

Perseverance of the Saints

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[0 : 00] Well, if we could this evening, for a short while, and with the Lord's help, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read in the letter of Jude.

The letter of Jude, and if we read again in verses 1 and 2. Jude, and we're reading the opening verses, where Jude writes, 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.

This evening, we're returning for one last time to what I suppose we could call the Christian's Greenhouse. And we're going to check on that one flower that should always be in the forefront of our minds.

Because the tulip, if you remember, the tulip is a flower that should never be allowed to wilt or to die. And this flower, it should shape the way that we walk, it should shape the way that we worship, and it should shape the way that we witness as Christians.

And as I've said before, when we understand this flower in all its beauty, it should cause us to respond in praise and adoration for the Lord. Praise because our salvation is not of ourselves.

[1 : 26] It is the gift of God. It is all of grace. And as we said before, tulip, we've said that it's an acrostic for what has become known as the five points of Calvinism.

And we've considered the first four letters, T-U-L-I. We considered T for total depravity. We saw that the entire human race is in a state of sin and misery.

Mankind is dead. Dead in trespasses and sins. And it doesn't matter if we are spoken with wisdom or eloquence or passion. We're dead. But we're not only dead.

We're in a dungeon. We're imprisoned by our sin. We're enslaved to our sin. And without the Lord intervening in our lives, without the Lord working in our heart, without the Lord taking that first step, without the Lord taking the initiative, we wouldn't respond.

We can't be saved. The Lord is the only one who can bring us from darkness to light, from death to life, from the dungeon to liberty. And so if our salvation is all of the Lord, then there must be an elect.

[2 : 33] And that brought us then to consider U in Tulip. U is for unconditional election. And the Bible tells us, as we've seen before, election is part of the gospel.

Election is good news. Because were it not for election, no one would be saved. No one would be saved, regardless of how privileged we are. Because the Lord, he was under no obligation to save anyone.

He didn't have to elect anyone. But the wonder of our salvation is that the Lord, in his grace and in his mercy, he sought to save some. But then more than that, when we considered L, for limited atonement, we saw that Jesus Christ, he entered into this world to redeem the elect.

He came to redeem those who were loved and chosen by God the Father from before the foundation of the world. And so Jesus Christ, he didn't die for the sins of the whole world.

He died for the sins of the elect. As our catechism reminds us, the only redeemer of God's elect is the Lord Jesus Christ. And then last time, probably three weeks ago now, we were looking at the fourth letter of Tulip.

[3 : 51] I is for irresistible grace. And we saw that irresistible grace is a work of the Holy Spirit. That when the Holy Spirit effectually calls us and irresistibly draws us to himself, there is conviction of sin.

There is confession of the Savior. There is commitment to the Son. And there is communication about salvation. It's irresistible grace.

And so we've considered T for total depravity, U for unconditional election, L for limited atonement, and I for irresistible grace. And now as we come to look at the last petal on this tulip, we see that P is for perseverance of the saints.

And you know, in order to consider this wonderful doctrine, we turn our attention to the letter of Jude. Because the letter of Jude, it was written to persecuted Christians. And these Christians, they were at the point of giving up altogether.

And just turning away from Christianity. But Jude, he introduces his letter with this wonderful doctrine. The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. And Jude does this by reminding these tired, weary, and battered Christians.

[5 : 12] He reminds them of who they are in Christ. He reminds them of who they are in Christ. He says in 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.

Despite all that they had been through as Christians, Jude reminded these Christians, and he's reminding us this evening, that we are called, loved, and kept.

We are called, loved, and kept. That's what he says. To those who are called, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ.

And so in Christ, you are called, loved, and kept. So first of all, in Christ you are called.

You are called. If you're using the authorized version, you'll notice that verse 1 reads, Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called.

[6 : 32] And you'll notice that the word called is put at the end of the verse, which is actually the way it was written in the original language. But the reason the word called is put at the end of the verse is for emphasis.

That's how Greek was often written. A sentence where there would be an emphasis. The emphasis was always put at the end of the sentence rather than at the beginning. But then when we translate it into English, the emphasis, it has to be moved from the end of the sentence back to the beginning, to give the emphasis, so that we'll know that the emphasis upon us as Christians is that we are called, loved, and kept.

We are called, loved, and kept. And the emphasis that Jude makes upon our calling is important. Because as Christians, and as we've been seen by studying this tulip, we've seen that we have been unconditionally elected to be saved, and yet whilst we were sinners, Christ died for us, there was a limited atonement.

But we have also been effectually called. We've been called by the Holy Spirit. And the catechism, a wonderful catechism, it reminds us of the explanation of effectual calling.

Effectual calling is a work of God's Spirit, whereby he convinces us of our sin and misery. He enlightens our mind in the knowledge of Christ. He renews our will, and he persuades us and enables us to embrace Jesus Christ as he's freely offered to us in the gospel.

[8 : 08] And so, my friend, as a Christian, you have been effectually called by the Holy Spirit. You've been effectually called by the Spirit. But you'll remember when we were studying effectual calling, you'll remember that there are two types of call.

There is the outward call, and there is the inward call. The outward call is, well, you could say, it can be resisted. But the inward call is, well, it's effectual and it's irresistible.

The outward call is the preaching of the gospel. The outward call is to whosoever. It includes everyone and it excludes no one. The outward call is a gracious call to everybody to come. But the outward call, as we see it every week, it's resistible. But the inward call, the inward call of the Holy Spirit is effectual and it's irresistible.

And it's irresistible because when the Holy Spirit begins to work in the heart and life of one of the elect, he draws us to Jesus. It's not that we're dragged into the kingdom of God, kicking and screaming.

[9 : 18] No, we are irresistibly drawn. We're brought to this point in our lives where we can no longer refuse the gospel and we have to submit and we have to surrender to the authority of King Jesus.

And you know, it's wonderful because that's exactly what the catechism describes. Effectual calling, it's a work of God's Spirit whereby he convinces us of our sin and misery.

He enlightens our mind in the knowledge of Christ. He persuades us and enables us. He renews our will so that we will embrace Jesus Christ as he's freely offered to us in the gospel. But you know, what I love about the New Testament is that when we are effectually called, the New Testament tells us that we're not only called from sin to salvation.

The New Testament says there's much more to it than that. Because the New Testament, when you look through all the letters of Paul and all the apostles, they say that, well, when we are effectually called, we're first of all called from sin to salvation.

[10:27] We're called out of darkness and called into his marvelous light. The marvelous light of the gospel. We're called, says Paul, by God's grace. God has graciously and freely called us by himself.

It wasn't anything to do with us. We didn't earn it. We didn't work for it. We didn't achieve it. In and of ourselves, we've been called by his grace.

But more than that, the New Testament says that we've been called into the kingdom and glory of God. We're called to receive the promise of eternal life.

And as those who are now in union with Christ by faith, we are united to Jesus Christ. And therefore, we have been called into one body. And we're called into the fellowship of God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is what the New Testament teaches us. But you know, there's more. There's more. Because our effectual call by the Holy Spirit, it has not only called us from sin into salvation.

[11:31] But we have also been called to be saints. We've been called to be holy. And you know, Paul, he affirmed this to Timothy.

When he said that we've been called not for impurity. We've been called in holiness. The Lord has saved us, he says. And he has called us with a holy calling.

Therefore, Paul says to the Philippians, we are to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which we have been called. And as Peter says, as he who called you is holy, you must be holy in all your conduct.

And so as a Christian, you have been called. And your effectual call, it has not only called you from sin into salvation. But you've been called to be a saint.

Which means that as a Christian, you've been called out. You have been called out. In fact, that's literally what the word church means.

[12:39] The word church in Greek means the ones who have been called out. We've been called out. Therefore, as someone who is part of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, you've been called out of sin into salvation.

And you've been called to be a saint. You've been called out of worldliness. You've been called out of the darkness into the marvelous light. And you're to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.

You're to live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel. The gospel that you have come to know and love. And so as he who called you is holy, you also must be holy in all your conduct.

My friend, this is who you are in Christ. And as a Christian, this is how you must live. Because you are called, loved, and kept.

And so as someone who is in Christ, you are called. But then secondly, you are loved. You are loved. Jude says he is a servant of Jesus Christ, a brother of James, to those who are called, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ.

[14:02] Again, if you're using the authorized version, you'll notice that it says that as a Christian, we are sanctified by God the Father. But the ESV says that we are beloved by God the Father.

Now the reason there is a difference is because of two Greek words that are very, very, very similar. There's only two letters of a difference. So writing them down, well, if they had made a mistake, then that caused a different translation.

But it's not clear which word Jude originally wrote himself. I would guess that it's the word beloved rather than the word sanctified. Sanctified. And I say that firstly because the Bible teaches us that sanctification in the life of a believer is often the work of God the Holy Spirit and not God the Father. The other reason I believe that it should be translated as beloved in God the Father is simply because what would be more encouraging when you're at the end of yourself, battered and bruised and about to give up?

Would it not be to be reminded that you are called, loved and kept? Because to be reminded that you are a beloved child of God the Father, it ought to be one of the greatest encouragements to you as a Christian.

[15 : 23] That you're a child of God, adopted in the beloved, with God as your Father, Jesus Christ as your elder brother and the church as your family.

And the wonder of it all is that you have received it. You've received this gift by an act of God's grace and unmerited love. It's all of love.

It's all of love. And you know, the Apostle John, he's often been described as the apostle of love. He's always talking about God's love.

And he's always talking about the love of God demonstrated to us in the person of Jesus. John recorded the words of Jesus, Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

John described himself as the beloved disciple. Not because he thought that he was more loved than any of the other disciples. He described himself as the beloved disciple because John was always amazed and overwhelmed by the fact that he, a sinner, was beloved by God the Father.

[16 : 32] And that's why the Apostle John, when you read his first letter, when he wrote his first letter to the churches, John says in the beginning of chapter 3, he says, Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called, we should be called the children of God.

And it's then that John, he went on to talk about God's love and he's speaking about God and he says, God is love. And then he starts talking about God's salvation and he says, here in his love, this is what love looks like.

Here in his love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us. And he sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins. And then John goes on to say, he goes on to apply it to us.

It's in chapter 3 and 4 of his letter. He says, Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. Because if we love one another, God dwells in us and his love is perfected in us.

And then John concludes his whole talk on God's love. And he concludes by saying, we love him. Because he first loved us.

[17 : 45] We love him because he first loved us. And as we said before, where did God first love us? We love him because he first loved us.

But where did God first love us? And you know, the wonder of it is, my Christian friend, is that there has never been a time since the beginning of this world that God has not loved you.

There has never been a day or an hour or even a second since time began that Jesus Christ has not loved you.

There has never been a moment since the foundation of this world was set when God has not viewed you as precious in his sight. And why is that? Because, my Christian friend, you were chosen in Christ from before the foundation of the world.

You were chosen and elected and loved in Christ when God the Father and God the Son entered into that eternal covenant of redemption. We love him because he first loved us.

[18 : 53] And he first loved us before time began. He first set his love upon us to redeem us and to save us and to bring us into his family and to bring us home to be with himself.

God first set his love upon us in the realms of eternity. But he demonstrated his love towards us in the scene of time through the death of his own son.

And his goodness and his covenant love towards us. They are promised to follow us now. All the days of our life. As David says in Psalm 23, goodness and mercy shall surely follow me all the days of my life.

And in God's house forevermore my dwelling place shall be. My friend, we love him because he first loved us. You are beloved of God the Father. Because you are in union with God the Son.

And you have been effectually called by God the Holy Spirit. You are beloved of God the Father. You are in union with God the Son. And you have been effectually called by God the Spirit.

[20 : 00] But you know the wonder of it all is that because you are beloved of God the Father. You will never be lost. You will never be lost.

That's what Jesus said. He says in John 6, All that the Father gives me will come to me. And whoever comes to me I will never cast out. For I have come down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me.

And this is the will of him who sent me. That I should lose none of all that he has given me but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life.

And I will raise him up on the last day. So my Christian friend it's because you have been chosen, elected and loved in Christ. It's because you are beloved of God the Father.

That you will never be lost. You will never be lost. This is the thing. You will be kept. You will be kept. And that's what you are being reminded here.

[21 : 05] That as someone who is in Christ you are called, loved and kept. You are called, loved and kept. You are kept.

And that's what I'd like us to consider lastly. You are kept. Jude says to those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ.

You know I believe that assurance of salvation and especially lacking assurance of salvation. That's the reason so few people commit their life to Jesus Christ.

Because they worry. They worry that if they come out on the side of the Lord or if they make a profession of faith. They worry that they won't last. They worry that if they start their Christian life, they won't keep going.

They'll just drift away. They worry that if they start, they won't finish. And sometimes their worry is not about letting themselves down. It's not about letting others down.

[22 : 09] It's not even about letting the church down. Their worry is about letting the Lord down. And the last thing they want to do is make a commitment or a profession of faith and let the Lord down.

But you know as real as their worry might be, the wonderful thing about the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints is that you don't keep going.

You are kept going. You don't keep going. You are kept going. When someone confesses Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, when they wholeheartedly commit their life to him, they are being kept.

The Bible tells us that we are kept by the power of Almighty God through faith. And you know, it was Kenny Mitchell who once said to me, he reminded me that the first step after being saved is being kept.

The first step after being kept. Because, you know, we have the promise of the Bible. He who began a good work in you, he will bring it on to completion at the day of Christ Jesus.

[23 : 22] My friend, the Lord finishes what he starts. He finishes what he starts. And, you know, it was R.C. Sproul who said, The whole purpose of God's election is to bring his people safely to heaven.

Therefore, what he starts, he promises to finish. My friend, you don't keep going. You are kept going. And, you know, this is the thing.

The Bible often describes the Christian life like running a race. We're running a race. Paul said about his Christian life, he says, This one thing I do, forgetting those things that are behind, and reaching forward to the things that lie ahead.

I press on towards the mark of the high call of God in Christ Jesus. The Christian life is like running a race, he said. The writer to the Hebrews, he wrote in a similar manner.

He's writing to persecuted Christians who are at the point of giving up altogether. And he says to them, Lay aside every weight and sin that doth so easily beset you.

[24 : 33] And run with patience, with endurance, the race that is set before you. But how are we to run? How can we run? What's the secret to reaching the finish line?

He says, let us run with patience, the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and the finisher of our faith. My friend, you don't keep going.

You are kept going. And, you know, this wonderful doctrine, it's as much the preservation of the saints as it is the perseverance of the saints.

Because when you commit your life into the hands of the Lord, you are being kept. You are being kept. And because you are being kept, yes, you can drift.

Yes, you can distance yourself from the Lord. You can distance yourself from his people. And all these things. You can even fall. But the wonder of it is, you will never fall away.

[25 : 34] Jesus says, all that the Father has given me will come to me. And whosoever comes to me, I will never cast out.

My friend, the one who has called you and loved you is the one who promises to keep you. You don't keep going. You are kept going.

And that's what the psalmist learned when he was making his long journey towards the Lord's house. In Psalm 121, we're going to sing it in a moment, the psalmist is describing his pilgrimage towards Mount Zion.

He's going to the Lord's house. And on that long and treacherous journey, the psalmist discovered that he doesn't keep going. He's kept going. Because as the psalmist climbed over the mountains and as he had to walk through the valleys and even cross through rivers, he had to do all these things in order to get to the Lord's house.

He had to contend not only with the landscape, but also with the heat of the sun by day, the cold nights under the moonlight by night. He had to contend with all these different things.

[26 : 45] And yet, what the psalmist discovered and whatever every traveling Christian pilgrim discovers, is that our confidence is not in our ability to persevere.

Our confidence rests in the power of Christ to sustain us by his grace and to lead us safely home. That's why the psalmist could say, the Lord is my keeper.

The Lord is my keeper. And from his own experience, the psalmist concludes by assuring all of the Lord's people who are making the same journey towards the Lord's house.

He says, The Lord shall keep thy soul, he shall preserve thee from all ill. Henceforth thy going out and in. God keep forever will.

My Christian friend, you don't keep going. You are kept going. Because as someone who is in Christ, you are called, loved and kept.

[27 : 45] You are called, loved and kept. And this message is for you, to those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ.

That's how Jude opened his letter to encourage struggling Christians. But notice how he concludes his letter. Jude concluded with this great doxology, this wonderful benediction.

And you know, it's as if you can almost imagine Jude lifting his hands over the Lord's people and he says, Now unto him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you faultless before his glory with exceeding joy.

To the only wise God our Saviour be glory and majesty, power and dominion, both now and forever. Amen. Do you know what's wonderful?

My Christian friend, as someone who is in Christ, you are called, you are loved and you are kept. You are called, loved and kept.

[28 : 54] May the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, we marvel at who thou art and what thou hast done in and through thy son Jesus and what thou art still doing.

That thou art the one who has begun that good work and thou art the God who has promised to bring it on to completion at the day of Christ Jesus. Help us, Lord, we pray, to keep looking to him, to know that he is the one who keeps us and help us to keep praying like David did, saying, Lord, keep me for I trust in thee.

O Lord, keep us, we ask, for we know that we cannot keep ourselves. And Lord, guide us, we pray, guard our hearts and our minds and bless us together. Bless, Lord, those who will meet with us shortly, those who are mourning, whose hearts are heavy.

That thou wouldst remind them I knew this evening that the Lord is their keeper and he is the one who has promised to keep their going out and their coming in from this time forth and even forevermore.

O do us, good Lord, we ask for Jesus' sake. Amen. Well, we shall bring our service to a conclusion by singing the words of Psalm 121.

[30 : 16] Psalm 121, page 416 in the Scottish Psalter. Psalm 121, we'll sing the whole psalm.

I to the hills will lift mine eyes from whence doth come my need. My safety cometh from the Lord who heaven and earth hath made. Down to the end of the psalm, the Lord shall keep thy soul. He shall preserve thee from all ill. Henceforth thy going out and in, God keep forever well. The whole psalm, to God's praise. Amen. I to the hills will lift my eyes from whence doth come my name. My safety cometh from the Lord, who heaven undercath me.

Thy good heal not, let's light the wind, let's light the wind, he slumber that thee keeps.

[31 : 43] Behold, he that keeps his fire, as he is, he is clambered, not nor sweet.

The Lord, think he's, the Lord, thy shade on thy white The Lord shall keep thy soul, we shall.
I'll preserve thee from all will. Henceforth thy going out and in, God keep forever will.
Amen.