

Rejoice in the True Foundation: Look to God with hope

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Date: 10 December 2006

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[0 : 00] Come with me, if you would, to the letter of Jude for the last time. And we come now to perhaps the best-known verses of Jude's letter, often used as a doxology to end a service or being sung in that way.

There's a lovely version of it in our praise hymn books, number 900. We often sing it. And probably much better known than all the rest of the letter of Jude. I've never seen verse 5, for example, sung as a doxology, have you?

Or verse 11, for example. Woe to them, for they walked in the way of Cain. Or verse 16. In fact, there's a lot of verses in Jude's letter that don't really make for an uplifting doxology.

But verses 24 and 25 are wonderful verses. And we're right to use them in that way. But how much more powerful these words are when we do read them after having read and studied and pondered everything else that Jude has written.

It's a very good example, isn't it, of taking a text in context. I hope the Cornhill students are listening. Not just a nice thought to end off a church service.

[1 : 22] In fact, it's much, much more than that when we see it here, isn't it? It's a vital perspective that Jude wants us to have in our minds, on top of everything else that he's had to tell us in this letter.

And some of that has been pretty hair-raising stuff, hasn't it? Because Jude's letter is all about a battle. A battle for the future of the gospel. A battle that takes place in the face of real and present danger for Christian people and for Christian churches whose very survival is on the line.

Let's make no mistake about that. There is a real danger to be reckoned with. Verse 4 is very, very plain. The truth of the gospel, Jude says, is constantly under attack.

It's under attack by a rebranding process that is nothing but a perversion of the truth. And so there are real enemies to be recognized and to be resisted. And that's true in our day, just as it was in Jude's day.

And they are to be exposed for what they really are. Enemies of Christ and his church. And therefore, as we've seen, there is a real responsibility for us to respond.

[2 : 37] All of us must constantly be building and rebuilding on the true foundation. That's what verse 20 teaches us. Looking out to one another in faith and encouraging one another to grow.

To grow strong in the faith. To build on the truth. To make impact for the truth. And, as we saw this morning in verses 22 and 23, we're always to be rescuing to the true foundation.

Rescuing those who are wavering. Who are wandering. And even those who have become warped in their thinking by the wickedness and the perversity of this world and its many desires, its many lures.

And it's all very daunting, isn't it, to think of these responsibilities. It's rather unsettling. It's rather worrying for us. Especially if we are tender-hearted Christian people.

How are we to do this? How are we to bear such huge responsibilities? Can we do it? Can we ourselves even be sure that we won't go the way of the waver and the wanderer?

[3 : 44] Drifting, even, well, even perhaps departing altogether from the faith. In difficult days, in dangerous days. I'm sure you find yourself asking yourself that sometimes.

I certainly do. I was saying at the prayer meeting this Wednesday, we were talking about a funeral that we'd had and the tribute given. That in a very real sense, we are living for our own funerals, aren't we?

Well, obviously, in one sense. But in another, in the sense that what is said of us, the tribute that is given to us, what is said of our Christian faith, what is that going to say when we're dead and gone?

Will it really ring true? Will they be able to stand and say, he stood faithful to God right till the very end? Or will they be able to say that about me?

And about you? I mean, it's easy to think, isn't it, in the face of Jude's dire warnings, all the predictions that we've had to read through, it's easy to think, well, what hope is there for me to survive?

[4 : 45] What hope is there for our churches? We've got so much responsibility on us to contend for the truth. Are we going to manage it? We find ourselves saying, help, it's such a great challenge.

But you see, Jude knows our hearts. And that's why he ends his letter this way. He ends with a resounding triumph, a resounding reassurance for us.

In the face of everything that's gone before, he reminds us of the one great fact that underlies everything. The one great fact that changes all circumstances in life.

the fact of God himself. If we forget God, and who he really is, then we are in despair, we're bound to be. But if we remember him, if we remember what he is, and who he is, then everything is entirely different.

And that's why Jude's parting message to us is look up. Look up with hope, he says. Rejoice in the true foundation of your faith. Rejoice in the one eternal, unchanging God himself.

[5 : 57] Rejoice in him. And remember him. And look to him. And think about him. And everything else will be very different indeed.

Last week, as you know, I was away on a study week. In fact, I was holed up in a little log cabin down in the Algarve in the south of Portugal, studying. And with no phone, and no email, and no people around, it really is astonishing how much work you can do.

I'm thinking about doing it every week. But I was somewhat helped by the terrible weather. There was cloud, and rain, and lashing, and winds. Now Ben did warn me, Ben, our weatherman, he did warn me that it was going to be dreadful weather down there, and I could expect it.

And at some time, I really thought, my goodness, I could be in Glasgow. It was a little bit warmer, but not much. Then at the end of my study week, Rebecca arrived, and we had two days of beautiful sunshine.

The skies cleared, it was blue, it was beautiful, and there was a total transformation on the landscape. It just seemed like summertime again. Now whether that was down to the sun, or to the presence of the sunshine of my life, I'm not quite sure.

[7 : 05] Don't tell her I said that. But somehow, one way or another, everything was suddenly altogether different. And that's Jude's message to us at the end of this letter.

He's saying to us, look, in the midst of the battle, in the midst of contending for the faith, struggling to keep faith to the end, remember the Lord.

Look up with hope, and that will transform everything for you. It won't magic you out of the battle, of course, but it will make all the difference to us in the midst of it.

All the difference in the world. So let's look in these verses at what Jude wants us to rejoice in as we look up in hope. Look who he reminds us our God really is, the God of Scripture.

Three things he gives us to rejoice our hearts in the one who himself is the foundation that all of our faith, all of our future is built in. First of all, do you see there, verse 24, Jude tells us that our God is our powerful keeper.

[8 : 11] To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before his presence, before the presence of his glory with great joy. That's our God, says Jude.

He alone has the power to keep forever, and he will keep those who are called and beloved and kept for Jesus Christ. Our God is a powerful keeper.

And that's the wonderful truth that envelopes, if you like, Jude's letter. He begins with it in verse 1. He says, we're kept for Jesus Christ. He ends with it here in verse 24.

We're kept for him and for the day of his coming. Now, that doesn't mean, of course, we've no responsibility. Of course not. He's just said in verse 21, we do have responsibilities.

These are great. We have to keep ourselves, he says. But it's this promise that enables us to keep ourselves. We're not alone, we're not orphans, we're not wandering and helpless.

[9 : 10] We have the keeping power of the eternal God surrounding us and holding us in. That's a promise, says Jude. God will keep us on the path to his glory.

He'll be like a pillar of cloud before us and a pillar of fire behind us so that we can walk the road to glory. We need not stumble, he says. And therefore, we must not stumble.

God promises us all the keeping power that we need to keep ourselves in his love. Can you see the twofold purpose of his keeping power?

First of all, he says, it's to preserve us, to keep us from stumbling. That's a promise to keep us from spiritual ruin, from stumbling away from God and away from his purposes for our lives now and for all eternity.

That's one of the favourite images that you find when you read the Psalms, isn't it? Think of Psalm 121, one of my favourite Psalms, a special family Psalm to us, has been all our lives.

[10 : 17] But I think it's probably the first thing I ever preached on in St. George's Tron some years before I came here. He will not let your foot be moved. He who keeps you will not slumber.

Or Psalm 116, verse 8, you have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling. I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living.

You see, kept from stumbling, from falling away from the Lord so that we'll go on walking with him. And so we can go on walking with him because we can, we must.

You see, in the Bible, God's sovereign keeping power is never an excuse for us to be passive. It's always the opposite. It's a spur for action. God will keep you so you can keep going and you must keep going.

Psalm 56, verse 12, I must perform my vows to you, O God. I will render thank offerings to you. Why? For you have delivered my soul from death.

[11 : 19] Yes, my feet from falling. That I may walk before God in the light of life. You see, he is our powerful keeper.

So we can keep ourselves in his love in obedient faith. That's always the Bible's way. But isn't it a wonderful comfort to us to hear that? To people who know their own frailties, their own tendency to stumble and fall away so easily.

to people who know that they still need God's mercy day after day after day. To people who know that they need the mercy that verse 21 speaks about.

The mercy that comes on the last day when Jesus Christ appears. To people who fear, will I be able to keep going?

Will I make it to that last day? Jude says, he is able to keep you from falling. Our God is a great preserver. Isn't that a great encouragement to see that truth in the flesh when we see it in the lives of Christian people that God does keep people right to the end?

[12 : 34] I find it one of the most encouraging things in my whole life. And all of us should see that. Those of you who are teenagers, who are under all the pressures that you find at school with your friends and all the pressure in society to conform and everything else.

Don't you find it an encouragement when you look around the church and you see students who are four, five, six years ahead of you and they've gone through all those struggles that you feel so keenly now at school and they're still standing for Jesus and they're witnessing for him at university and they're stronger now than they were then?

God keeps them. He's the preserver. And those of us who are middle-aged and I have to plead guilty to that now these days I suppose but I can't tell you what an encouragement it is to my heart when I see older brothers and sisters in Christ that have been kept by God that are still strong in the faith right to the end.

I remember when I was a student training for ministry how encouraging I used to find it going to minister's conferences and seeing ministers in their fifties and their sixties and their seventies even in their eighties still standing for the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ and every day in my classes I was having the Bible taken apart and my theology unpicked and my beliefs trampled on and I was asking myself can I be intellectually coherent and still believe these things can I go on with this?

And then I would see men of great intellect and ability power and persuasion standing still for the truth of God our God is a preserver he keeps there are folk even in our own congregation today who are facing death with a steady eye and I find that an immense encouragement he will not let your feet stumble he's a preserver he will keep you he will preserve us from ruin until that great day that's the promise of God and you know all the way through the letter of Jude that day is the great focus isn't it it's the focus of the whole New Testament and Jude has been on a mission of reorientation hasn't he from the present to the future the rebranders of the faith always want us to think about the here and now forget the future forget heaven think about satisfaction think about blessing think about fulfillment that's what you need now that's what we offer but Jude reminds us that that can lead us into all kinds of ungodliness all kinds of selfish passions and Jude says to us no it's that day that matters that day alone it's reaching that day it's standing on that day he warns us in verse 6 doesn't he that that day is a day of judgment it leads to eternal fire for the wicked as verse 7 says leads to utter darkness leads to all the ungodly being in judge verse 15 is very very plain very stark don't dare underestimate the importance of that great day says Jude but on the other hand it's the day of glory for those who are kept by

[15 : 52] God it's the day of mercy and the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ to unleash eternal life and that's the second aspect do you see of God's keeping power it's a power to preserve us yes to keep us from ruin until that day but also he says in verse 24 it's a power to present us to present us blameless before his presence with great joy now that's a worship word present it's priestly language it speaks of the presentation of an offering a sacrifice a perfect pleasing offering that brings joy to the heart of God isn't that staggering what could we present to God as an offering that would please him you see that's human religion isn't it it thinks that God wants offerings and sacrifices trinkets and duties and mumbo jumbo but that's totally wrong

Paul tells us that so clearly in Acts chapter 17 doesn't he he was speaking to very learned philosophers in Athens but he said God is not served by human hands as if he needed anything since he himself gives mankind life and breath and everything it's preposterous to think that we could present before God an offering that he would be pleased with and yet Jude tells us here that he himself on that day will present us to himself as a treasured offering as something to be rejoiced in and the Bible tells us that that's the purpose of the whole of creation that God purposed before the time before the world began that we should be holy and blameless before him that's what Ephesians 1 says isn't it that's the purpose of everything Ephesians 5 27 tells us that the whole purpose of creation and redemption is that God might present to himself in splendor the church without spot or without wrinkle blameless says Jude in the presence of his glory and that's what God's keeping us for

God wants us that's the destiny that he's prepared for us before all worlds that's the eternal glory that he made us for to present us as a perfect offering before him having been preserved until that day and you see that eternal glory is being forged now that's been Jude's message to us it's being forged in the midst of the struggles and the battles that we contend for in our faith it's being forged now as we struggle for faithfulness and holiness in this world of sin and wickedness that's what God is doing in us now that's what he's doing for us it's all about being prepared for that great day of presentation and that should be a wonderful comfort and consolation to us as we battle along in our

Christian lives as we contend for the faith against all kinds of falsehoods and battering things that come against us as we cope with all kinds of disappointments in our own lives and struggles for faithfulness that we undergo it should be a great comfort not just for battling Christians but for baffled Christians don't you find yourself sometimes frankly baffled with life with the way our Christian lives are the way they are full of so many struggles full of mysteries don't you find yourself perplexed and puzzled at the injustices in life or in the painful things in your own life that you just can't make sense of you can't understand Jude says remember it's the joy of that day that's being forged now in your life and through these struggles it may be baffling but don't lose heart that's his point God is keeping you for that glory he's doing it and this is the way he does it we can't understand it always but in a sense he has to do it this way because the transformation is so great that the sheer weight of glory that is to come must cause convulsions in this world when God's purpose is touch upon it he's doing such an enormous thing listen to

Paul as he speaks about this when he writes to the Corinthian church 2nd Corinthians 4 verse 16 so we do not lose heart he says though our outer nature is wasting away our inner nature is being renewed day by day for this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen for the things that are seen are transient but the things that are unseen are eternal and Jude saying to us be encouraged Christian brother and sister it's that glory it's that joy that is solid and eternal not what comes now and go on work out your salvation with fear and trembling as Paul says to the Philippians why for it's God who is at work in you and be assured be assured judgment doesn't depend on you presenting yourself in a favourable light with God on that day do you see that it depends on Jesus presenting you to himself blameless and with great joy blameless because of his powerful work for us and in us and that brings us to the second thing that Jude wants us to leave us rejoicing with at the end of this letter

[22 : 03] God is a powerful keeper he'll preserve us from stumbling he'll present us before him blameless and with great joy because our God is a personal saviour verse 25 the only God our saviour through Jesus Christ our Lord you see only if God is our saviour can we have any hope that's the difference between all mere religion and the true Christian gospel between everything else and the faith once for all delivered to the saints God is the only God and he is the saving God many people think rather like this don't they what hope do I really have of not stumbling or falling maybe not making it maybe the best I can hope for is reaching that day with uncertainty with doubt am I a failure could I really be accepted there are many many people many people going to churches week by week who are wracked with that kind of doubt but that's religion doesn't matter what variety it is what clothes it has on that's something that lays a crushing burden of anxiety and of stress and of guilt on people that's what drives pilgrimages whether it's the Mecca or whether it's to the Ganges

River or whether it's to Lourdes or all the Shrines of Mary or the Holy Land or wherever it might be that's what drives the Hindu doing his puja at the shrines at the temples all over the land that's what drives the offerings to the ancestors of the animists all over Southeast Asia and in other places it's what drives the vaguely Christianized folk religion that we see so much in the churches of this country you do your bit for the church you put your bit in the plate put your bum on the seat week by week and maybe God will accept you it's just the same actually as well as the religion and it is a religion of the modern secularist in our culture isn't it everybody has a moral code one way or another everybody has things that they do that make them feel righteous make them think that if there is a God he'll be accepted by them I think these days probably the most common religion seems to be righteousness by recycling I don't know the amount of bump that we get through that's very big or godliness by greenness we've had the budget this week haven't we and we get points for saving the planet

I think the chancellor is a very big fan of that one seems that righteously he thinks he's storing up heavenly treasure as he removes your earthly treasure from you but you see whatever it's you whatever it's thinking whatever it's type the world of religion can offer absolutely no assurance in the face of judgment none at all it can leave us at best with uncertainty with anxiety if not utter despair but you see Jude says that is not our faith our God is the only God and to him belongs majesty and glory and dominion and authority from everlasting to everlasting and he is our saviour through Jesus Christ he will himself keep us through judgment he will himself present us to God in glory and with great joy and that's the vast gulf between Jude and all his opponents both of them you see had the language of Christianity both of them had the practices of the Christian faith both of them had the same liturgy and all that sort of thing but Jude's gospel the apostolic faith once for all delivered to the saints is a saving gospel it's a word of transforming power that saves from sin and from guilt and from death it's a word that changes lives it brings holiness and obedience to Jesus our master but their gospel was not that it was just a form of godliness but denying its power there was no real salvation no real transformation it kept the trappings of Christianity but it lost the very heart of Christianity the transforming word about sin and grace was missing it had become merely an affirming word affirming sin an affirming sinful behaviour and therefore

Jude tells us denying our lord and master Jesus Christ and of course that's exactly what we're seeing in the crumbling and dying churches across Scotland across the United Kingdom because in so many places that's what's offered it's a cloak of Christianity it's got the words of the Christian church it's got the language it's got the culture but it hasn't got the very heart of the faith it hasn't got the very thing that makes the gospel a gospel that makes it good news God is not a saving God he's not a God who saves from sin and judgment forever he's not a God who rescues us once and for all from death and from hell he's not a God who assures us through the cross of Christ and his death for sins he's not a God who assures us of life to come by his justification but only that true gospel of the true God who is a saviour can bring us any hope of preservation from judgment only that God can make us face that day of coming judgment with great joy that must be so wasn't it only that message of a real personal saviour can help weak struggling human beings like you and me only a gospel of real personal salvation of real rescue can reassure us only that gospel can transform and reclaim and change the addict from the gutter you know that only that gospel can humble the arrogant from off his perch of pride and put him into the dust and lift him up again humbly the Christian message is a saving message because our God says Jude the God of the Christian gospel is the only God and he's a saving

God he's a personal saviour maybe that's a message with somebody here tonight I don't know maybe you've forgotten that maybe you've never really grasped it at all maybe you fear for the future will I make it or maybe you fear for even stepping out on the road of the Christian life or would I be able to make it would I be able to keep it up if I became a Christian well he is a saviour says Jude he has rescued his beloved he's kept them he's called them to be kept for our Lord Jesus Christ not to face wrath and judgement but to be presented before him with great joy and he does it and he will do it and only he does it because he is a saving God and that may be offensive to some but it will be offensive to many in our pluralistic world but the truth is our God is the only God and he's the saving God and to this God says Jude belongs all glory and majesty and dominion and authority in all the world that means whatever your culture or background or religion and for all time that means whatever generation you've lived in whatever age and so Jude says rejoice in him remember him he is the true foundation of our faith he's the rock on which your whole future depends he is your powerful keeper he is your personal saviour and thirdly Jude says to us therefore he is our permanent master he alone is king and lord forever look at verse 25 to the only God our saviour through Jesus

[30 : 35] Christ our lord belong glory and majesty dominion and authority before all time and now and forever there's only one master and lord and that's Jesus Christ says verse 4 and so we're reminded here once again to him belong all glory and majesty that means he's the king forever to him belong all dominion and authority that means he's the lord he's the master forever and that's what many in the church were denying in Jude's day and they're denying it in our day too denying it by their activities that deny his authority and by their perverted theology that has to be developed to justify that behaviour but you know it's personal isn't it we need to ask ourselves what about us what about me do I really bow before the one who is lord and king forever because if to him by rights belong all authority and dominion before all time and forever it also belongs to him now today says

Jude and therefore in all of our lives all the time so it's an important question isn't it do we submit to Jesus Christ as our lord and master or are we guilty of using the language of the faith while secretly scoffing his authority scoffing at him by the way that we live let me just put Jude's implications of these words two different ways first of all he's telling us that the savior is the master and that means that true assurance of salvation can only be found in following the master Jesus Christ in keeping ourselves in his love by obedience to his word if you keep my commandment says Jesus you will abide in my love if anyone loves me says Jesus in John 14 he will keep my word and my father will love him and we will come to him and make our home with him wonderful words aren't they so do you want to know the near presence of the father and the son in your life day by day well Jesus says follow the master submit to his rule don't scorn his rule over your life that's the way of all false faith by the way isn't it

Jude's opponents were very popular because they offered cheap grace but it was based on scorn of the master rejection of his authoritative words the very opposite of submission and trust in the master's words and ways but the savior is the master there's no such thing as being saved without having Jesus Christ as your master your lord Roy Murray was just writing to us at the prayer meeting on Wednesday saying that in Vietnam there were so many services where the pressure was on to have an altar call and people come to the front and people said they were saved but nothing at all changed in their life paid no attention to Jesus and his words no master but no says the new testament and the gospel lord lord doesn't mean a thwit says Jesus it's doing the will of our father in heaven doing the will of the master the savior is the master forever and the way of salvation therefore is the way of submission to him to Jesus Christ as our lord as our only master there's no in between you see it's either or either we scorn our only lord and master that's what verse 4 tells us or we submit to our permanent lord and master who has dominion and authority over us forever the savior is the master but also

Jude is telling us that the master is the only savior and therefore any form of Christianity that denies the authority of Jesus and his apostles is not a saving faith at all the only God is savior only through Jesus Christ our lord says Jude in verse 25 you only recognize God as savior don't you when you begin to take that first step of following Jesus Christ as your master and you discover your master is your personal savior it's all from him and there's no other way no other way to know the saving God and his saving grace apart from submission to the lordship of Jesus Christ it's plain he is our savior through Jesus Christ our lord to him belong glory and majesty and dominion and authority through through Jesus Christ our lord the lordship of Christ is central to our salvation and it's essential to our knowledge of God at all and therefore any form of Christianity that denies the lordship of Jesus

Christ is rejecting outright the salvation of Jesus Christ it's barren it's empty it's dead in fact it's devilish and that's why Jude is so intensive so brutal really in his exposure of these false teachers that's why he's so urgent in his warnings because those who think that way who say there could be a salvation without submission to the authority of Jesus Christ and his word and his way however well intentioned they are they are leading people away from the unique lordship of Christ and therefore they are leading him away from the only salvation that there is because the master is the only savior the only one who can lift the condemnation of judgment at the last day and the only one who can liberate us from the fear and the burden and the guilt of our sin in the present day the master is the only savior let me say three things as we come to a close first these words are a real warning aren't they to anybody who professes to be a

[36 : 57] Christian do you really preach and practice the lordship of Jesus Christ submission and obedience to his authority to his dominion if not Jude tells us there is no cause for assurance none at all rather he calls us to repentance to a change of life to submission to the mastery of Jesus Christ it is a warning it's also a real challenge to all professing Christians do we call ourselves Christians well the savior is the master he's lord and if he really is it won't just be our lips that confess him as savior is it it will be our life our daily life that confesses him as lord our thoughts our deeds our words all of these things will proclaim our love for him and our submission to him as our master so I need to ask myself is that true does the evidence from my diary my bank account my visitor's book my photo album all sorts of other things do they really proclaim the lordship of christ in my life worth a thought isn't it the savior is the master but last let me finish as jude would have us finish with a word of encouragement a word of comfort and a word of hope maybe may very well be that you feel weak and struggling and rather feeble and failing in your christian life it may be that for you life is full of mysteries and perplexities and uncertainties that unsettle you and worry you it may be that you are fearful and that you experience attacks of doubt and anxiety and you ask yourself will I keep the faith will I really make it to the end will I cope if the going gets tough could I let the lord down like that so badly as well could that be me well friends if that's you jude is saying to you you just called him lord there didn't you you said you feared letting the lord down and you love the lord don't you and you want to please the lord don't you you want to be faithful to him well fear not because the lord that you love and the lord that you want to please is the savior he's your personal savior and he's your powerful keeper and come what may the lord that you love is able to keep you and he will keep you he'll preserve you from stumbling and he will present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy his joy and all of heaven's joy and your joy too he can do that and he will do that if he's your lord so trust him says you look up with hope rejoice despite all the battles all the struggles all the things that you surely will face in life right till the end and you will friends you will don't listen to anybody who says you won't despite all of that rejoice in him he is the true foundation of everything it all depends upon him the only

God our saviour through jesus christ our lord and jude says amen you join jude in saying amen to that for in africa you'd all shout amen let me hear you say amen that's not bad well amen says jude let it be and let it be for all of us here tonight our master jesus christ he's our personal saviour he's your powerful keeper and he will keep you from stumbling and present you in glory before the presence of all angels with great joy and now to the only god our saviour through jesus christ our lord belong glory majesty dominion and authority before all time and now and forever amen well let's sing together