March 29, 2015

“Looking to God on the Dangerous Journey”

Jude 24-25

**FCF**: Paralyzed by fear of danger

**PROPOSITION**: (anchor) The Christian life is a dangerous journey.

(magnet) We must look to God and take heart.

**SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:**

John Bunyan’s The Pilgrim’s Progress is an allegorical journey that Christian and other pilgrims make from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City. Published in 1678, it went through eleven editions during Bunyan’s lifetime and has since been translated into more than seventy languages and dialects. And there are dozens of editions and versions available today. One of these is titled Dangerous Journey. And for reasons made clear in many ways over the course of the tale. As told in the original version, on the way to House Beautiful (READ quote):

So I saw in my dream that he made haste, and went forward, that if possible he might get lodging there. Now before he had gone far, he entered into a very narrow passage, which was about a furlong off the Porter's lodge, and looking very narrowly before him as he went, he espied two lions in the way. Now, thought he, I see the dangers that Mistrust and Timorous were driven back by. (The lions were chained, but he saw not the chains.) Then he was afraid, and thought also himself to go back after them; for he thought nothing but death was before him. But the Porter at the lodge, whose name is Watchful, perceiving that Christian made a halt, as if he would go back, cried unto him, saying, “Is thy strength so small? Fear not the lions, for they are chained, and are placed there for trial of faith where it is, and for discovery of those that have none: keep in the midst of the path, and no hurt shall come unto thee.”

Then I saw that he went on, trembling for fear of the lions, but taking good heed to the directions of the Porter; he heard them roar, but they did him no harm.

It’s a dramatic moment in the story. Because of Christian’s fear, he froze and nearly turned back. The point being that, in a profound way, the Christian life is a dangerous journey.

But how dangerous is it? That’s the question before us. And Jude gives us the answer.

**SCRIPTURE READING**: Jude 1-25

**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

**SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

“*Do not be afraid*.” Do not fear. Do not worry or be anxious. According to a Facebook post that’s spread a bit, there is such a command for every day of the year – 365 times. Actually, that’s not quite true. Depending on your translation, it’s about 100. But that should be enough. Especially because of the reason that’s attached to the command. It’s always connected to God – to who He is, what He’s promised, what He’s doing, what is coming. Do not be afraid.

Which brings us to Jude’s letter. An overview. He’s urged us to be ready to contend for the faith, to wrestle against false teaching. Why? The stakes are high and the danger great. So contend in what you remember and how you respond. Jude gives the what, the why, and the how. He’s made plain the dangerous atmosphere in which we live – false teaching and seductive morals. And he’s impressed on us the hazardous duty to rescue those ensnared in these things.

If you really hear him, this can all sound quite demanding, just too much and way beyond us. And it is. “*But*,” Jude tells us here at the end, “*do not be afraid*.” The Christian life is a dangerous journey. But ours is then to look to God and take heart. Meaning these two essential things. First, to look at what God is doing. And, second, to look to what God is due.

1. **WHAT GOD IS DOING**

First, looking at what God is doing, the assurances He has given (READ Jude 24).

1. *Keeping You*

Now, when Jude says God is “able” to do something, he is not speaking of possibilities.

1. His guarding us

These are assurances. Of what? Of His guarding us. Ours is “to keep,” by keeping watch. And that is instrumental. But God’s is “to keep,” by standing guard. And that is essential.

1. From stumbling

And what does He keep us from? From stumbling, from falling. We are made like sure-footed horses on a treacherous trail. We are preserved from the rot and death around us. And within.

*Illustration:*

It’s as though Jude is saying, “*Look. I’ve recounted for you stories of privilege slipping into presumption, of position into pride. You have watched marathon runners dropping out of the race, injured and exhausted. But you needn’t worry. The Lord has you. He will keep you from stumbling. You are eternally secure. He will preserve you. And so you will persevere*.”

1. *Presenting You*

He is keeping you from something. And for something (READ Jude 24).

1. That great day

That great day is in view here, the day of Christ’s return. “The presence of His glory” – that blazing beauty, a holiness so resplendent in just its reflection that men fall down before angels. And we will be “presented” before Him on that day, ushered into the presence of the ultimate of dignitaries. How does that sound to you? If you’re sane, it should absolutely terrify you.

1. What awaits us

Except for this. What awaits the follower of Christ that day is to be blameless in His presence – without fault, like the sacrifices of old, absolutely perfect. What Jesus was for us – His record reckoned to us, our rags now removed, now robed in His righteousness. And the response? The reception we can expect? Great joy! Whose? Ours? The angels? The Lord’s? Yes! Yes!

Jude is saying, “*Now, with everything else I’ve said, know this. Know what the Lord is doing for you. Know that right now, He is keeping you. And one day, He will present you*.”

*Application:*

Now, understand that this is not a promise that you will never struggle, wonder, wander, regress, or cause those who love you much distress. This is not a promise that you will never be hurt, bruised, or wounded along the way. This is not a promise you will never lose things dear to you – health, wealth, plans, or people. But it is a promise that He will never lose you. Listen to this golden chain (READ Romans 8:28-30). Or the Lord’s promise (READ John 10:27-30).

So look to God and take heart. What cause have we to worry? Let this quiet your heart. When the night is long and your imagination has spun wild, take this to heart. Connect the dots. If the Lord can handle this, can He not handle everything else? What is beyond His reach or sight? The Christian life is a dangerous journey. We can and must look to God and take heart.

1. **WHAT GOD IS DUE**

These assurances of what He is doing are a call not to worry but worship. Which brings us to the second point, looking to what God is due (READ Jude 24-25). Where do we begin?

1. *To Him Exclusively*
2. As always

God is due our worship – our trust, obedience, and praise – exclusively. As He has always made clear as Creator and Savior. We cannot save ourselves any more than we could create ourselves.

1. Now obviously

And that is made obvious, all the more clear, in Christ’s redemptive work. Ours is not to take credit here but to give praise. All we have contributed is our sin. And He has saved us from it.

1. *For All He Has Shown*

He is due our worship exclusively, for all He has shown – eternally forever and most evident now in space and time through the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus.

1. Glory

His glory – His greatness, splendor, and radiance – always there but made so obvious in such events as the Transfiguration when Jesus’ face shown as the sun, His clothes made white as light.

1. Majesty

His majesty – His kingly presence – always there but made so obvious even in the accounts of His birth as songs were sung, knees were bowing, the nations came, and tribute was given.

1. Dominion

His dominion – His power and control over all there is – always there but made so obvious in His ability to rule without any boundaries over disease, nature, demons, and death itself.

1. Authority

His authority – His total sovereignty and right to rule – always there but made so obvious not only in the wisdom of what He taught but how He taught. People were drawn towards Him.

1. *Forever Increasing*

He is due our worship exclusively, for all He has shown, and forever increasing. Listen again to the sweep and scope of Jude’s words (READ Jude 24-25). It takes your breath away.

1. Beyond the horizon

Beyond the horizon – going all the way back and then all the way forward. We are being brought into a song and story the scope of which has no beginning or end, no start or finish.

1. With great exclamation

With great exclamation – “Amen” meaning “Let it be so.” Something not to be mumbled. Jerome, the 4th and 5th century theologian and church historian most famous for translating the Bible into Latin, said that the “amen” of the early Christians was like a crack of thunder.

Ah, my friends, let us look long and hard at who God is and what He is doing. That will lead us with minds made clear and hearts aflame to hear a call not to worry but to worship.

*Illustration:*

That first Palm Sunday was Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem. He took a deliberate step, putting Himself on a collision course with the priestly and political authorities – not slipping in with the thousands of other Passover pilgrims but arriving as the long-awaited Messianic king. Down He came the steep decline of the Mount of Olives into the Kidron Valley and up into the city, hearing the praises of the people – not correcting it but receiving it.

*Application:*

No, they didn’t understand the implications of what they were saying. But we do. And we can listen and learn from them. As from this benediction. What is a benediction anyway? It’s not just a closing but a sending, a pronouncement of a reminder and an assurance. And in the history of the church, there have been different traditions as to how to receive a benediction. Some say we should bow our heads with reverence and humility. Others say we should lift our eyes with joyful expectancy. Others say we should raise our hands with longing need.

Well, which is it? Yes! Yes! All of the above. There is a depth and breadth of appropriate responses. Receive these words with deep humility, with great joy, with all our need. For through Christ, we see who God is, what He is doing, and what He is due. That enables us to take heart, to take the steps, to move forward on this dangerous journey.

**CONCLUSION:**

We started with The Pilgrim’s Progress, classic literature. Let’s end with a classic film, *Pollyanna*. Pollyanna is the 12-year-old orphaned daughter of missionaries who comes to live with her rich Aunt Polly. She is a cheerful, radically optimistic child who focuses on the goodness of life and makes many friends in the community. The main storyline has to do with Aunt Polly’s control over the town and the plans for an orphanage. Against Aunt Polly’s wishes, the town holds a carnival to raise funds for the project. Pollyanna is forbidden to go but sneaks away and then back home by climbing a tree to her attic bedroom. But she falls and is injured, losing the use of her legs. Her once buoyant spirits sink and she seems ready to give up on life.

When Aunt Polly hears this, she is saddened, realizes that she loves her niece very much, and feels a strong sense of guilt over Pollyanna’s injuries. When the townspeople learn of Pollyanna’s accident, they gather *en masse* in Aunt Polly’s house with outpourings of love. Pollyanna’s spirits gradually return to their usual hopefulness and love of life.  And all ends well.

Perhaps you’ve heard of the term, “Pollyannaish” – meaning someone who is absurdly optimistic and good-hearted, assumes everything always works out fine, going far beyond a glass-half-full person and to one who has their head in the sand. It’s not meant as a compliment.

Is that what Jude is calling for here? No. Jude is not calling for a foolish forgetting of our trouble but a proper framing it with truth. He is calling not for a closing of our eyes to what is there but to seeing it more truly, more fully, more clearly than before. And how? By looking to God, seeing what He is doing and what He is due. For from the outset, the Christian life is a dangerous journey. To move forward, we can and must look to God and so take heart.

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