

Recently we have been meditating on the *monumental reference to the sin of unbelief* we find in Jude verse 5: all through their wilderness wanderings, God's people dared to question if the Lord was among them or not. All through those wanderings, they rejected the assurance of God's unchanging character contained in His name, "LORD." But the Lord Jesus must destroy such unbelief, though He patiently bore with it all through Israel's wilderness wanderings. Thus, Christ Jesus Himself is identified as "the LORD" who both rescued Israel out of Egypt and destroyed those who would not believe: "Now I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it, that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe" v.5. What does it mean to affirm Jesus as "LORD," avoiding the sin of Israel and also the sin of the false teachers of Jude's day, who "deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ" (Jude v. 4)? This week, we return to the mercy, love, and peace which the Lord Jesus continuously and unchangeable applies to His wayward people, thereby discovering the richness of Christ's Lordship.

Mon/Tues: Read Exodus 33:19 and Matthew 22:23-33

The God of the Living

When Moses asks to see the glory of the LORD, it is the twin attributes of mercy and compassion which are emphasized: "I will cause all my goodness to pass before your face, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, before your face. I will have **mercy** on whom I will have **mercy**, and I will have **compassion** on whom I will have **compassion**" (Exodus 33:19).

What does such an unchanging character mean for us? Since God IS, He never changes in His covenant relationship to His people. The God who told Abraham, "I AM your God," continues to be Abraham's God and actually gives Abraham resurrection life so that it can be eternally said, "I AM the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, etc. - still!" This is Jesus' point in Matthew 22:32. He quotes the LORD's description of His relationship to the long-since dead Abraham: "I AM the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.... He is not the God of the dead but of the living." Because God doesn't change, we as His people are kept in continual relationship with the LORD even after we die!

Meditate and Pray: Thank you, LORD, that you identify yourself in relation to your covenant people in whatever trials they face – even death itself. As Jesus says about the unchangeable nature of His Father: He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to Him all are alive. Give us courage through this name to dwell securely and without fear as "aliens" in this hostile world. May we be persuaded that the very same God who preserved the faith of our fathers and mothers will also carry us through life, and even through death, as our "I AM" God! Amen.

Weds/Thurs: Read 1 Thessalonians 4:1-10 and Jude 1-4.**The Good News of Death to Sin**

We return for the rest of this week to our study of Jude in recent Sunday morning sermons. We begin with our thanksgiving prayer from yesterday's notes - as it echoes Jude's concern that we would be "kept" by Jesus Christ until the end (Jude 1:1):

LORD, thank you that you identify yourself in relation to your covenant people in whatever trials they face – even death itself. Thank you, Jesus, that you declare of your Father in the Gospels: "He is not the God of the dead, but of the living." Give us courage through this name to dwell securely and without fear as "aliens" in this hostile world. May we be persuaded that the very same God who preserved the faith of our fathers and mothers will also carry us through life, and even through death, as our "I AM" God! Amen.

The ultimate test of the LORD's ability to preserve us in "the faith once for all delivered to the saints," is what happens at the end, when Christ returns. Let's look, therefore, at this frequent emphasis in the New Testament on the Return of Christ, learning to appreciate the *warnings* of the New Testament writers, such as Jude, against the threat of false teachers who would render the church *completely unprepared for Christ's Return*.

All through the New Testament the Apostles raise their voices to warn the church: "Certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago **will** secretly slip in among you." The threat of false teaching – and of the most sordid kind – always rises up in every age to oppose true Gospel teaching. How sordid? Look at Jude 4's description of these false teachers: "They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a **license** for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord." How terrible to twist grace into a permission for immorality! This is simply the false argument of those who claim that more sin brings more grace, and therefore more glory to God (Rom. 6:1)! As the French philosopher Moliere quipped: "God will forgive – it's His job."

Meditate and Pray: Thank God for the Apostolic opposition to sin in the New Testament as men like Paul labor to help Christians understand that they have died to sin and now have a new, holy life (Rom. 6:1-6):

We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin ...

Fri/Sat/Sun: Read 1 Thess 4:8-10; Rom 6:5 & Jude 1:4; 1:20-23. The Dignity of Union With Christ

Our being united to Christ both in death and resurrection arms us with teaching that transforms our identity in Christ. The authority of Christ (by which Paul pleads for our holiness in 1 Thessalonians 4:1-2) is the authority of One who *joins* Himself to us in our death to sin and in our new life. He “keeps us” by His Spirit’s working faith “in us,” as our Shorter Catechism says (Q & A # 30):

Q. 30. How doth the Spirit apply to us the redemption purchased by Christ?

A. The Spirit applies to us the redemption purchased by Christ, by working faith in us, and thereby uniting us to Christ in our effectual calling.

To sum up this promise of Christ’s “keeping us” in Jude 1:1: It is *not* like a good cook, who simply “cans” us, like a jar of preserves, until His Return. Christ is far more confident in His preserving power than to simply withdraw us from the world to put us into the kitchen cupboard for safe keeping!

Rather, Christ “keeps us” by joining Himself to us – so that He once again walks with us through this world of darkness, temptation and sin. No matter what our past failings or moral compromises that make us ashamed – Christ is the One who *joins* Himself to us in our death to sin and in our new life.

Now we can say “no” to the very sins which Jesus Himself rejected in our nature and say “yes” to the holy will of God the Father as Jesus also said “yes”! The very same happiness which characterized His holy life can be ours! He by His Spirit teaches us more and more to say “no” to sin and “yes” to a life of faith and love!

Meditate and Pray: May these words from Dr. Sinclair Ferguson on our victory over sin through union with Christ greatly encourage our time of meditation today:

The knowledge of our union with Christ provides us with great dignity. As I look to myself I see failure, sin, sometimes shame and disgrace. But that is neither the ultimate nor the whole truth about me as a Christian. No! I am united to Christ, a joint heir of His riches, a child of God. Knowing this to be the real truth about me lends grace and power to my life. (p. 113, *The Christian Life*, Banner of Truth)