

Jude 24-25

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[0 : 00] We know that what began as a whisper has now swelled to a chorus that cannot be ignored, that will not be deterred, that will ring out across this land as a hymn that will heal this nation, repair this world, make this time different than all the rest.

Let me just pause there and ask you, have you any ideas of who spoke those stirring words? Well, I'm sure the following three words will give it away.

The words that follow, the ones that I've already read, are these, yes, we can. These words form part of Barack Obama's speech on Super Tuesday during his 1997 presidential election campaign. Yes, we can. And even though we are far removed from that particular theater of activity, we're all very conscious of these words.

We heard them so often, yes, we can. And how the crowds cheered as these words were pronounced. Now, a few years have passed since all the fanfare of that victorious campaign.

[1 : 20] And I wonder, I don't know, I only wonder, I wonder if in Obama's more pensive moments, in the privacy of his own thoughts, the words, no, we can't ever come to his mind.

All the great hopes of all that would be done, all that would be achieved, heal this nation, repair this world. We almost smile at the naivety of it.

And I wonder whether no, we can't is more prominent in his thinking today than yes, we can. Of course, we find the same feverish excitement in the words of gold medalists at the Commonwealth Games.

They're interviewed having just secured that sought-after medal. And they've got a message for others. You can do anything you put your mind to.

Anything is possible if you just believe in yourself. And again, it all sounds very stirring. But, and call me a grumpy old man if you wish, it's just not true.

[2 : 29] Now, don't get me wrong. I applaud and celebrate the capacity of men and women and boys and girls to achieve great things. Be they politicians, yes, even politicians, or athletes, or just ordinary and yet extraordinary and unheralded everyday heroes.

But we must recognize that in the grand scheme of things, man is as much marked by his incapacity as by his capacity.

Often we must accept that the slogan that fits is, No, we can't, rather than, yes, we can. What about God?

Is there a slogan that we could apply fittingly to God? I can't imagine that God would be a great fan of slogans, but indulge me as I suggest one three-word slogan that certainly fits.

He is able. He is able. Able to do what? Some might inquire. Well, if I can borrow from our friends across the pond again this morning.

[3 : 42] He is able, period. He is able, period. Is that not our conviction as Christians? Is that not the track record of God?

Is that not the unequivocal testimony of the Scriptures? He is able. Some wee boys in the playground like to bravely boast about their father.

My dad plays football better than your dad. My dad could beat you up in a fight. My dad is able to do anything. I don't know if any of my boys ever did that, but some wee boys do that.

Now, we smile at the naive innocence of their certainty, but as sons and daughters of God, we can say with grounded conviction, my Father in heaven is able.

He is able. He is able. And this morning, I want us to consider the doxology with which Jude ends his short letter. To him who is able.

[4 : 48] To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy. To the only God, our Savior, be glory, majesty, power,

and authority through Jesus Christ our Lord before all ages, now and forevermore.

Amen. To him who is able. The doxology is all about the God who is able, but it also implicitly constitutes a call to us to respond to our God who is able.

And that's the way we're going to consider the doxology this morning. From these two perspectives, he is able and we are called. We will spend more time on the first of the two, I think, fittingly, but also spend a little time on the second.

He is able and we are called. First of all then, he is able. Jude, in the doxology, identifies two things that God is able to do for his own people.

He is able to keep them from falling and he is able to present them faultless before his glorious presence. And let's think of these two things each in turn.

[6 : 17] First of all then, he is able to keep you from falling. Now we've read the letter. I warned you that it was quite difficult in parts.

The language used, difficult to understand, but also difficult in how harsh it sounds. And indeed, the letter is a letter marked by severe denunciation of error.

It's marked by the unflinching condemnation of immorality and the somber announcement of eternal judgment. But in a letter that is so marked by these things, Jude begins and ends the letter with the assurance that God, even in the midst of all of this mess, God keeps his people.

Notice how the letter begins in verse 1. Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James, to those who have been called, who are loved by God the Father. And then what does he say?

And kept by Jesus Christ. Kept by Jesus Christ. That's where he begins. And that is also where he ends. To him who is able to keep you from falling.

[7 : 32] But what does Jude have in mind when he states that God is able to keep his people from falling or stumbling? The first thing to notice is the down-to-earth realism concerning the Christian life that is implied in these words of Jude.

The Christian life is tough. The narrow way is marked by pitfalls and precipices and those who walk along it, you and me. We are weak.

We're often tired and often disorientated. We are prone to fall. We're prone to stumble. And there is much that would make us fall or stumble.

So even in giving us this assurance, Jude is recognizing that reality. And in this, he is very honest and down-to-earth in recognizing that that's the way it is.

But what specifically might Jude have in mind when he says that God is able to keep us from falling? Falling into what is the question that emerges? Well, I think the letter itself gives us very helpful clues in answering that question.

[8 : 49] Jude, in the letter, as we've already commented, has concerned himself with three big and somber realities. Error, immorality, and judgment.

The believers he is writing to need to contend with these realities. With those within the church guilty of heresy and gross immorality and bound for the punishment of eternal fire, to use the very words of the letter.

And this is disturbing stuff. This is scary stuff. Sincere believers might well fear that they too might fall. And to such comes this assurance.

Jude assures them, God is able to keep you. He is able to keep you from falling into error. He is able to keep you from falling into sin.

He is able to keep you from falling into final and fatal judgment. But let's be very clear in this matter. In this keeping work of God.

[9 : 57] And it is God's work. He is the one who keeps us. But in this keeping work of God, we are not passive. What is it that we need to do? If we are not to fall into error, then we need to know and contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.

The very exhortation that the letter begins with. If we are not to fall into sin, we need to resist temptation and flee from sin.

If we are not to fall into final judgment, we need to trust in Jesus as the one upon whom God's just judgment has already fallen.

He is able to keep you from falling. But then another matter comes to mind if we're looking at this with honesty and thinking of our own experience.

And the matter that comes to mind is, but we do fall. We do fall as believers, as Christians. We do fall into error. We do fall into sin. We do experience certainly temporal judgment.

[11 : 07] In the light of that reality, I think what we need to recognize in what Jude is saying is that ultimately, and most significantly, the words of Jude assured us of protection from falling without hope of recovering, of falling in such a way that we will fail to finish the course set out for us of such falling.

We are assured God will keep us. He is able to keep us from other kinds of falling, but very particularly, He will keep us from any final or fatal stumble. from such fatal falling. God will definitively keep us, even when we are careless in using the means that He graciously provides to help us, keep us upright.

Now, we may reach the finishing line, bruised and battered from many stumbles, often product of our own folly, but God will bring us home.

He is able to keep you from falling. The doubting, or perhaps simply the cautious might ask, well, He may be able to keep me.

[12 : 21] I don't doubt that He's able to keep me, but will He actually keep me? There are five members of our household who are all able to do the dishes.

All of us are able to do the dishes. But how many of us actually do the dishes? Well, I leave you to wonder about what the answer to that question might be.

Well, how different with our God? He is able and willing. And our security on this matter is then further reinforced by what Jude goes on to say that God is able to do for us.

The second thing that is mentioned here in the doxology, and we move on to that now. The second thing that Jude says that God is able to do is that He is able to present you faultless before His glorious presence.

To Him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before His glorious presence without fault, faultless, blameless.

[13 : 28] Notice as we move on to this second matter in which God is able to help us, notice that we have both an unbroken connection with what has gone before, but also a striking contrast.

The connection is simply this. God keeps us from falling until He presents us faultless before His glorious presence.

He will keep us from falling right up until the moment when He presents us before His glorious presence. We need not fear that there will be a time when He stops from keeping us and there will be this gap that will be our downfall.

No, He keeps us from falling until He then does what He also is said to do, present us without fault before His glorious presence.

In that sense, there's this unbroken connection, but there's also a great contrast. And the contrast concerns what we might call the theater of God's activity on our behalf.

[14 : 34] He keeps us from falling here in the here and now in the midst of this sin-sick world, so scarred by evil and pain and suffering and persecution and opposition.

But He presents us faultless in heaven before His own glorious presence. And the contrast, even in these words so packed together, the contrast is both dramatic and also just a little disturbing.

I say disturbing because it demands an answer to the question that any fair-minded person with even a cursory grasp of the holiness of God and the sinfulness of man must pose.

It's the question that the psalmist posed that we have sung. How can we be presented before His glorious presence?

How can men and women guilty of faults that are beyond our capacity to number ever be presented without fault? We can understand how a faultless man or woman could stand before God.

[15 : 48] But show me that man. Show me that man. There is not one fitting that description in any of the pews here this morning or in the pulpit either.

Where is that faultless man who can stand before a God? And this is what's disturbing. This is the dilemma. This is what makes it difficult to understand.

How can this be? How can it be that the likes of you and me could be presented before God without fault? But the answer to the dilemma is to be found in our text as it points us to another in whom we can stand faultless.

The word translated faultless or without fault sometimes or can be translated blameless is a word from the realm of temple sacrifice, often forming part of a couplet.

Speaking of the animals that needed to be presented, spotless and blameless, spotless and faultless. And we know that that is what was required of the animals offered as a sin offering in the

temple.

[16:57] They needed to be perfect, without spot or blemish, faultless, if they were to serve the purpose that they were intended for. But we know that these spotless, faultless animals pointed to another.

They pointed forward to Jesus. The apostle Peter, as he writes his first letter and in the first chapter and in verse 19, speaks of how believers have been, and I quote, redeemed.

We have been redeemed with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. What Peter is saying, what Paul is saying is that in Christ, as we embrace Christ, as we put our trust in Christ, as we are found in Christ, we are faultless.

And in Christ, we will be presented faultless before his glorious presence. In Christ, we belong in heaven. We belong in heaven, not just intruders, not visitors who wonder, well, should we really be here?

No, in Christ, we belong in heaven. We belong in the presence of God. We've already noted and we've already sung how the psalmist poses this big question.

[18:37] Lord, who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live on your holy hill? He whose walk is blameless and who does what is righteous. But we're not blameless and our walk is not righteous.

But Christ is blameless and Christ is altogether righteous. And as we are enabled to trust in him as our Savior and Lord, we are both cleansed of our sin, each and every one of them, and we are clothed with his righteousness.

And before we go on, I have to ask this question. Is this true of you? Is this true of you? Have you put your trust in Jesus, the altogether righteous one, that you might know forgiveness of sins, that you might be clothed with his righteousness, that on that great day you might be presented without fault before his glorious presence?

The only way that you will be able to stand before God is in Christ, trusting in him, and that is something you need to do now.

You can't wait till that great day. It'll be too late then. Now is the time for you to recognize your need and to recognize the gracious provision of God in providing a righteous Savior.

[19:59] Put your trust in him. But there is one more matter to note in this second activity of God, presenting as faultless before his glorious presence.

This presentation, we're told, will be with great or exceeding joy. Notice what Jude says. He is able to keep you from falling, to present you before his glorious presence without fault, and with great joy.

And with great joy. The presentation will be with great or exceeding joy. This is joy indescribable.

This is joy beyond compare. This is the joy that belongs to heaven. But who rejoices? I wonder if that's a question you've ever posed as you've heard or read these words.

Who rejoices? My first thought as I posed the question to myself, I think probably a very human first thought was, well, I'll rejoice. As the one presented by God before God, I will rejoice.

[21:05] I will rejoice as I stand before the glorious presence of God. I will rejoice in Jesus who holds me by the hand and declares, this one is mine.

I will rejoice in the garments of Christ's righteousness with which I am clothed. And of course that is true. As believers, we will indeed rejoice in that manner.

But I ask you this, is this solitary joy? Will we rejoice alone? The exceeding joy of heaven, the great joy of which Jude speaks, is the joy of all the redeemed.

It is the joy of the angels. It is the joy of the Father. It is the joy of the Son. It is the joy of the Spirit. It is the joy of the triune God. The God who rejoices over one sinner who repents is the God who will rejoice with exceeding joy as all those redeemed by His own precious Son are presented faultless before Him.

As the plan of redemption designed in eternity He has brought to its glorious fulfillment, God will rejoice with exceeding joy as each of His people are presented faultless before Him.

[22:24] And He knows them all by name. He chose them all before the foundation of the earth. Not one of them will be missing. Together they constitute the bride of Christ, a radiant church without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless, holy and without fault.

The word that Paul uses there in Ephesians, the very same word that Jude employs here in the dexology. And again, I ask the question, will you be there?

Will you rejoice with exceeding joy on that great day? Will you rejoice together with God? He is able. But also, and more briefly, we are called.

We are called. What are we called to do? Let me suggest that the doxology implies, or indeed explicitly makes clear, that there are two things that we are called to do.

We are certainly called to acknowledge the One who is able. The doxology begins, to Him who is able. But who is He?

[23 : 34] Who is this One who is able? To Him who is able. Well, Jude gives the answer. To the only God, our Savior. To the only God, our Savior.

We are to acknowledge the only God, our Savior. We are to acknowledge that there is only one God. Indeed, these words of Jude echo the words of that great Old Testament confession, confession, the Shema.

He, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. We are to acknowledge the only God, the one true living God.

But we are to acknowledge also that He is our God, to the only God, our Savior. And we can acknowledge Him as our God as we have been enabled to put our trust in Jesus and have been welcomed in to His family and are able to say, My God, my King.

We are to acknowledge Him as the only God, as our God. And we are to acknowledge Him as our Savior, as the one who has graciously and lovingly provided for our salvation in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ.

[24 : 47] We are to acknowledge the one who is able. But we are also called to praise the one who is able. Of course, these things are very much intertwined. We are called to praise the one who is able.

To Him, the only God, our Savior, be glory, majesty, power, and authority. And let's just pause for a moment and ask what we are doing when we praise God in the manner and with the words of the doxology.

What are we doing? Well, first, let's be clear on what we're not doing. When we praise God, even employing these very words, ascribing to God glory, majesty, power, and authority, what we're not doing is granting to God anything that He does not already possess.

When we glorify God, we don't make Him any more glorious than He already is. When we magnify God, we don't make Him any more magnificent or majestic than He already is.

When we ascribe power and authority to God, we don't grant Him power and authority, even over ourselves, which He doesn't already enjoy.

[25 : 58] Glory, majesty, power, and authority belong to God. Now, this reality is implied and so confirmed even by the timescale that Jude refers to in the doxology.

To the only God, our Savior, to the only God, our Savior, be glory, majesty, power, and authority through Jesus Christ our Lord before all ages, now, and forevermore.

Before we, before we, before the angels were even created, before there existed any congregation able to praise God, God possessed glory, majesty, power, and authority before all ages, now, and forevermore.

So, that's what we're not doing. We're not granting to God anything that He doesn't already possess. But what then are we doing when we praise God using the very words of the doxology?

Well, I think we can say one or two things. We are, with awe and reverence, describing God to God. You are glorious. You are majestic. You are all-powerful. You possess all authority.

[27 : 11] Now, you might ask, why would God take any delight in the likes of us telling Him what He already knows? I don't know if we really need to try and find some clever answer to that question.

God has chosen to delight in the praise of His people, and that's really all we need to know. With awe and reverence, as we praise, we describe God to God.

But, of course, we do more than that. As we praise, we are thanking and celebrating our God of all glory, majesty, power, and authority. Our praise is an expression of our thanksgiving, that these attributes have been employed on our behalf for our good.

And we are celebrating that our God is indeed a God of glory, of majesty, of power, and authority. As we praise, we are also submitting to our God of all glory, majesty, power, and authority.

We cannot praise God for His power and authority, and in the same breath, be rebels against that power and authority. And so, in our praise, we submit to the God who is all of the things that Jude

highlights.

[28 : 27] I think also, as we praise, we are testifying, we're testifying to one another, and indeed, to the watching world, that our God is the God of glory, majesty, power, and authority.

And all this we are called to do, and all this we are only able to do, because of Jesus. As Jude makes abundantly clear, we ascribe glory and majesty and power and authority to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. There is a, what we might call a divine symmetry in God's saving purposes for us. It is through Jesus Christ that the Father is able to present us faultless before His glorious presence.

And it is through Jesus Christ that we are able to praise the one who will present us faultless before His glorious presence.

And so, as we draw things to a close, I would say to you, Christian friend, in the midst of trials and troubles, in the midst of frustrations and disappointments, in the midst of personal failures and being failed by others, be persuaded and be assured that He is able.

[29 : 57] And in that assurance, answer the call to acknowledge and praise Him for who He is. And for those of you this morning who perhaps have bought into the fantasy of, yes, we can.

Yes, I can. I don't need God. I don't need a Savior. I can go my own way. I can do my own thing. Yes, I can. For those who have bought into that fantasy, I would urge you rather to embrace the reality, the eternal and unchanging reality of He is able.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we come to you and we do indeed ascribe to you all glory and majesty and power and authority. We thank you that you are the God who is over all, the God who is eternal.

We thank you that you are the God who is able and willing to do all that we have discovered and been reminded of even this morning. You are the God who is able to keep us from falling, to present us faultless before your glorious presence.

And we thank you for that. We praise you for that. And we ask that you would help us to be trusting in the one through whom we can approach you in thanksgiving, that you would help us to be trusting in Jesus as our Savior and Lord and these things we pray in Jesus' name.

[31 : 26] Amen. Now we're going to close our service this morning by singing Psalm 121.

In Sing Psalms, Psalm 121. We'll sing the whole of the psalm. It's on page 168. Now some of you will remember that this is a psalm that the children sang for us at the family service just a few weeks ago and we were just really learning the tune.

Many of us aren't very familiar with it, but we have heard it once or twice and we're going to sing it now. This is a psalm, of course, that celebrates God, is the God who is keeping us, the God who keeps us, who cares and protects for us, a truth that we've given some thought to in the light of the doxology.

So Psalm 121, the whole of the psalm, to the tune Adoramus, and we'll stand to sing. I lift up my eyes to the hills with an hour to look for my aid and help them serve.

I love it, I love it, I love it, I love it, I love it.

[33 : 17] I love it, I love it, I love it, I love it, I love it.

The sun will not turn up again, The moon will not turn up again.

The light will not turn you from home, Your love will be with the light of your heart.

He'll carve every step that you take, O power and power, which will come.

To him who is able to keep you from falling And to present you before his glorious presence,
Without fault and with great joy, To the only God our Savior, Be glory, majesty, power and authority,
Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Before all ages, now and forevermore.

[34 : 48] Amen.