

Lydia Collin

Series on Jude: The Beloved

Jude 1-2

Title: Kept for Jesus: What It Means To Be a Christian

Delivered to Trinity Presbyterian Church (viz Zoom), February 7, 2021

*Notes for Time with Young Christians*

- If you're in your living room right now kids, I want you to take a look around for a family picture. Lots of times they're in the living room, or on the walls of a hallway, or on a bookshelf. You can go and get one if you like. And adults, you can do this, too!
- Alright, now have the youngest one in your family see if they can name everybody in the one of those family pictures.
- Here's the question: what different names do we use for our family that your teacher or your friend at school wouldn't use, say for your parent? That's right: you have special names for your family.
- I come from a pretty big family, and do you know what? I have 14 nieces and nephews! And they have a special name for me. They call me Auntie Lydie. So in your family you use special names, like Granny and Grampi, Auntie and Uncle, or cousin.
- What about nicknames? (Picture of Chloe – Clo Joe) Nicknames are something you use when you're pretty close to someone and maybe you're not even related to them?
- What about your parents or your grandparents? Do they have special names they use for each other? (Picture of Dad – My Lovely)

- Do you know that in the Bible God has special names for us? God calls us children of God. Each one of us is God's child. What about when we're talking about the whole church—everyone and anyone who knows and loves Jesus. Do you know what the Bible uses as a picture to show us what that is like? The Bible makes the picture that we are the bride of Christ.
- *Ephesians 5:25 - Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it*
- So, if you ever wonder how much God loves you, remember that in the Bible God gives us the picture that Jesus' love is so great for all of us, that he calls us his bride!
- He doesn't call us, "Hey you" or "Mister and Mrs" or "So and so" or just plain old Lydia Collin. No, he calls us his bride: someone he cherishes, loves above all others, and commits to love forever and ever. Let's thank Jesus for loving us so much that he calls us his bride!

#### *Opening comments around Jude*

#### "The Beloved"

Come back with me in your spiritual memory to these words, "Through many dangers, toils and snares I have already come. 'Twas grace that led me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home." I now invite you to remember with me the story behind this hymn that stands in the annals of history as both a testament and a warning.

If you know the author, John Newton's, story, you'll remember that he was the captain of a slave trading ship and during a life-threatening storm (slide), he makes a bargain with God that if God saves him, he will surrender his life to Christ. Newton lives, goes on to become a pastor and writes the hymn *Amazing Grace*. He becomes active in the abolition movement and is a personal mentor to William Wilberforce who ultimately overturns the laws of slavery in Britain. What the history books often neglect though, is the telling of Newton's path of sanctification—the telling of

Newton's story of becoming like Jesus in how Newton lived his life. We make his conversion story a legend where Newton instantly renounced his former way of life, leaving his career in capturing Africans and sailing them back to Britain, to an overnight conversion where he decides to become a pastor and an abolitionist. The sad truth is, though, that after Newton converted to Christianity, he led three more voyages as captain of slave ships, and indeed it was 34 years after his conversion that Newton finally renounced his former slaving profession. In 1778 Newton published an important abolitionist paper *Thoughts Upon the Slave Trade* (slide). This pamphlet laid out the cruelties of both the slave trade and slavery, but it was in part confessional. Newton stated within the work, "I hope it will always be a subject of humiliating reflection to me, that I was once an active instrument in a business at which my heart now shudders."

And so, yes, Newton's life stands as a testament and a warning. A testament to the amazing work of grace to convert a sinner who would sell a human soul for personal profit and a warning to us to work out our salvation with fear and trembling lest we follow in a long, long journey of stubbornness to the holy calling of Christ. Newton warns us to lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us as we look to Jesus, the author and the perfecter of our faith. Newton's story of grace warns us to not use grace as an excuse to do what we want, and to in effect make grace cheap. Rather, Newton's story reminds us to run to and relish in the grace of Christ as it makes us like Christ, and keeps us in the life of the Beloved. Newton warns us to avoid the snares of cheap grace and to swiftly embrace all that Jesus calls us to.

As we come to the book of Jude, the sum of this book is quite simple. Jude is eager to relish in and dwell in this amazing grace of Jesus, but he finds it necessary to warn the early church to keep the faith, *just as* Christ promises to keep us. Jude is saying: celebrate this grace of Christ but don't use grace as an excuse to keep on sinning. Celebrate this grace of Christ, but be aware of those *on the*

*inside* who will abuse the grace of Jesus and lead you astray. Hold fast to the grace of Jesus as you do this, remembering that Jesus will do his part to keep you firmly in his grip of grace.

As if the world's call to abandon Jesus wasn't tempting enough to lead us away from Jesus, or our own private temptations weren't enough to lead us away from Jesus, Jude is compelled to write his letter to the early church to warn them about leaders right in the church who are trying to lead them away from Jesus. This letter is written only about 30 years after Christ's ascension. Think about that. Jesus has barely completed his earthly ministry, and within 30 years there are already people on the inside, claiming to be Christian, but leading this young, fragile church astray. And so Jude's approach in addressing this is to remind the early church of who they are in Jesus. He then warns the early church about false teachers. Next, and very helpfully, he tells the early church how to keep themselves in the love of God. And then, he ends with this great assurance that as we hold fast to the truth and love of Jesus, we can rest assured that Jesus will preserve us and present us faultless before God with great joy. So, those are the four key parts of Jude: 1) reminder of our identity in Jesus, 2) warning about dangers, toils, and snares, 3) how to persevere with Jesus, and 4) the great promise of Christ's power to keep us as his own forever and ever.

I've named our series in Jude *The Beloved* (slide) because I want us to focus in on this word that Jude chooses to use in addressing the church. He calls them Beloved, which means: declared sacred, consecrated, rendered as holy. Or quite simply: the stamp of holiness from God that passes over to whatever has any connection with God. To be Beloved is to be welcomed into the fellowship of the Triune God. To be beckoned into an abundant life of communion with the Father, with the Son, and with the Spirit. This is the name Jude chooses to speak over the church. He calls them Beloved. Remember that for yourself now, dear Christian. You are Beloved in God. Because you are Christ's and Christ is yours, cling to him with all that you have. Remember your standing in

him, and don't use your standing as an excuse to cheapen the grace of Christ. Live into—and indeed—live out of your position as beloved children of God.

Let's think a little bit more about what it means to be beloved. A stranger can only call out, "Hey you." An official can only identify you by government papers "Sir, can I see your driver's and registration?". An acquaintance might know your first name. A friend, your nickname. A family member identifies with you by the same last name. But it is only the intimacy of a lover who dares to call you Beloved. And that is how Jude chooses to address the church: Beloved in God.

Alright, so that's who Jude is writing to and what he is writing about. So for today, let's now dive into the first two verses where Jude states our standing as children of God, and declares that we are *Kept for Jesus* which is the title of my sermon today. (slide)

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

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

*2 May mercy, peace, and love be yours in abundance.*

Let's now look at our standing as The Beloved by noticing *three remarkable descriptions of what it means to be a Christian in these opening verses. Three marks of what it means to be a Christian.* (slide) First, the mark of humility. Second, key identifying characteristics of the beloved. And third, the marks of maturity as the life of Christ is abundantly multiplied in us.

1) So first of all, humility.

Brothers and sisters, don't rush past Jude's salutation. *Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James*. Hey Jude, who are you, anyway? Well, he is no less than the biological brother of Jesus. From what we know of him, he would have been with Jesus, naturally, in childhood, and then followed him in his earthly ministry. Jude is not one of the 12 disciples, but he is a renowned leader in the early church. For those who want to study him a bit more, he is also named in Matthew 13:55 and Mark 6:3, but in both these instances he is identified by his Greek name Judas, note Jude.

But notice here, how does Jude identify himself? *"Jude, the renowned brother of our Lord Jesus Christ, listen up!"* No, he calls himself simply a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James. Jude willingly takes a place of humility, not using his personal relation to Jesus as a way to boast or validate what he has to say. Rather, Jude does the opposite by identifying himself simply as a servant to Jesus. And then, he goes beyond that. In order to verify his identity fully, Jude associates himself with a great leader in the early church, but he does so by putting himself second. If there was any doubt as to who this man is, Jude gives historical reference to his other brother James, the author of the epistle James in our New Testament, and the leader of the church in Jerusalem. Jude shows humility twice by calling himself a servant of Jesus and simply identifying himself as the brother of James. Humility marks the beloved.

Alright, let's look at the second mark of what it means to be a Christian by noticing how Jude identifies these believers.

## 2) Identity

Jude identifies the church in three ways: 1) called, 2) beloved in God the Father, 3) and kept safe for Jesus. To be called speaks of intentionality, purposefulness, and great desire. Friends, it is no mistake that God has, since before the creation of the world, identified us as his own. It is not

accidental that we are created for relationship with God himself. This calling into union with the triune God was made crystal clear in the sending of God's own son, Jesus, to make a way for us to become children of God.

We see this in the 2<sup>nd</sup> identifying word "beloved by God the Father." Oh, how immeasurable is the grace of Jesus that he has brought us into the life of the Beloved where we know his Father as our Father. When God the Father looks at us, he sees Jesus and all the rights of sonship that are given to Jesus, God the Father bestows on us. As Romans 8:15 reminds us, it is by the Spirit at work in us that we can call Jesus' own Father our Father. Indeed, we call him Abba, the Hebrew word for Daddy. This is our inheritance: we are children of God, children of the Heavenly Father who welcomes us with tender affection, total commitment, and the security of a safe, good, and kind Father.

And then, Jude identifies us as ones who are "kept safe for Jesus Christ." This is a continuous preservation with which Jesus keeps those who trust him. We see this confirmed elsewhere in Scripture by other writers, too.

John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, writes in 1 John 5:18,

*"We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him."*

Peter, the apostle and disciple of Jesus in 1 Peter 1:5, identifies us as the begotten and then writes,

*"we are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."*

And then, Paul, the apostle writing to his young disciple Timothy declares in 2 Tim. 1:12,

*“I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to keep what I have committed to him until that Day.”*

So, friends, in the scripture we again see this intermingling of two great truths that it is God’s part to keep us and that it is our part to keep ourselves in the love of God. It is God’s grace that sustains us, and it is our job to not cheapen that grace. And Jude writes to assure us: do not worry, beloved. God is able. He has the power to keep you from stumbling. So hold fast to him, beloved. Don’t use grace as an excuse to stay in sin. Run unashamedly into the grace of Jesus, knowing with confidence that he has the power to keep you until the day of his return. Glory in that grace. Cherish that grace. Be emboldened in that grace. But don’t willfully abuse or cheapen that grace.

At this point, it would be fair to ask: What does that look like, to not take advantage of the grace of Jesus? Well, Jude gives us a hint of that with his last description of what it means to be a Christian through our call to become mature in Jesus.

### 3) Maturity

What happens to us: our mind, heart, soul, and body, as we love God with everything we have and rest in God as the one who is able to keep us? *Mercy, peace, and love* are multiplied to us. Let’s look at each one of those words from verse 2.

First, *mercy*. This is a rare word in the opening greeting of the letters of the New Testament, but it’s really curious to me that the word *mercy* appears in nearly every epistle that has to do with warnings against false teachers. I’ll give you a few references to jot down if you want to look them up later. They are: 2 Jn 3, 1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2. Warnings against false teachers, especially ones that

came within 30 years of Christ's ascension, remind us how every day we stand in need of the mercy of God. God's mercy to keep us from going astray, and especially God's mercy to keep us from leading others astray.

Second, *peace*. Friends, as we receive God's mercy day-by-day, we are given peace. Remember, Jesus promises us peace—not as the world gives. He promises us peace—not freedom from pain or suffering. Yes, his peace is a peace that passes understanding and that guards our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. His peace is the assurance that, even though in this world we will have tribulation, we are to take courage because he has overcome the world. The power of Christ to keep us, the power of Christ to redeem us, the power of Christ to preserve us gives us the kind of immeasurable peace that, even though our life may be taken from us, we can say with Paul, “To live is Christ, to die is gain.” This is the great peaceful assurance we have, dear Christian.

And third, *love* is multiplied to us. Friends, mercy and peace do not lead to apathy, for the gracious work of God not only leads to personal transformation but reaches out through us to others. God's own love is poured out to overflowing in our hearts by the Spirit. And the effect of such mercy and peace is love for others.

Mercy from God, peace within, love for all—in the fullest measure. Jude says, “*May mercy, peace, and love be yours in abundance.*” Other translations say, *be multiplied to you*. Jude is saying that our initial experience of Christ's mercy, peace, and love increases as we follow him. So don't stay content with the initial experience of Christ's salvation, but grow in maturity as your heart expands to receive more mercy, peace, and love—and to experience those three qualities overflowing from you to your neighbors.

Could one imagine a more complete prayer of Christian greeting? To be Christian—to be a Christ follower—is to be filled with mercy, peace, and love that transforms your community, your sphere of influence, your particular place and the particular time in which you live. Friends, this life abundant is not meant to be experienced as a private affair. For to be in the beloved is to be welcomed into a dance that invites others in. Come, come and experience the full affection of the Father, the mercy and peace of Christ, and the love of the Spirit as we allow the life of Christ in us to spill over to our neighbors.

*Jesus, would you make it so in us? In our times right now, there is great isolation, and so would you allow us and show us how to bring the community of the Beloved, the life of the Beloved to our neighbors? Jesus, may the truth of your word this morning not just cheaply run over us, but settle down in us and spring up as living water that wells up from our innermost beings? Jesus, take us further into the life of the Beloved. May we know the affection of the Father, the fullness of your life in us, and the sanctification of the Spirit who works and moves among us today? Help us to not just theoretically know that you keep us, but to live into that freedom in the way we actually live our day-to-day life. Jesus, we're open to you and we ask that you open us up to receive the fullness of the life of Christ, and to look forward to the day of your return with great confidence, knowing that it is you who make us whole and holy, for it is you who calls us The Beloved. Amen.*

*Benediction*

Children of God

Called Beloved in Christ and kept safe for Jesus

Remember the grace of Christ in which he became poor that we might know his riches; and that we might glory in the cross of Christ as our salvation.

May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else... May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones. (1 Thessalonians 3:12, 13 NIV)