

Guest Preacher - Rev. Kenneth M Ferguson

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Preacher: Rev. Kenneth M Ferguson

[0 : 00] Now, as the Lord enables us, let us turn for a short while this evening to the letter of Jude where we have read. And I'd like to focus in particular on the words we have from verse 20 and 21.

Jude 1, verse 20, We cannot but have noticed the marvellous security that the Lord affords his people, mentioned at the very beginning of this letter and also at the end.

For example, at the beginning, verse 1, It's as if they are kept securely in Christ's hand.

Remember what it says in the Gospel according to John. He says that, My Father has given them to me, and none shall pluck them from my Father's hand.

The security of God's people. And then at the very end of this chapter in Jude, at verse 24, Now, to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and 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.

[2 : 20] Amen. The ability of Christ to keep those who are his own. So we see at the beginning of this letter, and at the very end, it's as if the Lord holds his people.

But then as you read through the letter itself, you realize that there are so many dangers in the way for the Christians of Jude's day.

It says here at verse 4, We see that Although the people of God are kept ultimately in ultimate and blessed safety and security, nevertheless, there are dangers in the way as they walk through this wilderness.

And you see that in verses 12 and 13, that these people, I'm just saying these few words by way of introduction, these people, they are like hidden reefs at your love feasts.

And every sailor knows the danger that a hidden reef poses to the safety of his boat or of his ship. And these people who have come in secretly into the midst of the people of God, they are like hidden reefs, ready to sink, as it were.

[4 : 25] You're witness and destroy it. And also that they feast with you without fear, they're shepherds feeding themselves. It's as if they are focusing upon themselves and don't feed the people of God.

They are waterless clouds. In these Middle Eastern countries, times of drought were caused by the clouds not having any rain, rained down upon the land.

These people, they were waterless. They weren't helping the situation in the Church of Christ at all. They weren't irrigating the ground in a spiritual way.

And they're swept along by winds, fruitless trees in late autumn. When trees ought to be weighed down with fruit for the use of man.

These people, they are like fruitless trees in late autumn. They are twice dead, uprooted, wild waves of the sea, casting up the form of their own shame, and so on.

[5 : 42] So, there are people among the people of God in Jude's day who are posing no end of problems and no end of dangers to those who love the Lord.

And he comes to these two verses, 20 and 21, and he focuses upon the responsibility that each one of God's people has in such a climate and surrounded by so many dangers in this wilderness journey.

And he says, but you, beloved, you who are beloved by God and in God, that there are certain things that you need to be doing.

And he says, first of all, building yourselves up in your most holy faith. And secondly, praying in the Holy Spirit.

Thirdly, keep yourselves in the love of God. And fourthly, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.

[6 : 59] I'd just like to say one or two words on each of these four things. The responsibilities that devolve upon us as believers in our own day.

Because we are surrounded by all kinds of dangers as these people were. People who may creep in, as it were, unnoticed, with doctrines that are not biblical doctrines and lifestyles that are not at all according to the Bible's commendation of a holy and godly life.

And we must, by God's grace, seek to follow the charge that he lays before us here in verse 20 and 21. These people are beloved by God and he says that there's something that you have to be doing.

And the first thing I want to mention is they need to be builders. Building yourselves up in your most holy faith.

Now, this is the faith that he mentions earlier on, the faith once delivered to the saints in verse three. Once for all delivered to the saints.

[8 : 25] What does this mean? Well, I believe it's not talking about the subjective grace of faith, but particularly the word of God, the Christian faith.

Look, what we have before us in the scriptures, from Genesis to Revelation, as a rule of life. The revealed will of God to us, and that we commit ourselves to the Lord as he reveals himself to us in the scripture, and to Jesus Christ in particular, as the mediator between God and man.

And those who have come to the feet of Jesus by faith, and those who have trusted in him for salvation, and who have turned their back upon sin, and embraced holiness, it says here that they have a building work to engage in, building yourselves up in your most holy faith.

Now, what does really this involve? Well, throughout the scriptures, we have pointers to what it means. For example, it says in the epistle of Peter, grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

And also it says in Peter, as newborn children, desire the sincere milk of the word, that you may grow thereby.

[10 : 09] die. He's talking about a kind of lifestyle that builds upon the word of God, to be involved with the word of God as our source, as our diet, as it were.

And it says here that you have to build yourselves up. Now, if the houses along there that have just seemingly been finished had been started and just the foundation left, well, nobody could live there. Even if people, the bricklayers, ran three or four rows of blocks and stopped at that point, the house wouldn't be habitable at all.

But they had to keep going, following the plan, so that at last they would reach the top of the wall. And then the joiners would apply all the joinery skills in putting the roof on and all of these other things.

The house had to be built up based upon the foundation. foundation. And of course, we have a foundation that is Christ Jesus our Lord.

[11 : 40] He is the head cornerstone. And we build upon him. And we look unto him. And we rely upon him.

And we feed upon him. And we look to him for supplying grace in every situation of life. Build yourselves up in your most holy faith.

It's a wonderful thing, isn't it? That when the Lord begins a good work, it promises that he will perform that work until the day of Jesus Christ.

But he introduces this responsibility for his people to be involved. To be involved. building themselves up.

Rabbi Duncan, a famous professor of theology long ago, he was asked at one time, is the believer active or passive in the work of salvation?

[12 : 57] And Rabbi Duncan said, well, he said, he is passive in it, but active about it.

In other words, when God the Holy Spirit comes in a day of regeneration into your soul, he is the one who does the work.

He brings to life. He gives you a new heart. He is the one alone who is able to change your nature and the direction of your life. He alone brings you to life.

But once you are living with the life of faith and the life of the Spirit, we have responsibilities that we have to fulfill. That's what Rabbi Duncan meant.

He says, I am passive in it, but I have to be active about it. Add to your faith, faith, add to your faith all of these things that Peter says, and you will grow in grace and in the knowledge of your Lord and

Savior, Jesus Christ.

[14:11] And the second thing that he mentions here is adding to your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit.

Pray in the Holy Spirit. Well, it's something that is very important in the Christian's life, that he or she be at prayer often.

There's a story told about a man from Braggers long ago, Calamor Nuhuni. I think I might have said this here before, and I'm sure you've heard this story.

He was renowned in the community for his life of prayer. And somebody who was a friend of his, a Christian friend, came across the Moor to have fellowship with him one day.

And just when his friend arrived, Calamor was heading for the barn, which was his place for prayer. And he said to his friend, I can't go into the house with you just now.

[15:25] This is my hour for prayer. And he went and did business with the Lord, and then came back and had fellowship with his friend. And I think that's what we have called to us here, that we need to be praying in the Holy Spirit.

What does it mean to be praying in the Holy Spirit? Well, you remember that the Catechism says that prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God for things in accordance with his will, in the name of Christ, together with confession of our sins and thankful acknowledgement of his mercies. And when we turn to prayer, we realize that we need the enabling of the Holy Spirit to pray aright. Oh, words may come easily sometimes.

Sometimes they don't. But we need the Holy Spirit's unction and leading and guiding and enabling in order for us to pray in the Holy Spirit.

The work of salvation is amazing. And the work of the Holy Spirit is an amazing work.

[17:04] prayer in and we are called upon to do business with the Lord every day. Pray without ceasing, he says.

Pray without ceasing. And sometimes when we go to pray, we find that the heavens are like brass. Feel that we don't get through at all. We feel that it's a real battleground as we seek to bring our affairs before the Lord in prayer.

Other times we feel that the Lord is so close and that the Lord is helping us in our petitions and that he is answering the prayer of faith.

we see that the work of the Holy Spirit in the soul, it's an amazing work.

[18:08] The work of the Holy Spirit, he asks us not to give him rest until he makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth.

He asks us, ask and it shall be given to you. Seek and you shall find. Knock and the door shall be opened unto you. And you remember that man who went to his friend at midnight and he asked for certain things and his friend wasn't willing to give him anything.

Nevertheless, for his persistence, he gave him what he was looking for. And the Lord commends that holy persistence to us as he asks us to pray in the Holy Spirit.

He asks us to pray without ceasing, to pray without ceasing. There was a group of ministers long ago who used to meet informally to discuss points of theology.

this time after they finished, they had decided that the next time they would meet they would discuss this particular issue.

[19:27] What does it mean to pray without ceasing? And they decided on a certain day and date to meet again to discuss this. And the young woman who was made to the minister in the manse where they had met, she said to the minister after the rest had gone, she said, I heard the subject you're going to discuss the next time.

I find that it's easy to answer what that means. And the minister said, what do you mean? Well, she said, when I wake up in the morning and I wash my face, I ask the Lord that I be washed from my sins in the blood of Jesus.

And when I put on my clothes, I ask that I be clothed with the righteousness of Christ. When I go down to the kitchen and I start the fire, I pray, Lord, may the fire of the Spirit burn in my soul.

When I sit to have my breakfast, I pray that the Lord would feed me with a hidden manna, and so on.

And the minister said, well, you've certainly answered that question. What does it mean to pray without ceasing? That we, in every circumstance and in every situation, take the opportunity to pray, to pray in the Holy Spirit, ask to be led by the Holy Spirit.

[21 : 17] And sometimes when we cannot articulate and say what the longings of our hearts really are, he promises that the Holy Spirit makes intercession for us with groanings, which cannot be uttered.

What are you praying for in particular, in your own life, at present? These people in Jude's day, I imagine, would be praying that they be kept from these evil doctrines that had infiltrated the church. and the people of God, they ask that they be kept from sin, from giving place to any sin at all in their lives.

The Lord Jesus says, if your eye offends you, pluck it out. If your hand offends you, cut it off, and so on, that we might not grant ourselves to be involved in things that would lead us into sin.

And in the Song of Solomon, at the end of that chapter that is so marvelously encouraging the church to come away with the bridegroom, it comes like this near the end of the chapter, catches the foxes, the little foxes that spoil our vines.

[22 : 53] A little fox can get into your mind, into your heart, into your life. Maybe it's a thought, maybe it's a word from somebody, maybe it's something that happened, and it's allowed, as it were, to lie dormant, like foxes sometimes pretend to be dead.

They pretend to be dead until a bird comes thinking that they are easy pickings, and all of a sudden the fox sees the animal, the bird coming, and he turns and catches it, and it becomes food for him. That's the way sin is. The little fox that spoils your life, spoils your thinking process, spoils your fellowship with the Lord Jesus. Something worldly, maybe it's a word, maybe it's a song, maybe it's music, whatever it is.

And we pray that the Lord would keep these things from filling your minds and filling your lives with something that is at all far from what it ought to be.

So he's asking them to be building themselves up in their most holy faith, faith, and then praying in the Holy Spirit.

[24 : 24] And thirdly, and this is a particularly strong imperative, keep yourselves in the love of God. Keep yourselves in the love of God.

Isn't it amazing? He starts off the letter, those who are called beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ. The Lord's love has reached these people's souls.

And he has shown them love in sending his Son into the world. And he has given proof that he loved them and gave himself for them.

And they have tasted that the Lord is gracious. And they have known times of his love shed abroad in their hearts, by the Holy Spirit.

If that is the case, why should he be saying here, keep yourselves in the love of God? There were people in one of the churches to whom a letter was sent in Revelation.

[25 : 42] the church of Ephesus had left its first love. Why would that happen?

How was it possible that it could happen? People who had tasted of the grace of God, blessings from heaven filling their hearts and lives, nevertheless something came along and their love for the Lord grew cold.

These people are asked to keep themselves in the love of God. How can we do that?

How can we do that? Well, if a husband and wife are in love, how do they keep in love?

Well, I think there's a number of things that happen. They keep close together and they keep talking and they keep respecting each other.

[27 : 08] These are just three things. They keep in love, in each other's company, respecting each other, and so on.

And that is true on the spiritual level as well, I think, that we need to keep close to the Lord Jesus. How do we keep close to him?

Oh, keep close to his word. Read his word on a regular basis. Read his word prayerfully. Meditate upon his word.

Pray over the word of God. Keep close to him. And also seek to be obedient to him.

Whatever he directs you to do, in his word, ask grace to be able to do it. Whatever it is, keep yourselves in the love of God.

[28 : 19] Ask him to fill you with an obedient spirit, an obedient life. Ask him to love you in a way that will fill you with a real realization of your indebtedness to him, to love him in return.

Keep yourselves in the love of God. Now, if you love me, Jesus says, keep my commandments.

commandments. Keep my commandments. The psalmist, in Psalm 119, he devotes nearly every single verse of that long psalm to the word of God and his relationship to that word.

And he says, oh, how I love thy law. It is my meditation all the day. If we love him, let us keep his commandments.

Let us do what pleases him and not what pleases ourselves. Keep yourselves in the love of God. And fourthly and finally, they are to wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.

[29 : 49] waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. They have to be patiently waiting as well as being very active in relation to the things of God.

The Lord who has done great things for them already, who has proved that he loves them, proved that he has kept them, proved that they are his people.

Now, they are to wait for further evidences of his love and his mercy to them, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ. When you come to our church service, it's in this part of what's happening. You're waiting upon our word from him.

When you come to the word of God, you're waiting to hear his voice, maybe not audibly, but nevertheless in a way that's personal to yourself.

[31 : 12] When you come into the presence of the people of God for Christian fellowship, it's as if you are waiting for a moment's fellowship with him, along with his people, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Maybe there are certain circumstances in your life that are trying at present. Maybe you've tried everything and nothing gives relief.

Well, another waited for the Lord patiently. I waited patiently for the Lord, David said.

At length to me he did incline my voice and cry to hear. Sometimes from our point of view, he takes a long time to answer our prayers.

Nevertheless, he will not be a moment late in coming with the grace that you need for your situation, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.

[32 : 40] Maybe there's an indication here of the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in glory. The Christ who comes to visit us in the means of grace.

The Christ who speaks to us through the preaching or through the scripture or through the sacrament. He is the one who will at last come in glory.

He will come to take all of his people to be with himself at last. But if he appoints us to go through the door of death, he will come at the right moment to fulfill that also.

And he comes to his people to take them to be with himself. Isn't it amazing what Jesus said in John's Gospel chapter 14 when he said to the disciples, let not your heart be troubled.

You believe in God, believe also in me. in my father's house are many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

[34 : 04] And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. Waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.

what a contrast between that and the condemnation that awaits those who are ungodly people.

What a contrast between the final destination of God's people and the destination of those who care not for the things of God.

But at the very end of this chapter there's a doxology, a song of praise and he says, to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, the only God our savior and so on.

He is the one ultimately who protects us. He is the one ultimately in whose hands we are and he is able to keep us from stumbling.

[35 : 32] May he do so and lead us on the road safely onwards and upwards until at last he receives us into his nearer presence at his right hand where there are pleasures forevermore.

We see that this letter of Jude, a small letter, nevertheless it's a letter of that brings before us our responsibility when we're surrounded by sins of various kinds, evil of various kinds of in the world and we should be a people building ourselves up in our most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit keeping ourselves in the love of God and waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.

May God bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. Lord our God, we thank you that we have in our possession the infallible scripture and we pray that the Holy Spirit would apply this word to our hearts and lives.

May each of us understand the responsibility that is ours to fulfill what you ask of us and give us Lord to be as shining lights in this dark world.

Give us to be as salt. Give us to be as cities built on a hill unashamedly declaring that we belong to Jesus Christ and that we desire to live for him in this dark and sin sick world.

[37 : 47] We thank you that you provide grace for all of your people, enabling them to do what pleases you and enabling them to live in a way that magnifies and honors your name.

We pray for your blessing upon this congregation, every home, every individual, every circumstance that each one has. We thank you that you're able to draw near them and bring your word of blessing and help according to their needs.

Bless us now, we pray, as we sing your praise in conclusion and forgive every sin. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. We will conclude our worship by this time singing to God's praise from the Scottish Psalter and Psalm 31.

Psalm 31 and verses 21 to the end. All praise and thanks be to the Lord, for he hath magnified his wondrous love to me within a city fortified.

For from thine eyes cut off I am, I in my haste had said, my voice yet heardst thou went to thee with cries my moan I made. O love the Lord, all ye his saints, because the Lord hath guard the faithful, and he plenteously proud doers doth reward.

[39 : 31] Be of good courage, and his strength unto your heart shall send, all ye whose hope and confidence doth on the Lord depend. These stanzas of Psalm 31 all praise and thanks be to the Lord.

All praise and thanks be to the Lord, for he hath sanctified this wondrous love to me within the city fortified.

For from thine eyes adore O my arm I hear in my name such said my voice yet as the render thee with Christ my Lord I O love the Lord upon ye his sins because the Lord of God the faithful love he let just sing our true hearts done reward be of good and glad his shant he spread unto your hearts trust shall send all ye whose hope and come with end upon the

Lord depend now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit rest upon and abide with you all no one forevermore Amen