

The Benediction

Jude 24-15

At the end of a service we pray or pronounce a benediction. A benediction is a blessing. It is a prayer to God for the benefit of the people over whom we pray.

Jude is a book about fallen people, people whose faith has turned sour. It is a book that warns us of the terrible nature of people who claim to be believers but have actually fallen from their faith and attempt to influence other people in the same direction. Given that terrible idea, Jude still ends his short letter with a note of hope. The hope he pronounces is a hope that Jesus is able to keep us from turning sour. Our faithfulness to God, in other words, is not a product of our own effort, but of the work of Jesus who constantly acts on our behalf. If we continue giving ourselves to Him, He can keep us safe and intact.

So Jude pronounces this blessing, this prayer over his readers:

To him who is able to keep you from stumbling 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.
(Jude 1:24-25)

The blessing begins with a big question

Who is Jesus?

This is the biggest of the big picture questions. Because it is such a big question it cannot be given too simple an answer. Even a complex answer is not enough. There are no words, no amount of language that can adequately describe Jesus.

How do we answer the question then?

The first thing we do is focus in tightly and get personal. We cannot know Him in His fullness because we are limited. Therefore we must try to know Him in His aspects.

He is able to keep you from falling

What does that mean? God saves us if we'll ask Him to. He lifts us up out of sin and out of the consequences of sin and gives us life. The life He gives is fuller here and wonderful in eternity. He gives what Jesus calls Abundant Life. We were dead in our sins, according to Paul, but Jesus, by His death,

brings us to life.

In that way, we are lifted immediately above the condition in which we were born. We are raised from death to life, and given a platform to stand in high places. We get the opportunity to see the world, including our own selves from God's vantage point. We see the effects of sin and the beauty of faith.

God gives this amazing gift. He, of course, is infinitely powerful and, very literally, above the flaws of this existence. He stands over creation on His own power.

We however are not infinite. We are not all powerful. We can barely get a clear view of ourselves and our circumstances on the best of days, let alone when darkness surrounds us, confusion overtakes us, and temptation assaults us. In our human weakness we cannot see every side to a situation. We cannot see all vantages of a problem.

When we are in tune with God, though, we can do much better. We can see our own sin for what it is. We can see our own problems in a better perspective and proportion. It is God that gives us this view. His power upholds us. His love sustains us. His work in us helps us to overcome sin, and to embrace

forgiveness.

We become like the Apostle Paul, who was once not only an unbeliever, but was firmly against Jesus. He was violently opposed to the launching of Christianity. But Jesus reached down to him, lifted him up into what he called “the third heaven.” Jesus gave him a vision of what the world could be like if people everywhere gave their lives to Him. Paul who at one time persecuted others, himself became persecuted. He was beaten, stoned, imprisoned, even shipwrecked. At some point he might have become convinced that it wasn’t worth it. He might have become convinced that he should just go his own way and let Jesus take care of Himself. But at every turn, Jesus proved Himself faithful, saved his life, gave him friends when he was isolated, connected him with a fuller life than being a provincial rabbi who made tents could ever have offered him.

Jesus kept him from falling.

He can do that for us too. If we constantly give ourselves to Him, He will undergird us with His peace, and His strength. We may have hardships, just as Paul did. We may have kinds of hardship that are different from his, but God in His infinite power and love

can keep us too from falling: falling deeply into sin, falling into unbelief.

He can instead present us to God

Do you know that Jesus is not just interested in keeping you from sin? That's just preservation. There's more to the spiritual life than that. Jesus wants to make constant and permanent improvements to you. He wants to make you not just a less sinful person, but a fully righteous person. His blood, His salvation transforms you not just judicially before God, but in fact, before God as a person who stands before him without fault.

I have noted in my life that there is seldom a purely good emotion. Many good things in life are tinged with trouble or sadness. Two weeks ago I was visiting my brother in Australia. I had not seen him for years. The trip was paid for and we had no reason to let anything stain our celebration. However, at the same time, one day two things came up ... some difficult family issues that had nothing to do with me, and some health issues that reared their heads into our celebration. As good as it was, there was still the relational and physical limitations that come with being human to wedge their way

into our very good visit.

This is the way of life. It is to be expected. But Jesus does not work that way. In eternity he wants to present us before the throne of God without fault and with great joy.

Consider the amazing position of being a present to God. The word present is pronounced two ways, and both ways are related. We present a present to someone. If we make a presentation, we are giving a present. Jesus has His children cleaned by His own forgiveness, empowered by His own spiritual strength, and wrapped in His own goodness.

You are a gift, a present to God presented by His own Son.

I have known men who thought they were God's gift to women. When they give into this impression they are drastically and sadly wrong. They are not just wrong, but they are more a blight than a gift.

I know myself. I am not a gift to anybody. If you're like me you probably feel more like a piece of flotsam in the junk drawer than a present. A present is something useful, and shiney, and pretty, and delightful. On my average days, I am not like that. I am

something more to be endured.

But what Jesus is doing in the lives of His children is completely different. He is transforming you, transforming me. He is cleaning us up, and repairing us, and upgrading us, and fortifying us, beautifying us. He is making us into a gift, a present for His father.

Without flaw

Do you know that people who have given themselves to God will someday stand before God without a flaw?

Not one thing wrong in your entire person.

Your being will be perfect

And your joy will be untainted

Before the throne of God you will have no reason to be ashamed or abashed. You will have no reason to be sad. You will be the perfect gift to God, perfected and given by His Son.

Full disclosure here. The Bible is not perfectly clear who the “great joy” is attributed to: we who are presented to God, or Jesus who is doing the presenting.

Does it matter?

If you have ever given a good gift, you know what it is like to give something to someone when you know they are really going to love it. It is a feeling of great satisfaction.

Imagine Jesus being greatly satisfied in giving you as a gift to the Father.

It's going to be one way or the other, or, in my opinion, both. Sometimes a phrase is ambiguous on purpose. Who's happy about the gift, you the gift, or Jesus the giver? Both.

Joy is complete in the giving.

God is our savior, and Jesus is our Lord

He saves us out from all the things we've mentioned. At the same time He oversees us, gives us direction and motivation to do for Him as He wants done. When we cannot see God for all He is, we see Him for what He is to us. Jude makes it clear who He is to us.

He is the one in charge

He is the one who saves us

Because of that He deserves certain acknowledgement from us:

He deserves glory

That is light. All the light we have. Every bit of shining radiance we can generate, or more

likely reflect from Jesus Himself, goes to God.

I see us giving God glory in what I think of as a spotlight. The spotlight is bright, but looking at the light is not the point. If you look at the spotlight you'll see nothing, in fact it is a negative experience. The purpose of a spotlight is to help us see someone else. It draws attention to someone else, not the spotlight operator.

I remember being in the spotlight. The director would yell at me from the house: "find your light." At first I didn't know how to do that without looking into the light, and even that was difficult. He told me, close your eyes and feel the warmth on your face. And I would move in small increments around the stage till I felt the warmth of the high intensity light shining on me.

Warmth in emotional terms is usually equated with love. God deserves all the love, all the attention we can give Him. That's how we give Him glory Him. We express and cultivate our love for Him. We draw attention to Him.

His majesty deserves recognition

Majesty is not an easy idea for Americans. We don't do majesty well. We can get a feel

for what it is though when we are in the presence of a person of undeniable importance, who wears command like a cloak. It is instantly recognizable and demands immediate respect. When we are in the presence of a person like this, we cannot help ourselves. This is a person we feel instinctively deserves anything. People give them wealth because they have a deep inner sense that it is appropriate. They submit to them because it seems like the only reasonable thing to do.

When a person with majesty walks into a room, they are immediately recognized as the most important person present. They are seen as somehow bigger, more imposing, more ... more.

We do not give a person majesty, they have it in one degree or another. Two people in the same room might have it, and sparks will fly. Nothing needs to be said or done, no overt competition may be recognizable, but a tension will be in the room and everyone will know it.

God's majesty is above everyone else's. it is our place to recognize it and to acknowledge it. People will fall before God and worship Him in the last day, not because they want to

or because they are forced to, but because it will be the most natural thing for anyone to do. Nobody will even question it.

But for now, in His physical absence, and in a world that does not recognize it, we have the position of drawing attention to His majesty by worshiping Him willingly and with all the awe we have at our disposal.

His is the power and authority

These two ideas are related but they are not the same. A person has power if they have the ability to do something. For example, a man may have the power, that is the strength, agility, and knowledge of physics to pick up a car and move it. That's impressive on the face of it. Sometimes a person with power exerts himself and everyone knows it. I once saw a man walk into a store. He had muscles like you wouldn't believe. He walked around that store and everyone noticed. He walked over to a storage cabinet and began opening drawers and looking into them. A clerk walked over to him and said, as clerks will, "Can I help you?"

The guy turned to him with a sneer and said, "Does it look like I need help?"

This guy had personal, physical power.

However, he did not have authority. The clerk backed away, more out of nervousness than anything. Who knows whether that guy would have gotten belligerent, but the clerk wasn't taking any chances. The clerk, in fact, had authority. It was his store. He was entrusted with the safe keeping, the organization, and the sale of the merchandise in the store. The muscle man thought that because he had power he could do anything he wanted, but in fact, if he had gotten unruly, the clerk, who was just a little guy, would have had the authority to call security and have the muscle man arrested and detained.

It was his store

A man might be able to move a car, that means he has power. But if it isn't his car, or it isn't in the wrong place, or it isn't causing an immediate and drastic problem, the man of power does not have the authority to move the car. Now if a man walks up and sees that the car is pinning down his dogs leash, and the dog stands to be harmed by the car's location, he might have the authority to tell the powerful man to move the car. The man might be able to lift the wheel of the car, under the dog owner's authority, and free the dog.

God has both power and authority

He can do whatever he wants because He is both able and He has the right. Someone might ask, How can God cause the great flood? He had the power: that is, He had the ability to control the rain and the fountains of the oceans to rise up and cover the earth with water. He also had the authority of creation, ownership, and moral decision: that is right and wrong are in His hands to decide and the world was covered in violence and great sin. It was so pervasive it was spoiling creation. But God also had the authority and the power to recognize a single family who did not fit this sinful mold, so He chose to save a few and destroy the rest. His power was cosmic. His authority was morally absolute.

We have the opportunity now to recognize both his Power and Authority. That is, do we attribute to Him the acts of power that are rightfully His? He made the Universe and we should recognize the fact. Or do we attribute creation to mindless chance? He decides what is right and wrong, or do we leave it to popular opinion?

He is eternal

Note this: Jude is telling us Jesus was, is,

and will be forever. That is He is eternal. We usually think of eternity as having to do with the future. Forever means all the time to come and beyond. That's true. Eternity, whether we are talking about eternal life given to us, or the existence of God includes even the time after we die, and everything after the end of the world. Jesus deserves all the glory, majesty, power and authority into all existence to come.

Jude, though notes two often overlooked truths about eternity.

Eternity is now. We are, at this moment, partaking of a portion of eternity. That is mathematical nonsense, but it is supernaturally true. Jesus exists now, in our present, doing for us that which we cannot see, and that which is beyond our physical ability to do. As surely as He existed when He walked this earth, He exists now, in this present moment. It is part of His eternal existence.

Also, eternity is past. Jesus Himself said it: Before Abraham was, I am. This is an eternal expression. It means that all of time is in Jesus' eternal now. John notes that He was in the beginning at the moment of creation with the Father and the Spirit, co-existent.

Before the beginning of all things Jesus was.

What and who is God? How does Jesus fit into the picture?

It's a big question and deserves a big answer. It's an answer so big that we cannot do it justice in an entire lifetime. In fact, all of us cannot answer it in all our lifetimes. We can start by taking note that the:

authority

power

glory

majesty

of Christ is directed into keeping us from stumbling and making us into wonderful presents for the creator of the Universe.

So here's what you do with the knowledge of this blessing

Give God glory

Acknowledge His majesty

Recognize His power and authority

We do this by knowing Him better and by saying what is true about Him. Most often this is expressed in worship. We worship Him by saying or singing repeatedly the truths about

who He is and what He has done. Worship is not space filler before the message. In fact, the essence of the message is to inform worship. That means that all you will ever learn in a message is what you need to know to give God all that He has coming, all He is due. All our actions, even in love for other people are expressions of who God is, what He is like, and how we can be as much like Him as possible.

And what an encouraging thing that truly is.