

Keep from Falling • Jude 24–25

A friend of mine once shared with me some working definitions of three different kinds of people in this world. He said that a pessimist looks at how dark the tunnel is; an optimist says, “Yes, but there is a light at the other end!” And a realist adds, “And if you look carefully at the light you’ll see there is another tunnel coming!”

Jude, the half-brother of Jesus, was an optimist turned pessimist turned optimistic realist in his little book which is the next to the last book in the New Testament. He begins the book with optimism, but he gets over that very quickly and slides into a lengthy period of pessimism, ending up with optimistic realism.

Like Jude we really want to be all excited about Jesus Christ and the common salvation all Christians have in the Savior. Like Jude we keep seeing all the problems: dangers and difficulties; so-called Christians who act in un-Christian ways; heresies and sins; doubts and disappointments. Like Jude, we need our final attention fixed not on pessimistic circumstances but on divine realities!

Jude has a benediction for our times as well as his in verses 24 and 25:

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.

I must admit that whenever I read or hear this verse I remember a story told to me by a friend of mine who is a pastor. He reported on a service where a pastor had planned to recite Jude 24 as a benediction to conclude the morning worship service. On his way up to the platform he tripped and fell flat. He picked himself up, walked to the pulpit and said, “Now to him who is able to keep you from falling” That is not the kind of “falling” Jude is writing about! This is not a promise to protect us from the ordinary stumbles and trips and stubbed-toes of life. Rather, this speaks of God’s

God offers divine protection for life’s dangerous paths. He preserves us from disaster.

ability to protect us from fatal falls.

Have you seen those movies of mountain climbers inching their way up some sheer mountain cliff? They are tied together with climbing ropes so that if an inexperienced climber falls it will not be a fatal fall - - - the experienced, stronger climber is the one “who is able to keep you from falling” to your death in the valley below. You may be in for a scare and a few bruises, but he will protect you from the worst.

Most of Jude’s little letter is about the dangerous paths of the Christian life. Jude warns against ungodly persons who permeate the church. He warns against people who once professed spirituality and turned to sin, against teachers who communicate false doctrines and against those who “are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage.”

When they were growing up, our children had an Atari video game called “Pit Fall”. That game was so much like life that I chose not to play it. The object was to electronically move this little

man through a maze containing pits that he could fall into. The pits were filled with spiders, alligators and ferocious animals. Kind of like the grumblers and faultfinders that are listed

here in Jude. But that is what real life is like - - - a series of dangerous paths where it is all too easy to tumble into fatal falls of immorality, tragic life choices and heretical teachings.

But then comes the benediction: He “is able to keep you from falling!” God offers divine protection for life’s dangerous paths. He preserves us from disaster. He gives us truth, his love, his guidance, his protection. So those who belong to him need never fear that fatal fall. He has guaranteed us that nothing can separate us from his love. He has promised that he who began a good work in us will see it through to the end.

The Greek word that is chosen by Jude is “aptaistou” which means “free from falling”. It

is used only once in all of the New Testament, but it is used by other Greek authors outside of the Bible. Most notably, the ancient Greek author Xenophon used this word to refer to a surefooted horse that will not stumble.

Several years ago Charleen and I were on a Greek cruise ship that made an unscheduled stop at the Aegean Island of Santorini. If you ever see travel brochures for Greece they often feature the whitewashed buildings of the island of Santorini. It is a 27 square mile volcanic island that rises abruptly from the sea with high cliffs and deep precipices. The village is at the top and is reached by a narrow path that winds its way up the island wall. The way to get up to the top is on horses or mules.

I had serious reservations about making the trip to the top of Santorini. And I had a way out, a good one. Charleen was pregnant at the time and I did not think it was right to put her through it. The chivalrous thing to do was to stay there at the bottom. I mean, what else can a loving husband do? But just as I was getting ready to graciously offer this, someone said to her, “Charleen, you are not going to ride on that donkey all the way up that mountain pregnant are you?” And she said, “If Mary could do it to Bethlehem I can do it to the top of Santorini!” So what could I say at that point? I got on the horse.

I was concerned about falling off the side of the mountain, which would unquestionably have been fatal. But the guides assured me that the horses and donkeys were surefooted and safe; they’d gone this way many times before. All I needed to do was “hang on”. Let me tell you, I hung on to that furry fellow as if he were part of my skin! And we made it to the top!

And that’s what God is able to do for us. He is able to keep us from “aptaistous”, from falling. God is absolutely surefooted and safe. All we have to do is “hang on”, and he’ll get us all the way to the top! “He is able to keep you from falling!”

But that’s not all! He is also able “to present you before his glorious presence without fault.” This is really more than a declaration of God’s ability; it is a commitment to do something. While it is not quite explicit in this verse, it is explicit elsewhere in the New Testament. For example, Philippians 1:6 tells us, “. . . he who began a good

work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”

Once again, Jude uses an interesting word here. It is the Greek word “amomos”. It was used by the Greeks to refer to sacrificial animals that were required to be absolutely perfect—no broken bones; no stains or spots on the fur; no blemishes of any kind. It had to be essentially a perfect animal or it was unacceptable for sacrifice. Jude says that this is the way God will present us in heaven. God will fix us up, clean us up, straighten out anything and everything that is wrong with those of us he will bring to heaven so that we are morally and spiritually perfect. He will present us without blemish.

That is really quite amazing when you think of the moral mess sin makes of our lives. Those who are liars, cheats, immoral, thieves and everything else will show up in heaven without a sin or blemish! But the credibility of such a stunning promise hinges solely on the Promiser.

Let me take you back to your high school English class. Do you remember learning about “appositions”? Appositions are grammatical constructions where a word or expression is put beside another word or expression to explain it. For example: “Charleen, my wife, was born on May 18.” “My wife” is an apposition to “Charleen”. They are referring to the same person. Or we might say, “Jimmy Carter, former President of the United States, lives in Georgia.” “Former President of the United States” is an apposition to “Jimmy Carter”.

In Greek, the first half of Jude 25 is in apposition to the first half of Jude 24. Jude 24 says, “Now to him who is able . . .” and so the verse continues. Then verse 25 has the apposition: “to the only God our Savior . . . through Jesus Christ our Lord.” The one who is able is the only God! The one who is able is our Savior! The one who is able provided Jesus Christ to die in our place! So, the Promiser makes the promise credible! He is God!

But, it is merely abstract theology when we have only the Promise and the Promiser. It becomes personal and practical when we add the “Promisee”. The “Promisee” is “we”! That is, if we have accepted the promise! Those who have placed their trust for blamelessness and heaven in God through Jesus Christ will (God promises!)

arrive in heaven without sin or blemish.

God has done his part. We must do our part. For you and me that means a transaction of faith in God and his promise - - - praying to tell him that we confess our sins, believe in Jesus and accept salvation. If you've never done that or are unsure, do it now. Decide in your heart. Declare it in your prayer.

Let's review: (1) God is able to keep us from falling . . . so hang on! (2) God is able to bring us blameless . . . so get ready! And, (3) God is able to give us great joy . . . so don't worry! "To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy"

God is able to give us great joy. That takes some explanation because joy is not really the theme of Jude's rather depressing little book, so the word particularly stands out. It is quite an amazing glimpse at the way we will be and feel in heaven.

Here is the problem. This life has its full share of sins, worries, diseases and other problems. Might we not spend eternity regretting sins of earth, misspent years or lost opportunities? And what about those friends and loved ones who never became Christians and are not in heaven to share eternity with us? Will not heaven be a hard and lonely place without some whom we so dearly loved on earth?

Here is the answer. God is able to bring us to heaven "with great joy". He will somehow overwhelm the pains of earth with the pleasures of heaven. He will transform all the regrets. He will enable us to understand in a way that is now impossible.

Let me explain it in different terms. Some time ago I was completely surprised by a "This is Your Life" program at Wooddale Church. But let me tell you what went before.

Months earlier I received a telephone call from Dennis Baker, a pastor in our neighbor town, asking me to preach for him while he was on vacation on Sunday morning April 14? I said I really didn't think I could do it. And he said, "Well, you aren't scheduled to preach that morning anyway." I never

thought about how he would possibly know that. But, I let it go and I said that I would check. Dennis is a long-time dear friend and I could not say no. So reluctantly, with an irritation that did not show in my voice, I said, "Yes, I'll be there."

I also was scheduling, tentatively, a flight to the West Coast first thing that Monday morning. Charleen said, "I don't think that's a good time for you to go." She had never done anything like that before and I thought that was rather strange. Vernon Grounds, another long-time friend, was scheduled to preach at Wooddale Church that Sunday, and Charleen said that Vernon Grounds is a friend, he was staying in our house and it wasn't a very good idea to leave town while he was our house guest. So, I got out the flight schedule and changed the flight from Monday to Tuesday and did not think too much about that.

The Sunday morning of April 14 began a very demanding day. I drove Vernon Grounds to Wooddale Church, went through the first service, started the next service and then walked out the door. Charleen had the car running outside the door ready to go to the next church. We rushed over there, preached in their service and said goodbye to everybody.

Next on the schedule was dinner at Northwestern College where I participated in a special service there, which took the rest of the afternoon. We hurried back to Wooddale Church just a short time before the evening service began. I went into

the office and looked into the mirror. I don't usually talk to the mirror but that particular day I did. I said, "Leith, you look lousy." I was tired. It was a hot day for early April. I have naturally curly hair

and heat and perspiration cause my hair to look like a cross between an Afro and punk. When I saw how terrible I looked I was grateful that I did not have to do much in the program that night.

When I walked into the Worship Center I was impressed by the size of the crowd. (I thought Vernon Grounds had a good message in the morning service, but I hadn't thought he was **that** good!) I sat down and looked around. There was a stack of chairs on the far platform - - - that irritated me.

***God...will somehow overwhelm
the pains of earth with the pleasures of heaven.***

We were running out of chairs and it looked crummy having a stack of chairs up there. I thought about getting up and finding someone to move them, but I thought that might make matters worse. So I sat and stewed a little.

Then one of our pastors picked up the microphone and said, “Pastor Anderson, This is your life!” I thought it was a joke! But it was the beginning of one of the most memorable and joyous events of my life. People came from across America: my parents; colleagues; former teachers; childhood friends. And all this was shared with my beloved friends and my spiritual family from church!

And then it all began to come together. I understood what hadn’t made sense. I then understood that Dennis had invited me to preach because he wanted to get me out of Wooddale Church so that an announcement could be made about the events that evening. Charleen wanted me to change the schedule because my parents would be staying at our house and friends that I have not had together like that since childhood. All of these things started to fit together bit by bit and piece by piece. And that night, while I was still worn out, there was an invigorating surge of energy. It was like a new life. The irritations were all forgotten. All my problems melted away. My hair did not straighten out, but I was filled with great joy!

This is what God is going to do for us all on that glorious surprise day when we enter heaven! Things that absolutely don’t make sense to us now will then all fit together. The pains and irritations

and weariness of this life will all disappear. The best of memories will be brought back; the best of friends will stand there with us. And it will all be shared with a host of Christians who are our spiritual family.

What a day that will be. And it is only the beginning of an eternity spent together with the God who is able to grant us great joy.

It is no wonder that Jude says of our God who is able to keep us from falling, to bring us blameless and to give us great joy . . . to him “be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.”

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