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Jude 17-25 – Persevering Praise

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Today, we're continuing a brief three-week look at the subject of Praise...
 Last week we began by establishing what the Praise of God is...
 Why we praise the Lord... What praising God does for God, and what it doesn't...
 And what praising God does for us.
 This morning, I want us to again recognize the realities of this life...

If you are a Christian, then you know the tension we live in...
 We know the grace and mercy of God... God's Spirit has awakened us to see Him for
 who he truly is in Jesus Christ...
 We praise him for his majesty and glory... and we look forward to the day when he
 will come again and we will praise him for all eternity...

Yet... there is tension, because we still live in this present world. A world that is
 frayed, broken... full of sin. We continue to live with the tension of sin in our own
 lives, repenting and believing the good news of God's grace.

If you remember, last week we mentioned that often the pattern of the Psalms, the
 praise and prayer book of the bible... is a curvature.
 Many of the Psalms begin with prayers of complaint and anger, confusion and
 disappointment, and then work their way somehow to praise...

I was talking with someone after the service last week, and they said how freeing it
 was to recognize that in a fresh way.
 So often when we think about our prayer lives as beginning with praise and
 adoration. That's the proper way to start, then we unload our grief and requests...
 But, often in the Psalms, the psalmist is actually unloading their grief and confusion
 first, and in doing so... they come around to praise. A kind of praise and recognition
 of God that allows them to persevere through whatever situation they are facing.

Let me give you an example... perhaps a familiar example. This is Psalm 13- ¹ *How
 long, Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?*
² *How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my
 heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?* ³ *Look on me and answer, Lord my
 God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death,* ⁴ *and my enemy will say, "I have
 overcome him," and my foes will rejoice when I fall.*

⁵ *But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation.*

⁶ *I will sing the Lord's praise, for he has been good to me.*

Do you see the move to praise? Prayer leads to praise.

Even amidst the tension and difficulty and pain this life presents.

Today I want us to look at how Praise perseveres-

1. Praise in a Perilous Life
2. Praise in an Eternal Life

I want to take us today to a place in the Bible that is often looked past, perhaps even forgotten about, and very rarely preached upon...

Right before the famous last book of the New Testament, the Revelation of St.

John... is a short, epistle, a short letter named Jude, or Judah in some translations. So short, there is only one chapter.

For centuries scholars have investigated who the correct author of the book might be. The consensus seems to be that Jude was the blood-brother of James, and the half-brother of the Lord Jesus himself. We know from the New Testament and other first century texts that all of Jesus' natural family were followers and some apostles.

Scholars also are fairly confident that Jude was written in the apostolic age, somewhere between 60 and 70AD, before the fall and destruction of Jerusalem. And that's important because some of the subject matter of Jude, surrounds the growing tensions between faithful believers and those who were coming into the early church and causing tension and discord.

You can go back later this afternoon and read the entire book in about 2 or three minutes, but there you'll find a number of references to the Old Testament and the history of Israel, which tells us that Jude was written for an audience most likely based in Judea, most likely all from Jewish heritage and background... and who might have been the most susceptible to the temptation to take up arms against the Romans in the rebellion and revolt that took over Judea in those years that finally led to the Romans dropping the hammer on Jerusalem in AD 70.

I bring all of that to you, not to make us all Jude scholars... but to simply set the scene for the tension that these early Christians were living with... Earlier in the book, it says this, a strong warning for Jesus followers to be alert to the temptations of the scoffers and mockers...

¹² When these people eat with you in your fellowship meals commemorating the Lord's love, they are like dangerous reefs that can shipwreck you. They are like shameless shepherds who care only for themselves. They are like clouds blowing over the land without giving any rain. They are like trees in autumn that are doubly dead, for they bear no fruit and have been pulled up by the roots. ¹³ They are like wild waves of the sea, churning up the foam of their shameful deeds. They are like wandering stars, doomed forever to blackest darkness.

The early church, especially the places in which most came from Jewish heritage were constantly dealing with the question of, who are we?

Are we Jews? Are we Christians? We see this dilemma in the book of Galatians, we see it addressed in Hebrews...

The temptation always came from those within who felt they still needed to preserve their Jewishness, or hold it in tandem with their new faith in Jesus as the Messiah.... Or that the mission of Jesus was to indeed set Israel free from the control of the Romans.

And so, into the early church came false teachers who either mocked the way of Jesus, or Judaeen zealots who advocated for open rebellion and warfare in the name of Jesus against Rome.

Last week, I mentioned that sin has a way of disrupting our praise of the Lord, because it can make us turn against one another and wonder if that person or this person is praising the Lord or not... Or that one form of music, or expression might be the RIGHT way to praise the Lord.

Again, sin, has a way of disrupting our praise and fellowship by tempting us to take things into our own hands... Whether surrounding political, or theological matters... the root problem of humanity's problem with sin, is the continual desire to take control of our world and all that happens within it.

We think we will be the ones to set things right... To end the tension.

To win the day. That can happen on a large scale...

Or it can happen in the tiny decisions of our lives each day.

It can happen in us, like it did with the Galatians, where all of a sudden, we seem to forget the marvelous grace of God that leads us to praise and adore him, and seek to add additional hoops and religious tasks to our faith so that we feel we've truly accomplished something.

It can happen, as we said last week, in the temptation to think, well maybe God really does need me. He needs my help in this...

Or, in an even more twisted way, if I don't do this for God, then maybe he'll no longer love me... Maybe my place in his eternal family is not secure.

We hear these temptations from false teaching, and mockers that can come into the life of the church... and we can hear it in our own hearts that at times, simply cannot receive the gift of God's grace.

In all of that... what does the tension of this perilous life hinder?

Our praise of God. It very easily takes our eyes off of a God who is worthy to be praised, and onto ourselves or the problems we are facing.

The popular historian, Stephen Ambrose wrote a book in 1996, called *Undaunted Courage - about the famous Lewis and Clark expedition. One of the chapters talked about preparing for the expedition. Meriwether Lewis was meeting with President Thomas Jefferson. They were going to be going from St. Louis all the way to the Pacific Ocean to explore the new Louisiana Purchase that had been bought from Napoleon.*

President Jefferson and Lewis were talking together about the expedition, how it would proceed up the Missouri River, what they would need to cross the Rocky Mountains and descend the Columbia River to the Pacific Ocean and then return. The team would have to do this as a self-contained unit and once the expedition left St. Louis, Lewis would be stuck with the decisions that he had made during the planning process. How many men would he need? With what skills? How big a boat? What design? What type of rifle, how much powder, how much lead? How many cooking pots, what tools? How much dry or salted rations could be carried? What medicines in what quantity? What scientific instruments would they need? How many fishing hooks? How much salt? How much tobacco and whiskey? The important things of course... The point is... Think of all of that foresight and planning required to make the great unknown and perilous journey from St. Louis up eventually to the Pacific....

They must have Constantly been wondering if they had everything they needed.

For the Christian, moving through this perilous life... God has given us everything we need. Everything we need in Jesus Christ, through his Spirit... and through the gift of his word that helps lead us through the tension, the division, the pain....

Ultimately, like the Psalmists, to be able to even through the tension, come to praise.

Look at v. 17 - ¹⁷ But you, my dear friends, must remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ predicted. ¹⁸ They told you that in the last times there would be scoffers whose purpose in life is to satisfy their ungodly desires. ¹⁹ These people are the ones who are creating divisions among you. They follow their natural instincts because they do not have God's Spirit in them.

And then, he gives them instruction for how to live through these issues and tensions and still Praise the Lord...

v. 20 ²⁰ But you, dear friends, must build each other up in your most holy faith, pray in the power of the Holy Spirit...

Instead of focusing on the BUILDING of a temple, or an empire...

Jude here is echoing much of the New Testament, which sees that God is not building a physical temple or empire, but building a people... the construction metaphor of building up... is building one another up, in the faith...

This is how you guard against those who will distract you...

v. ²¹ and await the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will bring you eternal life. In this way, you will keep yourselves safe in God's love.

²² And you must show mercy to^[h] those whose faith is wavering.

I love this here... Jude says, to those who are wrestling with the tensions...

with the perils of following Jesus in this life... show mercy to them. To those whose faith is wavering... show mercy. How refreshing and tender is that?

Remember, the Bob Newhart approach to counseling TJ told us about a few weeks ago... DO BETTER!

Sadly, when there are those within the Church that are genuinely wavering in their faith... wrestling with doubts... struggling to Praise God because of the troubles that are present in their lives...

Unfortunately, at times Christians often show anything BUT mercy to their own who are wavering.

I think this is particularly present within more conservative Christianity...

We are concerned with doctrine and holding firm in the faith, and rightly so...

but often at the cost of withholding mercy from those who are struggling to see God for who he truly is in a given season of their lives. Jude says, for those who are wavering... show mercy.

In addition, to those who are wavering, there are those who are near the flames of judgment, who need rescuing... who have been so carried away by sin. Listen to what one commentator writes- *“They need rescuing. Some are teetering on the brink of moral collapse; don’t sneer at them or harry them, but show them mercy, the mercy we expect from Jesus himself. Others, are already in flames and need rescuing. It’s hard, particularly if they enjoy the warmth of the fire, but the effort must be made. Others again are deeper into sin, and it has left its mark on them, and on everything about them. In rescuing them with mercy you must also beware, Their very clothes may carry the memory, and the moral stain, of the life they have been living.”*

In other words, we handle with caution... but we are moved by the mercy of God shown to us, to extend mercy to those who need rescuing...

This sums up the perilous life in which we follow Jesus and are called to Praise God—

There are temptations on all sides... False teachers... doubts... trials... and YET, and YET... Jude turns in the last few verses to one of the most soaring exultations of praise in the entire Bible...

In fact, as NT Wright says... if there had not been a Revelation of John to conclude the New Testament, these next two verses would have been a fitting conclusion to the Bible.

v. 24 - ²⁴ Now all glory to God, who is able to keep you from falling away and will bring you with great joy into his glorious presence without a single fault. ²⁵ All glory to him who alone is God, our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord. All glory, majesty, power, and authority are his before all time, and in the present, and beyond all time! Amen.

You see, it’s as if Jude, cannot leave matters there on the note about those wavering and perishing amidst the sorrows of the perilous life. Instead, he closes with a picture of --- 2. Praise in an Eternal Life.

Just like the Psalmists... all of life, the joys and sorrows, must culminate in the Praise of God. The one in whom all glory, majesty, power and authority are do... And look at how Jude presents this majestic praise of God...

He casts it in relation to time... To the one who is Before all time, in the present, and beyond all time!

God is the one who is beyond the circumstances of time, the troubles of our lives and this world... and yet, is invested in this world... and in you and me? How can we claim this?

“Now all glory to God, who is able to keep you from falling away and will bring you with great joy into his glorious presence without a single fault.”

Friends, I don't know all of the things that you might be facing right now... I know that we all are constantly dealing with matters that try and test us. I know that this world is frayed at the edges, and there is seemingly trouble around every corner... but there is no greater hope for you and me than that sentence... God is the ONE... who is able to keep you from falling and who will bring you with great joy, into his glorious presence without a single fault.

That... should move us all to Praise. What else could we do in response to that single truth! Than Praise Him. In other words... the Eternal praise of God, has already begun... Because it is promised to you and me...

that we will be with great joy in his glorious presence.

It reminds us of those wonderful words from the Apostle Paul in Philippians... that He who began a great work in you, will bring it to completion, until the day of Christ Jesus... The Eternal praise of God has begun.

Christopher Hitchens, who was one of the “New Atheists,” king of a fascinating character... told an audience in one of his last public speeches just shortly before his death in 2011:

It will happen to all of us that at some point you get tapped on the shoulder and told not just that the party's over, but that the party is going on and you have to leave.

That's the reflection I think that most upsets people about their demise. Alright, then, let's pretend the opposite. Instead you'll get tapped on the shoulder and told there's great news. The party's going on forever and you can't leave!

The response of Christianity is. YES. That is exactly right. Heaven, will be the everlasting celebration of God... It will not be boring. It will not merely be whatever fantasies we have of what heaven will be like... Above everything else, Heaven will be the eternal celebration of praise of God... and as we said last week... When we are praising God, we are delighting in Him. We are enjoying Him. We are doing what we were made for, and that is ONLY for our Good.

You see... might be tempted to think that as we go through the perilous life, that the only way through is to keep our heads down, avoid all the dangers, and bring our dutiful praise to God...

But that is not it at all... Christianity is not a kill-joy religion...

We are invited into an eternal praise... that has at its very foundation, the TRUTH that God himself will keep us from falling... AND WITH GREAT JOY will present us in his glorious presence without a single fault!

God is the one who sent his son Jesus Christ, to take on himself all of our faults... so that we would stand in joy, faultless before the throne.

Friends, no matter the perils... No matter the wavering... No matter the troubles and problems... Being a follower of Jesus and a worshipper of God is a thrilling celebration that begins now!

And so!!

²⁵ All glory to him who alone is God, our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord. All glory, majesty, power, and authority are his before all time, and in the present, and beyond all time! Amen.

Let's Pray.