

X Marks The Spot

*³Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.
(Jude 1:3. ESV)*

¹⁷I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. (Romans 16:17. ESV)

¹But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine. (Titus 2:1. ESV)

Apostasy And Perseverance II

February 17th, 2013

Jude 1:1-2, 20-25

Hebrews 10:23-25

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Introduction:

Good morning! We are at week 7 of a 14 week series called “X-Marks The Spot” in which we are exploring some of the real and seeming tensions we discovered in our Walk Through The Bible journey in 2012. Last week we talked about the tension between the Biblical doctrine of apostasy – which means falling away – and the equally Biblical doctrine of “perseverance” – which means NOT falling away. We agreed that apostasy is real. People who confess Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour, perhaps with great sincerity and emotion, DO IN FACT FALL AWAY INTO RUIN. Jesus said in Mark 4 that they do this because they have no root in themselves. The Gospel never really penetrated their heart. Do you remember in the first Star Wars movie when the rebels made an attack on the Death Star? One of the first X-wing fighters dropped a bomb on the ventilation shaft that did not penetrate – it bounced off the outer rim. There was an impressive explosion but it did not have any lasting effect. Then Luke Skywalker used the force and delivered a bomb directly down the shaft and destroyed the death star and everyone lived happily ever after until 1982 when the next movie came out. Jesus is saying in similar terms that sometimes the Gospel “bounces off the outer rim” of a person’s heart. There is an impressive initial explosion but there is NO LASTING EFFECT. Those people inevitably FALL AWAY. They apostasize. They are APOSTATES. We agreed last week that apostasy is real, it is a frequent teaching of the Bible and it is a very real danger for the church. It suggests

that we need to be cautious about offering people assurance of their salvation. We should watch for the fruit of good works, we should watch also for perseverance through testing and trial.

But we also agreed last week that truly saved people ALWAYS PERSEVERE. If God begins a good work in you by His Sovereign grace then he will CERTAINLY COMPLETE IT. He who began a good work in you WILL BE FAITHFUL to complete it, the Bible says. The Bible says that those whom he predestined he also called and those whom he called he also justified and those whom he justified he also glorified. This is the GOLDEN CHAIN and it means that if God's grace begins something in you it will certainly and always have the fullness of its intended effect. The saints PERSEVERE.

After preaching that message last week the Holy Spirit seemed to speak to me and to suggest that perhaps we were not quite finished with this topic. Beyond explaining these truths there is some pastoring to do around the edges and so this week I decided to do part 2 of last week's sermon. I want to help you partner in the work of perseverance that God will surely do in your life if you are truly saved. So turn in your Bibles to Jude chapter 1 and we will read verses 1-2 and then we'll skip forward to verses 20-25. Jude is writing an emergency letter. He had hoped to correspond with the church about something else – he says that in verse 3- but he is forced to change topics and write an emergency letter about the need to ward off apostasy. He sees the devil attacking this church and he sees people beginning to drift into apostasy and so he writes to them this wonderful little letter that speaks so clearly into the issue of how we can partner with God in the grace that he himself supplies in the matter of our perseverance. Let me read to you from God's Holy and Inspired Word.

¹Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James,

To those who are called, **beloved in God the Father and kept** for Jesus Christ:

²May mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you. (Jude 1:1-2. ESV)

It is very common in a New Testament letter for the author to introduce their topic in the address line and so it is here with Jude. He wants to talk to this church about being KEPT by the Father for Jesus Christ. He uses the Greek word *tay-reh-o* in the perfect tense. I told you a few weeks ago when a word is in the perfect tense in Greek that is usually very significant. Perfect tenses indicate things that are COMPLETED in the past, the effects of which are continuing to work themselves out in the present. That is massively important. Jude is saying that your

perseverance, if you are truly in Christ, is a COMPLETED THING. It is DONE. Whosoever he predestined he called. Whosoever he called he justified. Whosoever he justified he glorified. DONE. Jude is saying that if you are truly saved your perseverance is already accomplished by God. The word *tay-reh-o* here is in the dative case which means that it goes with God the Father which is also in the dative case. Jude is being very specific here. He is saying that God the Father has FINISHED the work of our perseverance and he has done that unto or FOR Jesus Christ. The Bible says that the Father has promised to give to the Son the nations as his inheritance, and he WILL NOT FAIL in so doing.

⁸ Ask of Me, and I will give *You*
The nations *for* Your inheritance,
And the ends of the earth *for* Your possession. (Psalm 2:8. NKJV)

Jude is saying therefore, that it is GOD THE FATHER who does the keeping. He does it because of His love and His promise to the Son. He does it by means of the indwelling and sealing Holy Spirit; we read of that in Ephesians 1:13:

¹³In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, **were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit,** ¹⁴**who is the guarantee** of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:13. ESV)

Therefore our perseverance ultimately depends on a sacred and unbreakable promise made between the First and Second persons of the Trinity and effected by the Third. The entire Trinity has a stake in our perseverance. Ultimately then, our perseverance does not depend on us. It doesn't depend on the strength of our faith or the sincerity of our intentions – it depends on the promises of the Father. That is very good news. Now skip down in Jude 1 to verses 20-25:

²⁰But you, beloved, build yourselves up in your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit; ²¹**keep yourselves in the love of God,** waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. ²²And have mercy on those who doubt; ²³save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.

²⁴**Now to him who is able to keep you** from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, ²⁵to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. (Jude 1:20-25. ESV)

In verses 20-21 Jude now says that we have to do some stuff. We have to build ourselves up in our most holy faith and we have to KEEP OURSELVES in the love of God. He uses the same Greek word there – *tay-reh-o* only this time he puts it in the Aorist Active Imperative 2nd person

plural which means “YOU MUST KEEP YOURSELVES”. In verse 1 he said that the Father was going to keep us but now he says “YOU MUST KEEP YOURSELVES”; how does that all fit together? Is Jude confused? Is he forgetful? Is he messing with us? No, Jude is just operating with both of these PRIMARY TENSIONS – the tension between the Sovereignty of God and human responsibility – firmly in mind. We are never allowed to forget about these equally true truths. God is Sovereign. Whatsoever comes to pass happens because God DECREES it from before the foundation of the world. And yet, human beings make real decisions. Our decisions have real consequences. When we do things right, things tend to go well. When we act in a stupid or lazy manner bad things tend to happen. We reap what we sow. If we sow stupid we reap difficulty. The whole Book of Proverbs exists to make that point. That’s why we can’t just “let go and let God”, because human beings are truly and really morally responsible creatures. So Jude is saying two complementary and true things at once, he is saying that if you are truly saved then God has already decreed your perseverance from before the foundation of the world. You have been promised as a gift from the Father to the Son and the Father will not disappoint the Son and the Spirit is strong to accomplish what the Father has decreed. Therefore, at the end of the world when Jesus opens his present YOU WILL BE IN THAT BOX. And yet simultaneously Jude says: “Now you need to do some stuff to stay in the box”. And then he finishes his letter by drawing their eyes back in worship to the one:

who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy,²⁵ to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. (Jude 1:20-25. ESV)

Whoa! Its complicated this theology business isn’t it? What is Jude saying? He is saying that God keeps us in the faith by enabling us to do the things that keep us in the faith. God keeps us in the faith by enabling us to DO KEEPING THINGS. I stole that from John Piper, just so you don’t tell people that pastor said something brilliant today – I didn’t say that, John Piper said that and he stole it from Jude the brother of Jesus. All good ideas are stolen from inspired sources. God keeps us in the faith by enabling us to do the very things that keep us in the faith. That’s what Jude is saying. Perseverance is a work of God’s Sovereign Grace but it will work out in us doing certain things that keep us in the faith. Let’s talk about what things we need to do, by God’s grace, that will build us up in our most holy faith and that will keep us in the love of God for Christ Jesus. How ought we to be partnering in our perseverance?

Partnering In Perseverance:

1. We need to PRAY for persevering grace

Just because God has promised something doesn't mean that you take it for granted. All the way back in week one we agree that God has decreed the ENDS and ALSO the MEANS. The means by which God accomplishes his Sovereign ends are generally PRAYER and PREACHING. So in this case the means by which we receive from God the Sovereign grace that enables us to persevere is first and foremost by asking for it. And don't get so caught up in your good theology and your firm grasp of Divine Sovereignty that you paralyze yourself into prayerlessness. If you ask questions like: "If God is Sovereign why do I bother praying? He will do what he will do and he will give what he will give regardless of what I do or do not do." When you say things like that you simply indicate that you are not nearly as theologically informed as you think you are. Because the Sovereignty of God does not invalidate the reality of second causes. God is Sovereign BUT humans are responsible. The normal way of God is to work out his Sovereign ends through responsible human agency. Let me bring that down to street level. Sometimes:

ye have not, because ye ask not. (James 4:2. KJV)

God may well have promised to give it to you but he's not going to give it to you until you ask for it. So if you like constantly falling into the ditch then just continue on in your prayerlessness. If you'd like to walk the narrow way with a little more consistency and endurance then you need to ask God for persevering grace.

This is why Jesus taught his newbie's to pray:

lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen. (Matthew 6:13. KJV)

New believers and old believers, you should pray that prayer or something very much like it, every day. Pray for persevering grace.

2. We need to BEWARE of false teaching and false teachers

That is actually the specific problem that is being addressed in the body of Jude's letter. He begins and ends by teaching about how God keeps us but in the middle he addresses the specific danger that they are facing that seeks to threaten their perseverance. Look at Jude 1:3-4:

I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. ⁴For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. (Jude 1:3-4. ESV)

Jude is concerned because certain people FROM INSIDE THE CHURCH have risen up and are trying to tempt them away from the faith once for all delivered to the saints. False teachers exist inside the church and they almost never wear name tags! Jesus warned of this in Matthew 24:

¹¹And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray...¹³But the one who endures to the end will be saved. (Matthew 24:11-13. ESV)

One of the most important ways we partner in our perseverance is by being careful and discerning in who we listen to. Beware false prophets.

3. We need to GO DEEP in our learning of doctrine

In the Letter to the Hebrews the author rebukes his church for living perpetually at the level of milk and refusing to press forward into meat. He says:

¹²For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, ¹³for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. ¹⁴But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil. (Hebrews 5:12-14. ESV)

He warns them that their failure to press on into meatier teaching puts them at risk of apostasy and he says:

¹Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and **go on to maturity** (Hebrews 6:1. ESV)

Brothers and sisters I am convinced that one of the most foolish innovations in the history of Christianity is this idea of Seeker Church. This idea that we'll all go to church and hear the same basic introductory message week after week after week is a recipe for apostasy and disaster.

Who came up with this idea? I know where it came from. We're all afraid to share the Gospel with our friends so we invented a form of church where we can trick our friends into coming so that somebody else can share the Gospel with them. And of course two things happen. Our friends don't come to Jesus and we fall away. Enough. You need to go deep. You can't afford 52 messages a year on the basics of Christian faith.

4. We need to HOLD FAST to our confession of faith

Jude told us to hold fast to the faith once for all delivered to the saints and the author of the Letter to the Hebrews says:

²³Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering (Hebrews 10:23. ESV)

One of the things you need to understand is that while methods change – today we play guitars and 100 years ago they played organs and 300 years ago they sang only the Psalter – methods change; but our theology doesn't. A church is supposed to preach the faith ONCE FOR ALL DELIVERED TO THE SAINTS. That is why from time to time you will hear me drag out the Old Baptist Confession and you might wonder: “Why in the world is he dragging out a statement of faith from 1689? Who in the world cares what our great grandparents thought about anything?” Well the simple answer is; we do or we ought to. We ought to care a great deal because we are in the business of passing on a changeless set of truths and so it is actually very important to check ourselves every once in a while to see if we have made unintended and unlawful changes. We need to know if we've been drifting because we may be drifting into danger. A good pastor ought to be preaching a message that is no different in theological content from what a good pastor would have taught in 1689 or for that matter in 189. Now obviously the illustrations change, I highly doubt that Benjamin Keach or Charles Spurgeon ever used the movie Star Wars as an illustration of false conversion, but illustrations aside, the THEOLOGY should be the same. Beware of theological innovators.

5. We need to PRIORITIZE participation in corporate worship

In Hebrews 10 after telling us to hold fast to our confession of faith the author goes on to say:

²⁴And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. (Hebrews 10:24-25. ESV)

I think I've told you before that the word used in verse 25 for meeting together is the Greek word *epi-sun-ago-gein* which is a compound word putting "epi" which means "over and above" and "synagogue" which means "church" together to form a unique word which seems to mean "extra church". In the first century Christians had not yet been totally exiled from Judaism so most believers went to synagogue on Saturday and then went to "extra Synagogue" on Sunday morning where they celebrated the resurrection of Christ from the dead. The author is saying: "You need church. Extra church." Do not neglect it. We need to hear this because in our increasingly individualistic culture we don't believe this. We think that we can stay home and watch Christian TV and read books by quasi-heretical authors and we will do just fine. No you won't. You need to assemble together with your brothers and sisters in Christ to sit under the Word, to partake of communion, to respond in praise and to be encouraged and at times rebuked – you need this – and all the more as we see the day approaching. You need church. Extra church. Do not neglect it; it is a means of your perseverance.

6. We need to ANTICIPATE trials and persecution

Jesus said in John 16:

In the world **you will have tribulation**. (John 16:33. ESV)

In case that wasn't clear enough the Apostle Paul added:

¹²Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted (2 Timothy 3:12. ESV)

In the world YOU WILL HAVE TRIBULATION and indeed ALL who desire to live a godly life will be persecuted. That seems very clear. My friends we in North America have been experiencing a rare, extended window when we have enjoyed the momentary favour of culture and government; do not get used to it for indeed that window is already closing. That was not normal. Normal is coming and normal is tribulation and persecution. Do not be surprised when this happens. Keep to the middle of the path, Christian, and you will be saved. These troubles are not to destroy you they are to refine you.

Lastly:

7. We need to TRUST in the Sovereignty of God who does all things well

Several months ago after preaching on Job I had an older lady in the church come to me with tears in her eyes and she said: “Pastor I don’t know if I could ever be like Job. When Job lost his children he said, ‘the Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away, blessed be the name of the Lord’, I don’t know if I could say that. I’m not sure that I could persevere under so great a trial.”

“Don’t worry about it,” I told her. “You don’t need grace for that trial today. Today is a day of joy in your life. Enjoy that also as a gift from God. And if God’s grace is truly in you, if you are truly saved, then when God sends you the day of trouble he will also send you grace enough to persevere. He does all things well.”

My friends, we can’t look into our hearts today and expect to see the extraordinary supply of a Job or a Bunyan or a Joni Erikson Tada. But our God is the same as their God. And if God should so decree that you should lose your children as Job, or go to jail for 12 years like Bunyan or suffer terrible injury like Joni Erikson, then he will give of the same grace that he gave them. Do not fret over such things. Trust in the Sovereignty and Goodness of the God who does all things well.

Conclusion:

Trust in the promise that the Father made to the Son. Trust in the Holy Spirit who is our guarantee. Trust in the Word of God which says:

those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. (Romans 8:30. ESV)

That is the Golden Chain of God’s Sovereignty and Goodness and it is strong unto perseverance yet today. This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.