

## The Promise of Truth

Jude 24, 25

When I began this study in *Jude*, Jim Ressler emailed me the following:

“Did you hear the NPR radio article this morning on religious tolerance? They had the kids decorate lampshades with various religious symbols, then place them over a lamp to show that no matter how they are decorated on the outside, the light of faith still shines through. Same faith, different lampshades. Nice.”

That is nice. Dumb, but nice. Still, you know as well as I do that these days, it is deemed insensitive to assert that there is such a thing as one body of absolute religious truth that is always true for everyone and that disqualifies all contrary ideas as false. It is nice to try to get along by celebrating anything embraced by any human heart or mind as that individual’s “personal faith” or “true for them.” It sounds peaceable to advocate that all the great religions of the world are of equal value – that all roads lead to the same destination. It is all so ... nice.

Of course, in reality, it is also utter nonsense to suppose that anything and everything a person believes can be true for him whether or not it is true for anyone else. The very notion of truth demands that there is a realm of falsehood, and the danger of falsehood is why Jude wrote his letter. In spite of the fact that he desired to write a little something on the topic of salvation, it was more urgent that he write a warning about the presence of false teachers coupled with a call to action, a call “to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.”

Of course, to contend for anything with the passion into which Jude calls us, a passion with which he also writes, presupposes that we really believe it. Jude really believed the truth of the gospel, but that was not always the case. Jude, or Judas, was the natural son of Mary and Joseph, one of four half-brothers to Jesus. The others were named James, Joseph and Simon. None of these boys believed in Jesus whenever we encounter them in the gospels. In fact, on at least one occasion, they were collectively concerned about their big brother’s mental stability: “they went to take charge of him, for they said, “He is out of his mind” (Mark 3:20, 21).

Nevertheless, Jude and James went from unbelievers to men inspired of the Holy Spirit to write New Testament letters that bear their names. Something caused Jude, James and apparently, the other half-brothers of Jesus to believe in Him. That something seems to have been the bodily resurrection of Jesus, for only after Jesus was raised from the dead do we read these words:

... <sup>14</sup>They (all the Apostles except Judas Iscariot) all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers. – Acts 1:14

Something happened that seemed to be a satisfactory proof of everything Jesus had ever said. Something happened that so sealed the veracity of “the faith” that Jude found it worthy of contending for. Something occurred so pivotal that without it, a little movement begun in Galilee would certainly have faded into an obscurity so deep that no historian would have ever addressed it. But, whatever this something was caused a handful of unschooled and ordinary men to turn the world upside down. Resurrection happened. Without it, the teachings of Jesus are interesting enough, but because of it, “the faith once for all delivered to the saints” is worth dying for, because Jesus’ resurrection assures us that God has already defeated death anyway.

Jude brings his little letter to a close with a doxology, a declaration of the glory of God:

<sup>24</sup>To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy - <sup>25</sup>to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

This morning, I want to consider this doxology hand-in-hand with a consideration of the message of Easter - that Jesus defeated death and the grave. You see, the Resurrection is prerequisite to our ability to praise God in the way that Jude describes. Without the Resurrection, there is no Jude the believer. As wonderful and as extraordinary as this description of God is, we could never be certain that we will one day stand with Him were it not for the truth of Easter, a truth that crowns "the faith once for all entrusted to the saints," and makes it all come together.

## **I. "The Faithful" Are Reinforced by the Truth of Resurrection**

### **A. Jude Has Called Us to Protect Ourselves and One Another**

Satan's agenda against the people of God is to undermine their standing in the truth. He wants us to doubt. He wants us to believe his lies. He wants to infatuate us with sin even though Jesus came to destroy the grip of sin over us. This is precisely the work the devil was accomplishing through the teachings of "certain men" who twisted the doctrine of grace "into a license for immorality." Grace trumps sin, they argued, so it doesn't matter if we continue to sin, for grace will always trump sin. In fact, if we truly wish to showcase God's grace, we should sin with abandon. The more we sin, the more grace abounds, and the more gracious God is proven to be.

Dangers and falsehood lurked everywhere, and Jude wrote pointers to help his readers to stand. He told them to build themselves up in the holy faith, which means to know it and trust it. He told them to abide in the love of God, which means to obey Him. He told them to pray. He told them to do all that they could do to keep themselves from falling, but he seemed to realize that "all they could do" would never be enough. Our efforts against sin and error are reinforced by the knowledge that the battle is not ours to fight alone. He turns their thoughts ...

*"To him who is able to keep you from falling ..."*

### **B. Ultimately, Only God Can Keep Us from Falling**

Jude is saying, "I have encouraged you to keep yourselves in God's love, to pray and to fortify your own footing in the faith. But, do not think for a minute that you will ever be able to protect yourselves completely. You must receive help from above, from Him Who can keep you safe."

It is nice to think that God is up there – somewhere - keeping us safe, but how can we know for certain that He will do that? We know it is so because of the Resurrection of Jesus. The power of God raised Jesus. That same power comes to us so that a new life is possible. That life will inevitably be plagued with a stumble here and there, but we make progress and we live with a certain hope, that one day, we too will be raised from the dead. His power accomplished it once in Jesus. Therefore, we have every confidence in His assurance that He can keep us from falling.

## **C. Ultimately, Only God Can Present Us in Glory without Fault**

“Without fault” reflected the kinds of sacrifices required under Old Testament law. Only perfect sacrifices were deemed “fit” for the altar. The only way that we will ever stand in God’s presence with any hopeful anticipation of the outcome is to be holy as He is holy. We need to be rendered “fit.” Jesus was a sacrifice “fit” to be offered to God. In fact, the same term Jude uses is elsewhere applied to Jesus, “a lamb without blemish or defect” (1 Peter 1:19). Because He had no sin of His own, His sacrifice can cover the sins of others. We are the others.

... But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. – Hebrews 9:26

That is certainly an advantageous arrangement for us. A perfect Lamb dies in our place, so that we are deemed “fit” for God’s presence, but how can we trust the arrangement is credible? If Jesus simply died with the parting words, “Don’t worry, I’ve got you covered,” only to fade in the memories of His friends and to rot in a grave, never to be heard from again – how could any sinner ever walk in assurance that His promises are more than mere words? Something happened! Something happened to fortify the promise and to prove that sin can be defeated. We walk in assurance that one day we will stand unblemished before God because the Resurrection proves Christ’s victory over sin.

## **D. Ultimately, Only God Can Present Us in Glory with Great Joy**

This is not the quiet, calm peaceful joy that sustains us through hard times. This is an exultant celebration that will mark our encounter with God at the end of time. Given God’s promises, we might no longer be terrified by the notion of death, but it’s also not the kind of a thing we are in a big hurry to encounter. I think of the fiery preacher who shouted repeatedly at his congregation, “Stand up, if you want to go to heaven!” No one stood up even after several challenges. Dismayed, he asked, “Don’t any of you want to go to heaven?” to which one lady replied: “I just need a little clarification; you’re not trying to round up a group to go right now, are you?”

How do sinners typically encounter the glorious presence of God? When Adam and Eve sinned, they became aware of their nakedness, and their instinct was to hide in fear and shame. Isaiah encountered a vision of God in the temple. He cried, “I am undone,” meaning that he thought he was falling apart. In other words, he was terrified. After a miraculous catch of fish on Lake Galilee, Peter realized that the presence of Jesus meant the presence of holiness. He fell to his knees and cried, “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!” (Luke 5:8).

Profound discomfort is the normal reaction of a sinner to the actual presence of God, but we are told that God will present us in His glory “with great joy.” John writes that when Jesus appears, perfect love will cast out fear. How can we be sure? How could the Apostles or Jude know that this was not just one more fantasy from the realm of religious myths pertaining to afterlife? Something happened! Something occurred that obliterated the fear of punishment that accompanies sin and rendered the promise of joy viable. Resurrection happened. The promises of God are credible to us because the power of God to keep His promises is showcased by Christ’s resurrection.

## **II. “The Faith” Is Reaffirmed by the Truth of Resurrection**

### **A. Jude Was Prompted to Write by an Attack on Truth**

The deceivers' twist on grace was just one issue. The other insidious thing they did was to "deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord" (verse 4). They did this by denying His unique union with the Father. The Apostles presented Jesus as God, one of three Persons of one Godhead, of the same essence as the Father. He was not an agent "on assignment" from God. He was God in the flesh, an aperture through which we could capture a glimpse of the divine glory.

If these deceivers were Gnostics, they might present Jesus as a man adopted by God for a time or as a phantom who was never really human. But, if Jesus is not fully man, that undermines the integrity of His alleged experience with our suffering and grief. If He is not fully God, that undermines His authority to lay down His life and to take it up again for the forgiveness of sins. The redemption formula in Christ's blood breaks down if He is not both fully man and fully God.

## **B. The Truth of the Nature of God Was Vindicated when Jesus Rose from the Dead**

... <sup>25</sup>to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority

He is one God. The Gnostics imposed a challenge upon themselves to explain the creation of the world. If the spiritual realm was always good and the material realm always evil as they claimed, then how could a good god create an evil world? They conjured up a silly scheme to connect the two realms. A number of lesser gods emanated or secreted from the top god, each less pure than the previous. Eventually, there was a god so corrupt, so ornery, so distant from the top god, that he could create the world. This allegedly Christian line of thought required more "gods" than the Romans, the Greeks or the ancient Canaanites ever bothered with. God Himself insisted otherwise:

<sup>5</sup>I am the LORD, and there is no other;  
apart from me there is no God. – Isaiah 45:5

Of course, there are many ideas about how the world came to be. Some cultures still worship multiple gods today. And, many people who believe in only one god do not think of him (or her) in such an exclusionary sense as "the LORD," *YAHWEH*, the God of the Bible, presents Himself. So, what made Jude so sure he was right? What occurred to convince Him of the veracity of the Christian faith? What put all arguments to rest? The Resurrection of Christ can do that.

## **C. The Truth of the Person of Christ Was Vindicated when Jesus Rose from the Dead**

... <sup>25</sup>to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

Frail, sinful human beings could never survive the unrefracted, undiminished glory of God's presence. There is only so much we can take in. Some of His nature is evident in the things He created. The Israelite nation received a little more information through the Law and the Prophets.

... <sup>2</sup>but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. <sup>3</sup>The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. – Hebrews 1:2, 3

John sets forth the truth that Jesus is the Word (the full utterance) of God, Who was present from the beginning and Who is the God of creation. He became flesh, and the apostolic witness saw "his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14b). Jesus gave them all the revelation of deity that they could absorb. Throughout John, He spoke of His unity with the Father. He told them, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). One of them asked Jesus to reveal the Father to the group. He answered:

... Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father?' <sup>10</sup>Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? – John 14:9, 10

He was saying it, but it wasn't sinking in. Something had to happen, and something did. All their doubts as to Who Jesus was and the fears attached to trusting Him melted into certainty and peace when they watched Him die and, then, three days later, encountered Him alive again.

Actually, not all the Apostles were there that first Easter when Jesus appeared. Somehow, Thomas got separated from the pack over that frightful weekend. Even after a week of being ganged up on by his friends, each insisting that he had seen Jesus, Thomas would not believe: "I need proof. I must touch His wounds or I'm not buying it!" Then, Jesus appeared to him.

There are a number of accounts in the gospels of people being unnerved when they sensed the holiness of Jesus. Demons were terrified of Him. But, there is only one recorded instance of a man declaring to Jesus, in definitive and unambiguous terms, "My Lord and my God!" That would be Thomas, but it took an encounter with the resurrected Christ to bring him to that point.

All that can be known about God is made known in Jesus. He taught remarkable things. He performed mighty acts of power. But, it took Resurrection to place a seal on the faith and to persuade even His closest followers that the things He had showed them and the way of salvation that He made known to them constituted a body of truth, a faith, worthy of defending with everything that they had to give. Resurrection proves that "the faith" is worth contending for.

Amen. That's how Jude brings his doxology to a close. When we "Amen" onto a prayer, it emphasizes that we mean what we just said. When we echo it in response to someone else's prayer, it means we endorse what he just said. When it appears at the end of this ascription of glory to God, it means that what has been said is trustworthy. I will close now, reading this great text one last time, but the final word on the matter must be yours, but only if you have resolved all doubts that Jesus was raised from the dead and that He now lives and reigns forever..

<sup>24</sup>To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy – <sup>25</sup>to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore!

And all God's people say, "Amen."

© 2008 by R. Karl Crouch, 2183 Veumont Drive, Lancaster, PA 17601