teachers that were infiltrating the church. It's why Jude said in verse 3:

Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.

We've been learning in this book that the word "contend" is just what it sounds like. It means "to fight or struggle with intense effort." We've been reminding ourselves that the call to Christian life is not a call to a picnic; it is a call to a war, a spiritual war. Truth is under attack which is why he said in verse 3 that we were "to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints." This faith is the whole body of truth, the revealed truth as the very foundation of the Christian faith.

Truth was under attack in Jude's day, and it's no different in our day. Truth is under attack by liberal and mainline churches who promote social agendas and ignore or distort the gospel. It is under attack by pastors and leaders who fleece the sheep and use the church as a venue to promote their own immorality or their own greed. It is under attack by cults and Christian-sounding groups who teach a false Jesus and a work salvation. It is under attack by those who try to convince us that the Christian God, the Muslim god, the Buddhist god, and all the gods are basically the same God. We just approach him in a different way.

Jude reminds these believers that the prophets and apostles had warned that such attacks would be coming. In fact, they wrote in verse 16:

These men who do this are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage.

¹⁷ But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold. ¹⁸ They said to you, "In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires." ¹⁹ These are the men who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit.

You see, Jude's warning could easily depress or discourage those who felt that these deceptions and this opposition to the truth was overwhelming. If you have ever felt like lies are winning and falsehood is winning and truth is being marginalized, then you will understand exactly how these people felt. But Jude reminds them that evil doesn't win. Jesus always does. In fact, he already has. He reminds them that their salvation and their future doesn't depend on their ability to hold onto God but on God's ability to hold onto them. Their assurance was in the person of God. Those who contend for the faith can have complete assurance of victory in the person of God.

The question is, how do we experience that? How do we experience that assurance? Jude reminds them here, we do it when we keep God as our focus and we keep God as our hope. We have complete assurance of victory when we keep God as our focus. This is the way Jude put it in verse 24:

To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy.

I was reading an article this last week by a man named Charlie Crow from Covington, Georgia. I'm not sure if Charlie is a pastor or not, but he wrote into this pastors newsletter thing that I read. He was telling about an experience that he had with a friend of his some years ago when they decided to fly from Georgia across central Florida in his private plane. He said:

During my friend's 50 years of experience as a pilot, he flew all over the world and faced every possible condition. On our return trip, the airplane began to shake and the engine started coughing and losing power.

Now, I've been in a small plane a bunch of times. That is not what you want to hear when you're in a small plane. He said:

As I looked down from an altitude of a few thousand feet, terror gripped me. I felt an incredible urge to do something, but there was nothing I could do. I had no experience in flying, no experience in landing or even fixing a plane. But then I looked over at my friend at the controls. He was utterly calm. He just sat there adjusting knobs, flipping switches. He just continued piloting the plane right through it and brought us safely down.

When he was reflecting on that he said:

There are times in my life when I desperately want to grab control. My experience in the plane reminds me that if I take control I'll ruin or destroy my life because I'm not in control. At those moments I must resist the urge and trust the one who has seen it all before and who knows what he's doing.

When circumstances put you in a situation you obviously can't solve, it becomes obvious that looking to your own ability is foolish. We need to focus our attention on the one who has the ability. Believe me, people, God will bring each of us to a place in our life where we have nowhere else to look but to him, because he wants us to learn this trust that he is trustworthy.

Jude reminded these faithful Christians that the one who has the ability to bring them to victory is God himself. Our assurance is to focus on God. In verse 24, every one of these words was written as a word of significant encouragement. It begins like this:

To him who is able --

Jude immediately focuses these people on God. "To him who has the power" it means, by virtue of his own ability and resources, we're looking to the one who has all ability and all resource and all capability. That's who you're looking to.

²⁴ To him who is able to keep you --

The word is "to guard you, to watch you, who protects you." In Jude 1 he reminded us:

Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James,

To those who have been called, who are loved by God the Father and kept by Jesus Christ:

² Mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance.

That's the God that Jude knew, and that's the one who keeps you, the one who guards you and watches over you. "God does the keeping" Jude's reminding them, "not you."

To keep you from falling --

A word that means "from stumbling." It actually means "to keep you sure footed" so that even in your many challenges you will not fall away from God.

To present you --

"To cause you to stand" is that word.

Before his glorious presence --

Meaning "in the presence of his person." People, that phrase is significant because it means not just as the idea of in the same room with God, but you are going to stand in relationship with God right in front of his person. You are going to see God with your own eyes. You are gonna know the fullness of who he is. He is gonna have you stand there -- by the way, that can be a terrible thought to think, "I'm really gonna stand in front of the God of the universe and see him face-to-face." Yes, you are, but because of Jesus we're gonna be there without fault -- praise God for that -- without blemish, without sin, clean.

I don't care what you've done or how many times you've done it. If you've come to Jesus, confessed that sin, been saved by his grace, cleansed by his blood, you're gonna stand before him without fault and with great joy. "Exuberant gladness and exultation" is the word he used. But it relates to our redemption, this word he used meaning this: You are gonna stand in front of this God without fault, and in that moment you will have great joy as you realize the fulfillment of all of God's redemptive work through Christ and the cross and the resurrection has now been fulfilled in you, and you are standing before him clean and in relationship with him for eternity. Amazing. God will do that. You cannot.

Our focus is on him, not ourselves. Our focus is on his ability, not on ours. There's a lot of assurance in this because I can't save myself or even trust my ability to hold on to salvation once it's granted. God saved me when I couldn't save myself.

Do you remember in the book of Titus in Chapter 3 verse 3 Paul told Titus as he was going to lead that church on the island of Crete? He said:

At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. ⁴ But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.

I couldn't save myself, so God saved me. God keeps me because I can't keep myself. That's why Jude said in verse 24:

To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy.

Remember, you and I are the bride of Christ. It was the Jewish custom for every groom to present his bride before his father. Jesus is gonna keep us as his bride and present us before his Father. When you meet God, Jesus will be presenting you as his bride.

It was that kind of joy of Jesus presenting us to the Father that helped him to endure the cross. He saw it all. That's why it says in Hebrews 12 verse 2:

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

It is the reality of that coming joy that enables us to endure such opposition from sinful men as Jude was describing. We know that just like Jesus we too will stand in the Father's presence without fault and with great joy. It won't be our doing. It will be his doing "now and forever."

²⁴To him who is able to keep you.

And not only by keeping God as our focus, but we have complete assurance of victory when we keep God as our hope. This is what Jude said in verse 25:

To the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

I was reading this last week an article that appeared in *U.S. News & World Report*. It was called "The Mysteries of Hope and Healing." In this article it was describing the work done by a Harvard Medical School professor named Jerome Groopman who said that when he diagnoses patients with serious diseases you discover that all of them were looking for a sense of genuine hope. Indeed that hope was as important to them as anything he might prescribe as a physician. After writing a book called *The Anatomy of Hope*, Dr. Groopman was asked for his definition of what hope is. This is what he said:

Basically, I think hope is the ability to see a path to the future. You are facing dire circumstances, and you need to know everything that is blocking or threatening you. Then you see a path, or a potential path, to get where you want to be.

Once you see that, there's a tremendous emotional uplift that occurs. I think hope has been, is, and always will be the heart of medicine and healing. We could not live without hope. Even with all the medical technology available to us now, we still come back to this profound human need to believe that there is a possibility to reach a future that is better than the one in the present.

Hope. It's indispensable to our assurance and well-being. Andy Crouch, in his article in *Christianity Today* called "The Gospel of Steve Jobs" once made the comment:

Human beings can live for 40 days without food, 4 days without water, 4 minutes without air, but we can't live 4 seconds without hope.

Hope is only as good or secure as the object of the person or object that we have our hope in. A lot of people have their hope in pretty faulty things and pretty faulty people. That's why our hope is the greatest hope because our hope is in the God who is the ultimate hope. Because our hope is in this God, it's not surprising that that's why Satan tries so hard to erode your confidence in this God, and he's good at it.

Sinclair Ferguson in his book *By Grace Alone* identified four major fiery darts that Satan uses to unsettle believers and rob them of their assurance and their peace and their hope in the gospel and in God himself. Now listen to these. I'm sure you've heard them. I have.

Fiery dart #1: "God is against you," Satan says. "He's not really for you. How can you believe he's for you when you see the things that are happening in your life?" It's that age-old lie, "If God were good and he really cared about you and you were sovereign, why would these things happen?" You ever heard that?

Fiery dart #2: "I have accusations I'll bring against you because of your sins," Satan argues. "What can you say in defense? Nothing. You're guilty. We both know it, and God knows it." It's true. We're all sinners by nature and by choice.

Fiery dart #3: "You can say you're forgiven, but there's a payback day coming, a condemnation day," Satan insinuates. "How will you defend yourself then?" That's the old lie of "God can never forgive you for what you've done."

Fiery dart #4: "Given your track record, what hope is there that you will persevere to the end, because you know you won't?" You ever heard those lies? Satan sends those things in your ear because he's trying to undermine your confidence in God because he knows you put your confidence in God you'll have a hope he can't break because God is the ultimate hope.

Jude told these faithful believers that their hope is in God himself. "Our hope is secure in the one who is God, Savior, and Lord," Jude said. Verse 25:

To the only God our Savior .

"To the only God," he tells them. There aren't many gods or many versions of God, there's only one, and you have put your hope in the God who is truth. He is the God our Savior. He saves us, and we cannot be lost.

Jesus said in John 10:

²⁷ My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one.

“No one can snatch them out of my hand,” he said, **“and no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.”** How strong is God’s hand? Well, through Jesus Christ our Lord, we now know that God is and has and possesses all power, majesty, glory, and authority. Jude said:

²⁵ To the only God our Savior be glory,

All glory. All that is glorious emanates from him and to him and returns back to him. “All majesty,” he said. “Mega-greatness” is the word, “awful transcendence.” In other words, “God is so infinitely above everything else in every form of greatness, no one has ever been able to see completely how great and awesome God really is. He is the mega-awesome in greatness.”

He has all power, dominion. He has and demonstrates all power as he reigns in sovereign control over all things by the strength of his might. It is as though Jude is implying, “Name one thing God can’t handle? You’ll never think of it.”

And he has all authority. “Liberty of action” is the word. In other words, he has all power and all authority to exercise that power, whenever and however he chooses. He has authority to do as he pleases, and no one can overrule him, no one can out-judge him, no one can stop him, no one can thwart his hand. His will will be done.

No wonder the apostles and the prophets who know this God wrote with such an assurance of hope. Romans 15 verse 4:

For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

It’s this hope that motivates us to a deeper worship, a deeper obedience, a deeper purity, and a deeper assurance. That’s why the apostle Paul wrote to Titus such encouraging words about our future and our hope when he said in Titus, Chapter 2 verse 11:

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. ¹² It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, ¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

We contend for the faith with the assurance that our victory is already won.

I’m not a big technology guy, in fact I had to call my friend, Phil, the other day and ask him, “What do you call those little boxes where you record things off your satellite or cable and you play it back.”

He said, “Larry, it’s a DVR, digital video recorder.”

“Thank you.”

Well, before they had DVRs they had VCRs. I forgot what VCR stands for, video something recorder, I'm sure. The cool thing about DVRs and VCRs that you can record TV shows. I was reading an article this week by Charles Ellis, a guy from Indianapolis, Indiana, who was suggesting that Christians need to live with a VCR or DVR mentality.

It caught my attention so I read on. This is what he said:

I'm a tremendous sports fan. Since many sporting events take place when I'm not at home I videotape them. When it's time to sit in my easy chair and view the tape, unlike most people, I don't rewind to beginning to view it. Instead, I rewind to the climax and discover who won and lost. If my team lost, I'll put the tape away. But if my team won, I'll rewind back to the beginning, get some snacks, and watch the whole game.

Some have told me this method can't be much fun. On the contrary, I enjoy it thoroughly because no matter how bad things look for my team, I don't have to worry because I know in the end they already won.

That's how we ought to think about what Jesus did for us. We need a VCR-DVR mentality that no matter how bad things look we don't have to worry because we know the end of the story. We've already won.

That's the message of Jude. Contend for the faith because it's under attack. It always has and it always will be. Stand your ground and don't worry. No matter how bad things look you've already won. Evil never wins. Jesus always does, so contend for the faith. It's been entrusted to you. Share this faith and live it. Stay faithful. Keep yourself in his love. In other words, obey what he reveals to you and remember in the end the victory does not depend on you, it's God's.

²⁴ To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—²⁵ to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore!

And all God's people said, "Amen."

Thank you, Lord, for this reminder today. Thank you for your faithfulness to us. Thank you that the victory is assured not because of our abilities, because of yours. It's a victory that in Christ it's already been won. Help us to contend for this faith, to be unashamed of the gospel. To live it out, to share it until all nations believe and obey. And we'll thank you, God, for this encouragement. We praise you. In Jesus' name, Amen.