

He will hold you fast.

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[0:00] Let's turn now to our reading for this evening, and Alice will be preaching to us from the very end of the short letter of Jude.

So do turn in your Bibles to the letter of Jude. If you have a visitor Bible, you'll find that on page 1027. So go to the very end, find Revelation, and go back one, and you'll find Jude.

Now Alice will be preaching in the very last paragraph, but I'm going to read just the opening paragraph as well, just to give us a bit of context. So I'll begin at verse 1, then we'll jump down to the end. So Jude and verse 1.

Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James, to those who are called, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ, may mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you.

Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

[1:16] For certain people have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of God into sensuality, and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

And I'll just turn over to the end, verse 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, to the only God, our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority before all time, and now, and forever.

Amen. Amen. It is a genuine delight to be here this evening, and to share in all that has taken place, and to recognize the goodness of God, and how he does keep his covenant promises.

It's a long time since I was a small boy sitting beside my father, being taken to St. George's Tron Church in Buchanan Street, and looking up at that ice cream cone that was a pulpit, and seeing the gray-haired figure of George B. Duncan, and never, ever imagining that things would come to such a pass.

But here we are. A brief prayer before we look at this. Father, what we know not teach us, what we have not give us, what we are not make us.

[3:00] For your Son's sake we ask it. Amen. One of the great privileges in pastoral ministry is being able to minister to people in all various circumstances of their lives, and not least of all, when they find themselves in hospital.

And Cleveland is well served with hospitals, most famously the Cleveland Clinic itself. And there have been a number of occasions when I've found myself in a routine visit, finding that not only has my conversation been erupted, but everything has been interrupted by the sounding of a klaxon. It makes three sounds, and then the voice says, code blue, code blue. That is followed by the announcement of the floor and the vicinity, and nobody is mentioned as responding to it, because the response team knows instinctively that essentially it is their job to attend.

It is the announcement of a medical emergency, making it clear that a patient is experiencing a life-threatening reality.

Now, I begin there because I want to suggest to you that this little letter here is largely a code blue. You can see from it, and I will assign it to you for your homework to read all of it, you can see from it that immediately Jude is addressing what we would regard as a clear and a present danger.

[4:46] And he explains why, that certain people have crept into the congregations unannounced, surreptitiously, crept in, is the right phraseology.

They didn't come through the front door announcing themselves. They came in under various disguises, and as a result of that, the danger is present.

He's addressing people, as you see if your Bible is open, who are called, beloved, and kept. And as those who are called, beloved, and kept, his prayer for them is that they might know mercy and peace and love multiplied to them.

Why? Because they find themselves in the middle of this situation. The body of the letter is taken up with showing how the implications of the arrival of these people is severe.

Ungodliness, blasphemy, and immorality. And in addressing this, he points out to his readers that this is not something new, and he is able then to go back into the history of the people of God and show how much that is taking place in this immediate experience is mirrored in the past.

[6:04] He then goes on to point out that this will not finally go away, that it is an experience that goes on through life. And so he gives to them these directives, and he says, I want you to keep yourselves.

I want you to stay alert, because the scoffers will come. You need to be on your game. And I want you to have mercy upon those who are struggling in their lives.

These directives come, and then he ends by assuring them in this very straightforward way that his letter is, if you like, framed by the same thing.

You have been called by God. You are beloved in God. You are kept for Jesus. Therefore, let me remind you that you will be kept.

And I don't know why it is, I think I know better now tonight why it is that I thought that I would address the 24th verse of Jude. After all, I have a whole Bible, and you don't know what you want me to say, and I can deal with just about anything in the whole Bible.

[7:14] But when I listened to this, I said, oh, I get it now. So, what assurance do we have that what has just taken place here will be fulfilled?

Well, the answer is, because of the calling of God, because of what it means to be beloved of God, and what it means to be kept by God.

Perhaps it's worth asking as we consider this, do you ever feel like quitting? Do you ever feel in the long cross-country run of the Christian life of saying, you know what, I've gone a long way around this track a number of times.

I think I'm just going to lie down in the grass for a while and let somebody else take it over. Do you ever wonder whether you're going to make it to the finishing line?

Do you ever say to yourself as you drive in the car, I am amazed that I am still in this race? How is it? Well, the encouragement and the explanation is contained here essentially in the 24th verse.

[8:26] Let me observe three things. First of all, the preservation that is promised and is realized. Secondly, the presentation that then follows and finally, the jubilation that is part of this.

Jude's brother James in his very practical letter highlights the responsibility particularly of the teacher where he says, we need to acknowledge that we all stumble in many ways.

The best of men are men at best. We all have clay feet. He is addressing this supremely in relationship to the use of the tongue, which is, of course, perfectly understandable because teachers use our tongues all the time.

But in fact, it belongs to more than that. It belongs to our desires. It belongs to our decisions. And therefore, it confronts us with the fact that we face the challenge just of living the life.

We are aware of the weakness of our hearts. We are aware of how easy it is to run after things that aren't beneficial to us.

[9:42] And we need to reckon on the fact that there is danger on the path. Pilgrim's progress stands the test of time, doesn't it? That as Pilgrim sets out, he is immediately confronted by all kinds of things as he is making his way towards that final destination.

And he is aware, and we are aware, of the presence of the enemy, that the Christian is involved in a continual and irreconcilable war, that the same grace which reconciles us to God antagonizes us to the evil one.

This is how the Westminster Confession of Faith addresses it. When God converts a sinner and brings them into a state of grace, he frees them from their natural bondage to sin, and by his grace alone he enables him freely to will and to do what is spiritually good.

So far, so good. Yet, because of his remaining corruption, he does not perfectly only will what is good, but also wills what is evil.

Now, it's important, vitally important, that we recognize that Jude is not writing here about the believer called, beloved, and kept stumbling out of God's family.

[11:11] He's not addressing that at all. How could he possibly? He knows his Bible. He knows God. I don't know if he knows Philippians 1, but we do.

That he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. That he is the one who sustains us to the end. I will give them eternal life, and they will never perish.

So, if he's not talking about that, then what is he talking about? Well, he's talking about the stumbling, the trips, the falls, staying with Pilgrim, the danger of lying down in Bypath Meadow, the seducing sounds of Vanity Fair, the kind of friendships that once were beneficial to us that have now begun to move us away from the convictions with which we had begun, stumbling into error, adopting sinful patterns of behavior, which always rob us of our joy and always rob us of our assurance.

You know, his readers might easily have stumbled into some of the ungodly ideas that these people, the creeps, were promulgating amongst them.

And so, he actually gives the exhortation, verse 21, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[12:42] And then, of course, you find yourself saying, how am I possibly going to keep myself in the love of God? Now to Him who is able to keep you. God provides the means for our keeping.

And so, it is that we can take great comfort in this. This is Samuel Rutherford, a Presbyterian, and then I'll give you one from Spurgeon, a Baptist.

This is Rutherford in an earlier age. All our stability and the strength of our salvation is anchored and fastened upon free grace.

And I am sure that Christ hath by His death and blood cast and tightened the knot so fast that the fingers of the devils and hell fools of sins cannot loose it.

The preservation of God's people. Spurgeon, a little more colloquially, God could do this by shutting us up in a prison or depriving us of the power to commit sins.

[13:58] But He does not keep us in that way. He leaves us with every faculty and propensity that we had before. Yet by some mysterious, omnipotent working of His Holy Spirit, He keeps all His people from stumbling.

I mentioned the Cleveland Clinic. That's where I go to see those wonderful people. And the last physical that I had, the doctor said to me, well, everything looks to be pretty good.

But as you leave, let me just say one thing to you, Alistair, make sure you do not fall. Make sure you do not fall. I took that as a bit of an insult to tell you the truth.

I walked out saying, does he think I'm my dad or what is that? I don't fall until I fell. I sleep very soon afterwards and I was lying on the concrete floor of my garage looking up at the ceiling and saying to myself, oh, this is what he meant.

This is what he meant. But I began in the way I began because it is a great mystery, isn't it? The saving, keeping power of God.

[15:11] When these little ones grow to maturity, then we'll know, then we'll see. This is one of my favorite hymns.

When all thy mercies, oh my God, my rising soul surveys, transported with the view, I'm lost in wonder, love, and praise.

Unnumbered comforts to my soul, your tender care bestowed before my infant heart conceived from whom those comforts flowed.

And in a verse seldom if ever sung, when in the slippery paths of youth, with heedless steps I ran, your hand unseen conveyed me safe and brought me up to man.

Every day that a new day dawns, our eyes open, and we thank God for His goodness to us through the night, and we realize the opportunity of the day that lies ahead, we're testifying to the preservation that is here addressed by Jude.

[16:25] But not just preservation, a presentation, a presentation. He is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless, kept from and presented to.

The believer is waiting for that blessed hope, that great appearing of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The trajectory of the Christian life may be summarized in all kinds of ways, but it is certainly this.

And what God is doing with you in Christ is the same thing He is doing with me, and the same person who's sitting next to you also in Christ.

And what is that? Well, you know Romans 8, 28, that all these things work together for good for those who love God. And then He goes on into 29, for those whom God has called, He has predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son.

So, the trajectory of our lives is such that our elder brother Jesus is not only our Savior and our Lord and our King, but He is our pattern. And so, that is God's eternal purpose.

[17:41] When Paul writes to the Corinthians, he says, and we are being transformed into His image. And when John writes in 1 John 3, he says, now we are the children of God, but it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when we see Him, we shall be like Him, because He's preserving us in order that He might present us.

You know, when you're invited to a special event, and I've been at special events all this weekend, the big question has been, what are you supposed to wear at this event? And it's been very easy, I think, because of the rather casual nature of things.

When there's freedom to choose, then you have to make decisions. And usually, as a man, when you decide what you're going to wear, then your wife says to you, you're not surely going to go in that, are you? Just after you've done your very best.

You can't appear in there like that. You can't go in there looking like that. Well, you can just go into the presence of a holy God, looking any way you choose.

The Old Testament makes it perfectly clear that everything and everyone who was presented to God was to be without blemish and without fault, persons as well as animals.

[19:04] That's a staggering thought, especially when you read the psalmist, and he says, Lord, who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live on your holy hill?

He whose walk is blameless. Well, that means that taken to its logical limit, that psalm would mean that no one could dwell in the presence of a holy God.

But, of course, we know that the dilemma is answered in the cross of Christ, that we are blameworthy. We're not blameless. Jesus is the blameless one.

Jesus is the one who died as a lamb without blemish or without defect. As Cecil Francis Alexander puts it in her hymn, There is a green hill.

There was no other good enough to pay the price of sin. He only could unlock the gate of heaven and let us in. So, our standing before God in Christ is established in eternity, is revealed in time, and is unfolded as we continue.

[20:26] Again, the doctrine of justification is the doctrine of a standing and a falling church. As I've walked around again the city for the last few days, as I've traveled a wee bit around, it is staggering, and I'm sure it's staggering for those of you who live here consistently to go from building to building to building that are anything other than what they once were, that were that once sounded out the name of Christ and the glory of his atonement and everything else as now sounding out a very different note.

What happened? Well, what happened was that the person who had the privilege of expounding the Scriptures lost confidence in the Scriptures and then lost confidence in what the Scriptures teach and so began to teach in a different way.

And the idea that a standing of a sinner before a holy God was on account solely of all that Jesus had accomplished was diminished, devalued, and dumped.

justification, the God of his own mercy, unmerited mercy, remits the sins of guilty men and women, accounting them righteous on the basis of Christ's representative obedience and redemptive death.

Again, that's the confession. Goodness, this is a Presbyterian church. I should quote the Westminster Confession while I'm here. keep you all happy. This is Calvin.

[22:06] The Son of God, though spotlessly pure, took upon himself the ignominy and shame of our sin and in return clothed us with his purity.

That our standing before God is on account of the fact that God receives the sinner only on account of the perfect righteousness of Jesus, which is credited to us through our faith union with him.

Imagine the thief on the cross. In fact, imagine that whole scene for a moment. Here you have two individuals in the same proximity to Jesus.

They both are the beneficiaries of having heard everything that Jesus has said from the cross. One curses him and dies.

One cries out to him and lives. Lord, will you remember me when you come into your kingdom?

[23:19] Today, with me, paradise. Is there a dress code, Jesus? I'm naked up here.

That's a perfect dress code. Nothing in my hand I bring. Simply to your cross I cling. Naked, come to thee for dress and helpless come to thee for grace.

It's as foul that I, to a fountain fly, wash me, Jesus, or I'm a dead man. Alive in him, my living head, and clothed in righteousness, divine bold, I approach the eternal throne and claim the crown through Christ my own.

I shared in a funeral on Thursday of a very dear friend of my wife and I. Her husband preceded her in death by only a few months. He often took me to events that otherwise I could not have got into, to the Open Championship, to the rugby in Edinburgh, and so on.

And I found myself going in through there, waiting on somebody saying to me, hey, hey, where do you think you're going? And I'd be able to turn and say, I'm with him.

[24:46] And that made all the difference. But in Christ, it's not I'm with him. It's I'm in him. I'm in him. My union with Christ is the issue.

It's really such a reality that when it grips us afresh, it helps us that one day, strange as it may seem to us now, we will stand before him in the presence of his glory.

And that will be it. Jubilation. You see, where do you get that from? Well, I think it's in the text. 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.

Joy. That's jubilation. Remember, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2, he says, I have not seen. It's invisible.

Nor ear heard. It's inaudible. Nor has the heart conceived. It's inconceivable what God has prepared for those who love him.

[26:01] But it is the Spirit who makes it known to us as we come around God's people, as we sit under God's Word, as we go out into our communities to share the good news of Jesus.

We're reminded of this. The joy when sin is gone. When what they used to tell me in Crusaders class, in Jesus, you have been saved from sin's penalty.

You are being saved from sin's power. And one day, you will be saved from sin's presence. When Satan is shut out, when temptation is over forever.

What a wonderful joy it will be for Sunday school teachers to find themselves in the presence of Christ, in the presence of glory, and be able to look around and see, oh, I never thought he listened to a thing I was saying in the Sunday school.

And you brought him here, Jesus. That is amazing. And that wee girl, always doing all kinds of things. I despaired ever of ever anything happening to her.

[27:10] What a joy to be able to say, as it were, what Jesus actually says before the Father. Here I am and the children you've given me. Here they all are.

Look at this group. Look at what has happened. Jesus will have the joy of presenting the church his bride. And it was in anticipation of that joy that he endured the suffering of the cross, so that the prize for which he died is an inheritance of nations.

in the presence of his glory with great joy. Do you think it's okay to say that God himself will have joy?

I think so, because it's in Zephaniah chapter 3 in verse 17. He, that is God, will rejoice over you with gladness.

He will exult over you with loud singing. Now, we know from the parable in Luke chapter 15 of the boy who was down the road and then came back that we have a picture of God running.

[28:32] But the thought of God singing I think it's in Job where he talks about I can imagine when the world was made, when the morning stars were shouting with joy.

But God didn't sing at that point. He said, this is very good. There was no song.

But think of it. When that great company, an innumerable company, a multinational company, gathers in his presence around the throne, the joy of the eternal Father will swell the chorus of praise.

And everything and everyone will burst into infinite, God-like song. I was a big fan of Elizabeth II. I hope that's okay to say. It should be. And I loved the way she preached at her funeral. Oh, you say, you must have heard something that I never heard because apparently she was doing anything other than preaching at her funeral.

[29:47] Oh, no, but I think she did. I'm assuming she chose her hymns. Number one, the 23rd Psalm to the tune of Crimmond. Good choice.

The Lord is my shepherd. Number two, the hymn that was sung at the funeral of Queen Victoria and at the handing over of Hong Kong from Britain to the Chinese.

With the glorious concluding verse, So be it, Lord. Thy throne shall never, like earth's proud empires, pass away. Your kingdom stands and grows forever till all your creatures own your sway. And then she capped it off with love divine, all love's excelling. With the amazing lines, Surely, surely this is right.

I hope so. I'll ask her. Till we cast our crowns before thee. That's one thing for us to say.

[30:51] I don't have a crown. We will have a crown, but it will be given to us. Maybe we get to keep it. I don't know, but you'll have it so you can cast it down. But when she, if she chose that hymn, she was making a point.

There's only one person that Our Majesty ever referred to as Your Majesty. Your Majesty. That's going to be the jubilation.

And that's the only thing that will mean jubilation. Earthly pleasures come and go. Success, fame, whatever it might be.

I think I have a quote here from Mogarich. I'll just slip it in since I thought of it just now. Listen to Mogarich in an early year. He's been gone a long time. He says, That's pleasure.

That's pleasure. Furnished with money and a little fame, even the elderly, if they care to, may partake of trendy diversions. That's pleasure.

[32:02] It might happen once in a while that something I said or wrote was sufficiently heated for me to persuade myself that it represented a serious impact on our time. That's fulfillment.

Yet I say to you, and I beg you to believe me, multiply these tiny triumphs by a million. Add them all together, and they are nothing, less than nothing, a positive impediment measured against one draft of that living water Christ offers to the spiritually thirsty irrespective of what they are.

It's true. Solid joys and lasting treasure, none but Zion's children know. We used to sing in the old days whenever they were, Therefore the redeemed of the Lord shall return and come with singing unto Zion, and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads.

They will obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and mourning shall flee away. God's happiness will not be complete till all His beloved ones are saved to sin no more.

Preserved, presented, jubilant. Father, thank you that your word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path, that we can read it, we can learn from it, we can meet Jesus in it.

[33:43] So accomplish the purposes that you have planned for all that has just been said. Banish from our recollection anything that is untrue or unhelpful, and grant that we might be unmistakably assured that the God who begins a good work in us will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

and in Christ's name we pray, Amen.