

Preserve and Be Preserved (Jude 22-25)  
John Seago October 30, 2016

Intro:

- a. Good morning, my name is John Seago, I'm a partner and deacon here at CLC and I'm looking forward to examining this last section of Jude together with you, but first I need to tell you a story.
- b. It was November 2007, a philosophy major who's entire world revolved around writing his senior thesis through a series of unexpected events found himself in a relationship with a charming, outgoing, and non-philosophical sophomore. Although they had been "pursuing a relationship" for 48 hours they had not really had a thorough DTR yet. On principle the philosophy student knew it was unethical to continue a relationship without disclosing his intentions as well as his well-thought out and written guidelines and expectations for their relationship. Ok, spoiler alert, it was me. Ok. So, this evening I was planning we'd pick up some Chinese food and take it back to my dorm to eat while we had this paramount and probably relationship-ending conversation. I was a nervous wreck to say the least. I honestly expected her to hear my convictions about relationships and dating, pat me on the back, and leave... maybe to add insult to injury, she'd say something like she'll be praying for me. So here we are, pull up to the Chinese restaurant, I get out and nervously flipping my keys around in my hand, you know, like a really smooth guy, and the keys fly out of my hand across the parking lot. She just looks at me and says, 'are you going to get those?' Ugh. The series of embarrassing events just continued. I tore open our bag of food, there was an awkward phone call with my mother in there, I split drinks that night, it was ugly. Again, in front of this girl, I'm desperately trying to keep in my life, but I'm almost certain I'm about to return to my studious singleness. We finally get to the DTR and I lay out a few principles and convictions and say, ok what are you interested in here? I made her say what she wanted first. My plan was whatever she said I was going to match it, A friendship, oh yeah we're best friends; dating, done; if she wanted to get engaged that night, well I'd rush to whatever jewelry store was still open.
- c. This kind of questioning, uncertainty affects you. I didn't know what our relationship was and I could not enjoy it without the truth. These were foundational issues that were unresolved in my mind. I required a lot of patience and mercy that day. This morning we're going to see how we should react to individuals who require our patience and mercy, although much less embarrassing I'm sure. Let's pray.
- d. Pray: Lord, we're so foolish and you're so wise. Lord more than that you're patient, kind and show us consistent mercy in Christ and in your daily interaction with us.
- e. This morning as we finish the book of Jude we're going to see two main callings. First that we are called to preserve others and secondly, we're called to be preserved.

a. So first we're called to...

**I. Preserve others** who are wavering, who are stumbling, and who have fallen.

- Last week we had this call to build others up and this week Jude focuses in on and adds detail to that imperative.
- First we need to notice that this is written to all Christians. Remember verse 1, this is a letter to "those who are called" meaning Christians.
- Every Christians is being encouraged to personally minister to those in need.
- This is not new, we saw that 1 Peter (4:8)told us "Above all, keep loving one another earnestly,"
- Now, I understand, we prefer to outsource counseling, or ministry to the "leaders," those "professionals." I get this temptation: I'm not a counselor, I'm not exactly most personal guy in the church, so if someone needs love, encouragement, and even counseling from another Christian, I'd like to refer them to the spiritual elites in the church, Go talk to those guys, right?

- That's not how the church works. In Christ, we all are a family, a kingdom of priests. So as we go into these situations remember this passage is written to you Christian. And think about people that the Lord has brought into your life for this purpose.
- Now, maybe you see yourself fitting into one of these groups. If you're not a Christian and just investigating I think you'll find the depth of love and seriousness of faith compelling, particularly with those who doubt.
- Let's look at verses 22-23.
  - 22 And have mercy on those who doubt; 23 save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh
- It is clear that Jude wants Christians to be concerned for and involved in the lives of those who fallen into misunderstanding the grace of God or now have had their faith challenged.
- So, Jude is describing how those in the church should react to three groups:
  1. people who are wavering -doubting
  2. those who are falling - need to be saved from the fire
  3. and individuals who have fallen
- Let's look at that first one, "have mercy on those who doubt"
  - "Doubt" here is the same word used in verse 9 for "disputing"<sup>1</sup>
  - These individuals are doubting, they're questioning, or even wavering.<sup>2</sup>
    - This is not people declaring to be atheists or agnostics. These are people struggling to believe or seek answers about the truth.
    - And there is much to doubt, in this series of 2 Peter and Jude we've talked about angels, demons, judgment, fire, and so like the original audience you may too be questioning some of the views and doctrines we believe.
    - **Also, this doubt is not just people struggling with intellectual skepticism or deep philosophical arguments. You may be here this morning questioning God and his promises because of a hardship in your life, a broken relationship, the death of someone close, or just frustrated with where the Lord has put you right now. These trials are pushing you to ask questions or waver over whether God is really good, whether he really cares about you. That is included in the type of wavering and doubt Jude is discussing and we're looking at.**
  - Either way, doubting mind or doubting heart, look at what Jude says our response is supposed to be:
    - "Show mercy," not to look down on, snub, or cast them out as heretics or pagans.
    - As Christians we are called to deal patiently and mercifully with them.
  - Throughout the biblical narrative we see God interacting with people who doubt, who question him, his plan, and his promises. Not just obscure characters but heroes of the faith like Abraham and Moses. Look at how God deals with those who doubt:
    - In Moses' case, when God was calling Moses to go lead his people out of slavery in Egypt, out of the burning bush God calls him to this historical task but Moses talks back to God. five times. FIVE. He shows doubt: who should I say sent me, what if they don't believe me, I'm not a good public speaker...

<sup>1</sup> Greek: *diakrinomenous*. Also indicates these people are "at odds with themselves"

<sup>2</sup> In Jude's context these people doubting or questioning could be the fault of the false teachers (who were causing division in the church) who have caused uncertainty about Christianity.

- What does God do? Each time he shows mercy: gives him answers, gives him proof, even granted him a partner to go help him with his mission. That's Exodus 3.
- Now, pop quiz, who is the poster child for the doubters? Who comes to mind? Thomas, yes. Doubting Thomas right?
  - Let's look at him in John 20:24-29: "Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe." Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."
  - Thomas gets a bad reputation right? Doubting Thomas. But really, he was just asking for the evidence and experience the other disciples received. Jesus appeared to them, why not Thomas? They didn't necessarily have more faith than he did, they were just at the right place at the right time. I always feel bad for that guy.
  - Jesus doesn't lecture Thomas when he shows up, Jesus shows mercy, he engages, he meets him and provides that evidence Thomas wanted.
  - Jesus did clarify blessed are those that don't see and believe, we don't have time to go into all this, but that is not anti-reason or calling us to illogical belief.
  - Look what John writes next. Immediately after this story about asking for evidence and belief, John adds a rare commentary in his gospel writing, "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."
  - Fascinating that John put this commentary about the purpose of his book here right after the Thomas story. He's saying this book, the Bible is our evidence like Thomas' evidence was the body of Christ. Let's bring our questions and doubts here (Bible) so that we can believe.
- Now, the evidence of God's mercy is not just in scripture, these written accounts of God's interaction with men, but this is true in my story.<sup>3</sup>
  - In 2006-2007 I went through a period of deep philosophical skepticism, doubting the foundation and core doctrines of Christianity. I'd love to share this with any of you in more detail, but I went through this intense questioning of God. Even though I was hostile to God, he showed me mercy. First he showed me mercy through my Dad. My dad was one of the few people that knew I was doubting. Imagine this, I called my Dad who has been a pastor for 40 years from my very conservative college run by a seminary to tell him I wasn't sure I believed we could even know if God existed. As a father myself now, I cannot imagine how I'd respond. (Arguments, book recommendations, fly there immediately, probably) Yet, my dad didn't do that. He listened, He reiterated his

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<sup>3</sup> Another story to look into would be Nicodemus, who had questions, doubts, Jesus answered them, and we have biblical evidence later Nicodemus did come to have genuine faith in Christ.

love, he confirmed my questions were worthwhile. Then he said he'll pray for me and will talk more if I want to. THAT'S IT. He didn't condemn me, he didn't recite the ontological argument for the existence of God, didn't tell me to go read some cheesy Christian author.

- I then experienced the mercy of God directly, through writing my senior thesis that closely dealt with my questions, God gave me a solution. He provided a refutation to my doubt. He did not answer the questions I asked, but he showed me the failed philosophical assumptions and pride under the questions I asked. Through his mercy I rediscovered the complexity, the rationality, and the beauty of these core biblical truths I doubted.
- SO after this long phase of questioning and pride in my life, I expected punishment. Instead of punishing me, which I expected, God showed me a third round of mercy. See two months after this period of doubt ended, God in his infinite mercy allowed me to meet Brandy and go on that awkward date and DTR conversation I told you about.
- I was bracing for discipline and God brought this beautiful, hilarious, and unbelievably faith-filled woman into my life. So I proposed to her six months later. *Seems reasonable right?*
- Church, we should show mercy to those that doubt, because that is what God has done and continues to do.
  - At CLC we value sound doctrine, we will defend the proper interpretation of Scripture and orthodox biblical theology. However this does not mean doubters are not welcome.
  - Whether you're an intellectual doubter or you have a doubting heart this morning, you are encouraged to bring your questions or frustrations, to find someone here to sit, listen, and discuss this with them.
- All you Christians here should commit to this. See, we can be merciful to the doubter out of the truth that we are not better than them. We have not accomplished something great by having faith. No verse 21 clarifies that no one is good enough to earn God's favor and everyone must wait for his mercy.
- Let's examine what mercy looks like and what it does not look like:
  - First Mercy is not:
    - **Condemnation.** Its not calling doubters out as false teachers or heretics – Remember we are kept by Christ himself, so we have no high ground to judge these individuals from, our faith and obedience is a gift from God, not our own doing.
    - **Dismissing** or downplaying doubts and questions. –Telling those seeking answers 'ah don't sweat it, its not a big deal' may seem nice of you to help relieve their angst or restlessness over certain questions, but it is not mercy. Neither is telling others, "just believe."
    - **False assurance** – We do not help or benefit others by giving them illusionary hope of salvation if they really are struggling with core tenets of the gospel.
  - Mercy to those who doubt looks like:
    - Accepting and **affirming** the importance of them working through these issues, whether it's a doubting mind or a doubting heart.
    - **Patience** - Being patient and actually listening to their concerns – I struggle with this in conversations or city group, when I know where someone is headed, I just want to interrupt them and answer their question. That's not mercy, not loving the person in front of me.

- **Truth-Directed.** This is critical. Directing them to truth in love. God does not leave Moses, Thomas, or even me in their doubts. Remember, Jesus did not tell Thomas to quit complaining and have faith, no, he showed him evidence to lead him to the truth.
  - Mercy is not going soft on the gospel.
  - **There is no godly mercy without the truth.**
  - The point of having an open mind, like having an open mouth, is to close it on something solid. --G.K. Chesterton
- This does not mean we have to constantly argue, we don't have to have all the answers, but we should be willing to walk with others to find truth. To help them seek after the Lord whose wisdom is infinite and unsearchable.
- **There are two other groups Jude mentions here:**
  - "Save others by snatching them out of the fire"
  - "to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh."
- These are individuals who are falling and individuals who have fallen. These are two different degrees of severity and danger.<sup>4</sup>
  - The second group of people are not misled or confused doubters, but those slipping into the eternal fire of divine judgment. - This may be a friend who is falling into a dangerous pattern of sin with boyfriend or girlfriend, someone who is getting too comfortable skipping gospel community and personal accountability.
  - The last group are not just slipping into sin but are deep in immorality. – This is more serious. Like finding out a friend is addicted to internet pornography or \_\_\_\_\_
- In both of these cases, the falling and the fallen, Jude is telling us that Christians are called to be the tool by which God rescues them.
  - Jude is saying it is still possible for people in peril to escape God's judgment and to be snatched from the fire.<sup>5</sup>
  - Again, this is how God himself has shown mercy, think about the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, where angels were dragging Lot and his family out of the city before it was judged by fire.
  - That is a picture of the gospel, us who deserve punishment were snatched away by the loving hand of God.
- The apostle James explains this calling for us as followers of Christ to go after those who have veered from the path, James wrote, "My brothers if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins." James 5:19-20.
  - This is our call to preserve others, to preserve others "soul from death" or "snatch them out of the fire." You might be thinking this is a little harsh. Right? "I'm all for helping someone else, but that's a little dramatic to say we're snatching someone from fire." Tone it down Jude.
- Jude's tone is harsher than ours usually is, because unlike us, he is granting appropriate weight and seriousness to sin.

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<sup>4</sup> But both are not to be handled lightly, but directly and vigorously. The latter group has most likely begun to engage in thinking and a lifestyle that "perverts the grace of God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ" (v4).

<sup>5</sup> This use of the image of fire, returns us to verse 7, when Jude uses all those examples of rebellion from God and his severe yet appropriate judgment on them.

- Look at his language at the end of verse 23, “hating even the garment stained by the flesh.”<sup>6</sup>
- We ought to be fearful of the dangerous nature of sin.
- **Even with that fear of the consequences of sin that fear does not drive us away from the sinner but towards them.**
- None of these three groups are hopeless cases, although they vary in degree of danger and risk of God’s punishment.

**II. Be preserved for joyful righteousness by our sovereign Lord.**

- The second calling we’ll close with is the calling for us to be preserved.
  - Jude’s message of warning, and the serious and eternal consequences of sin could leave the audience in despair and discourage them. however we’re are not left hopeless.
- Read 24-25: 24 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, 25 to the only God, our savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.
- This closing section in Jude’s letter is a **doxology**, a praise to God. Jude is praising God for his ability to overcome all of our failures, filthiness and to keep us.
- God has the capacity to preserve us in Christ’s holiness even whenever we’ve been wavering, are falling or have fallen.
  - This continues the theme throughout Jude about keeping.<sup>7</sup>
- **This is something to celebrate!** Has 2 Peter and Jude been bumming you out? ITS HEAVY. All this talk about the severity and seriousness of sin can weigh on us right?
  - We don't get out of that gloom over our sin by putting it out of minds or distracting ourselves with other things.
  - No, we turn to this point Jude closes on, that God himself keeps us. Are you here this morning and believe in the person and work of Jesus Christ? If so, you have been kept! And it is the ground we stand on to show mercy to those who doubt...
- **This doxology shows us three things about God’s preserving us. A How, Where, and Why.**
  - 1. **How** he preserves us:
    - Look at exactly what the keeping looks like in **verse 24**
    - God is able to keep us from falling into sin, yes, but also “to present us before the glorious presence without fault and with great joy.”
    - We have this imagery of these filthy cloths from verse 23 which are taken. Scriptures uses this metaphor that our sin and rebellion against a holy God is like excrement-covered garments.<sup>8</sup>
    - Yet, here we’re presented without fault or spot, which is Christ’s faultlessness put on us.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> This imagery indicates that their depravity is infectious.

<sup>7</sup> We were told that we are kept for Jesus Christ (v1), then that we should keep ourselves in the love of God (v21), and now we’re reminded that God is able to keep us (v24).

<sup>8</sup> Zechariah 3 episode where Joshua stood before the angel with dirty garments, and the angel of the Lord told him, “remove the filthy garments...Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure vestments...So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with garments. And the angel of the Lord was standing by.

<sup>9</sup> Same word here, *amomos*, “without fault” = “without blemish”).

- Remember 1 Peter 1:19, Christ paid the ransom for our sins with his “precious blood...like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.”
- This is the greatest news, that is what the cross represents, Christ died on the cross to take the punishment for our sins and declares us forgiven and guiltless before God.
  - This was the best expression of mercy from God we have, remember JD discussed last week.
  - This exchange is our sin for his perfection and the outcome of this exchange is our great joy.
  - When Christ removes our filth and gives us his righteousness, it is not a shaming event, yes our sin is serious yet the mercy of God on us produces JOY, not guilt or debt.
  - So, this is how he preserves us.
- 2. This doxology answers ‘**Where** our confidence lies.’
  - The answer is the character of God.
  - **We find confidence and purpose in the one who preserves us.**
- Essentially a few main attributes Jude is praising God for:
  - 1) His unity: “Only God our Savior”<sup>10</sup>
  - 2) His personal nature: “our savior...our Lord” – God is not some all powerful impersonal force or idea, but a personal being who pursues an intimate relationship with us.
  - 3) His Sovereignty, described in the characteristics attributed to him:
    - His glory, - radiance, moral splendor
    - His majesty, - greatness
    - His dominion and authority, - his ownership and rule over his creation,
    - His timelessness. –“before all ages, now and forever.”
    - A long list, but all these establish that we can be confident in God because he not only has the right and ability to rule the universe, but the fact that he was “before time, now and forever” shows he has not change nor will he. So, his plan, his desire to save us is sure and will occur.
- 3. Lastly, this closing doxology tells us ‘**Why** we’re called to preserve others and to be preserved.’
  - God’s glory is the goal. This doxology is a praise to him who saves us, and has glory, majesty, dominion, authority...<sup>11</sup>
  - This is the WHY for everything we’ve discussed. If God has all authority, majesty then our ultimate purpose is to bring attention to his truth, beauty, & majesty. You exist for this, supremely, And the more you do this the more you will taste the great joy of being preserved by a glorious God and being used to preserve others.
  - Christians and nonchristians this morning, you exist to love others and be loved by God.
  - Aligning people their ultimate purpose is THE greatest mercy any single person can show.
- “God elects to be savior because it is the most supreme and lovely display of his glory.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Jude reiterates the monotheistic elements of the faith, which were most likely being challenged or perverted by the false teachers.

<sup>11</sup> That glory is mediated through Jesus Christ.

<sup>12</sup> Bird, 557.

Jude balances the command to keep yourself in God’s love while faithfully awaiting salvation. “The divine action does not annul this human responsibility. But in his final doxology Jude will return to the note on

This is an answer that science cannot answer and naturalist philosophy fail at answering: Why are we here.

Bring back our call to preserve others:

- We share this responsibility to reach out, show mercy and snatch other from the fire.
- Not even those infected by filthy sin are beyond God's mercy and ability to remove their sin and put on Christ's righteousness.

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which he began: his confidence that the God who is their savior through Jesus Christ can keep them safe until they come to their eschatological destiny.”<sup>12</sup>

The whole Bible reflects this balance, “assurances of divine faithfulness [are] matched with warnings against falling away.”<sup>12</sup>