

Jude 22-23 Sermon Outline

At this point in the letter Jude had just exhorted the church in the previous verses to keep themselves in the love of God. They were to do this by building themselves up in the faith, praying in the Holy Spirit and waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.

Jude had given a long list of the characteristics of the false teachers within their midst. He vividly described them as waterless clouds, twice dead fruitless trees, and wandering stars doomed to be engulfed by eternal gloom and darkness. They lived licentious and rebellious lives and taught others to do the same.

Even though he gives scathing judgments about the character of the false teachers, Jude did not want true Christians to focus their attention on them. When the body of Christ is dealing with egregious sins in its midst and when the true church is surrounded by unholy and heretical false teachers who deny Christ and yet gain a vast following, all the while living in luxury and decadence, it is easy for Christians to focus their thoughts on the sins of such individuals.

But if we do this we inevitably become just like them. We inevitably become like that which we worship. That thing or person we give our time and mental energy begins to shape our character. Jude wanted his hearers, the true sheep, to have their character shaped by Christ.

And this would be done as they directed their hearts and minds to Him, through prayer, through the building up that comes by way of feeding upon apostolic doctrine, the gospel, revealed in Holy Scripture and through renouncing the ungodliness of this age and eagerly anticipating the coming of Christ and the age to come.

So, relatively speaking, according to Jude, the proper response to ungodliness and false teaching on the part of the members of the true church of Jesus Christ was to focus on themselves. Consider how Jude calls the church as a whole to action but the object to which this action was directed was themselves.

They were to keep *themselves* in the love of God (v.21). And they were to do this partly by building *themselves* up in the most holy faith (v.20). In a word the churches in Jude's day were to focus on their own relationship with Christ.

This is what it meant to keep themselves in the love of God. In the face of haughty wickedness within even the fellowship of the church, Jude called the church to action, action that involved primarily a renewal of the mind.

But Jude did not stop there. Our most holy faith friends is not simply a mental exercise in agreeing with gospel teaching and feeding upon right doctrine. Some philosophies are like this. In their minds they climb over walls and perform gymnastics but their philosophy has no touching point in reality.

One famous and influential British philosopher said that his own ideas frustrated him at times because they could not adequately explain the activities of his everyday life, like hanging out with his friends and enjoying a meal.

But belief in the gospel is not like this. Building ourselves up in the faith, praying, patiently enduring evil as we look forward to the coming of Christ, all of these things are meant to renew our minds and shape our character so that our behavior toward others reflects the love and mercy of Christ.

According to Christ the way we treat others is the sum and substance of true religion. He said, “*whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the prophets*” (Matt. 7:12)

In Jude’s day, and it’s no different in our day, the distinguishing factor between true religion and the religion of the false teachers, intruders in the church, was the way in which they treated one another. The false teachers as Jude described them were lustful, discontented, merciless, self-obsessed loud mouth boasters bearing no evidence of real fruit in their lives.

True Christians however had experienced the mercy of Christ. They were waiting for the mercy of Christ which leads to eternal life and therefore they were to display this same mercy by showing mercy to those around them. This is the main thrust of these two verses, that Christians would show mercy to others.

Here we see very clearly the communal aspect of life in the visible church. Our lives are not our own. We belong to Christ which necessarily entails that we belong to the other members of His body. The sins that are committed in the body and the good deeds that are performed in the body influence the other members of the body for evil or for good respectively.

Jude set aside his original plan to write about their common salvation and instead wrote this letter appealing to the church to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints, because he knew the perverted sinfulness of the false teachers could shape the behavior and thinking of those around them.

This is in fact what happened. He talks about those who doubt in verse 22; “*have mercy on those who doubt*”. This word “doubt” is the same word Jude used in verse 9 where he talked about Michael the archangel “*contending*” with the devil. Michael was at odds with the devil.

Here in this verse though Jude uses the same word to show that there some in the body who were at odds with themselves. They had doubts about this faith once delivered. Jude said these false teachers were like hidden reefs at their love feasts.

These people had table fellowship with other believers in the church. But they posed a hidden danger; they were wolves in sheep’s clothing. But for some the true character of these people wasn’t easily recognizable.

They were not sure what to believe, who was right and who was wrong. This cause an inner struggle. They had doubts. One option for the other members of the church would be to dismiss them, at worst condemn them as being foolish for having doubts. The method of operation for the religious leaders in Jesus’ day, who were without mercy, was to immediately condemn anyone who disagreed with them.

This is why they sought to destroy Jesus. Jude rightly and justly condemns the false teachers. They are designated for condemnation. But what about those who may have followed them unwittingly and now had doubts?

Jude says the church is show mercy to them. They are to be patient with them, have compassion for their inner struggle, pray in the Holy Spirit for them and encourage them. When we are dealing with those in the body who have doubts our response is not to pull away from them but draw near to them.

Mercifulness is the hallmark of the Christian. Jesus said “blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy”. The mercy that Christ will show to us on the last day leads to eternal life (v.21). We have been shown mercy by a God who is rich in mercy therefore we are to be merciful.

Showing mercy to those who doubt is not always easy. We open ourselves up to pain and suffering. In the next verse Jude says we are to jump in the fire for some. But this vulnerability that accompanies being merciful should not stop us from showing mercy.

It's who we are as Christians. It's part of our DNA in Christ. So know that you will suffer in showing mercy to doubters. In showing mercy to us the Father watched His only begotten Son be crucified for you. In showing mercy we will never suffer to the extent that the Son of God suffered in showing us mercy. Show mercy to those who doubt.

Jude thus shows us the kind of effect false teachers have on some. They begin to doubt. We are to show them mercy. Others though have gone past the threshold of doubting. Because of the strong and sinful influence of the intruders these people had become more committed to following their sinful ways.

He says, "*save others by snatching them out of the fire*" The image we get here is one of Christians who, as a result of their sin, imitating the sinful practices of the intruders, are so close to the fires of hell that they can feel its heat. They need "saving".

This is what sin does, it destroys. While the mercy of Christ leads to eternal life, sin leads to eternal death. Jude borrows imagery from the prophet Zechariah here. In chapter 3 Zechariah sees a vision of Joshua the high priest dressed in filthy soiled clothing.

Satan stood by ready to accuse him and have him condemned for his sin. But the LORD said to Satan, "*the LORD rebuke you, O Satan! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?*" (Zech. 3:1-2).

Then the LORD proceeded to have the filthy garments removed from Joshua and replaced with pure, clean vestments. This vision symbolized the total forgiveness of sins for the people of God. They were chosen by God to obtain the forgiveness of sins. They were thus a brand plucked from the fires of God's wrath.

These Christians need to be plucked out of the fire, saved from their deliberate sinning. In Zechariah's vision, the LORD saved Joshua, the priestly representative of the people, from the fire. Here the people of God participate in the "saving".

The Lord Jesus Christ alone, by His death, atones for our sins finally and forever. By faith in Him we have the forgiveness of sins. But this does not mean that true believers cannot get entangled in sin for a season. In Jude's day they were dealing with the collateral damage caused by the intruders.

Some saints had fallen into sin, following the ways of the false teachers. Now our Lord Jesus Christ promises to keep us. In verse 1 we are those who are beloved by the Father and we kept by the Father for Christ. True saints can never be separated from the God's love.

Sometimes though believers can fall into serious sins and grieve the Holy Spirit. And very often the LORD will use the mercy and compassion of others in the church to reach out and "save" them from their sins. What does this look like?

In our day it would certainly include prayer for them but it might also, and probably should also include a phone call or face to face conversation, an encouraging email or text. Or it might simply be merciful patience, long-suffering.

In Jude's day he used his pen and this letter to hopefully reach those near the flames. Perhaps the words found here calling the church to contend for the faith was what was desperately needed by those caught in

sin. Although it is often the case that grievous sins draw people away from the reading and preaching of the Word not toward it. We don't know exactly what Jude had in mind here but he was clearly commanding the church by God's grace to show mercy to those riddled by doubts and sins.

The image of snatching of someone out of the fire carries with it the necessity that in order to do this we must get very close to them. In order to physically grab someone from the flames you have to be close enough to them to reach them. You cannot practice social distancing when it comes to showing mercy to sinners.

It also means that you must get close to the fire, i.e. the wrath of God against sin, the fires of Hell. This is why Jude says believers are to show mercy with fear. As we get close to those entangled in sin we put ourselves at risk to be tempted into doing the same sinful practices. Sin is temporarily pleasurable. It crouches at the door ready to devour us.

Sin and its defilement are contagious things. It spreads like a bacteria but is much more dangerous. While showing mercy we are to have a healthy fear of sin's consequences. We can get close to those who are caught in sin but we don't have to condone or accept their sin.

Jude goes back to using an illustration of filthy clothing. He says "*to others show mercy with fear hating even the garment stained by the flesh*". This garment Jude refers to was a long shirt or similar garment worn underneath a cloak. It had direct contact with the flesh of the person and so it would get stained in all kinds of ways.

This rather grotesque picture of spoiled clothing, like the clothing in Zechariah's vision, is meant to shock us into fully appreciating the way sin can spoil the soul. So again we can get close enough to save but we should hate the sin we get close to. The church is to be merciful like Christ was merciful.

He ate with sinners and tax collectors. He was not afraid to get close to those who were despised in the community. He did not even avoid confrontation with the religious leaders who wanted to murder Him. Yet all the while He remained holy.

We are thus called to be merciful beloved, to be slow to anger, forgiving others as we have been forgiven. Saving some, showing mercy to all, while hating the sin that spoils the hearts and souls of people around us.

As we do this we imitate our Savior Jesus Christ. The gross filthiness of our sin did not push Him away from us. Rather because of His great mercy, the eternal Son of God stepped toward us, clothing Himself with flesh and blood, just like ours, yet without sin.

But He did not stop there. That perfect sinless human body and soul became sin on the cross. Our filthy, spoiled clothing of sin was given to Him as He was nailed on the cross. This was what was required to save us from the fires of Hell. Is it too much to ask then of we who have been shown such great mercy, that we also would show mercy to all?

It is not too much to ask. In fact it is part and parcel of our identity united to this merciful Christ.