

Presented Blameless

Jude 17-25

**First Presbyterian Church
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As we take up this beautiful passage from Jude, we will be talking about the theme of *Christian assurance*. If we are honest, there are some questions that worry every Christian from time to time. For example, can I know I will reach heaven without falling away into sin and unbelief? Can I be sure that God will truly accept me into his presence? Will God really complete the work he has undertaken in me? I mean, is it really true when people say “Once saved, always saved”? Don’t I have to do *something*?

Let’s look closely at this wonderful doxology which closes Jude’s letter.

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,
To the only God, our savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord,
Be glory, majesty, dominion and authority,
Before all time, now and forevermore. Amen.

Isn’t that beautiful? My summer challenge to you is to learn this doxology, these two verses by repeating them in your prayers morning and night for the month of June. Get it off the page and into your heart. It will change your worship, change your heart, and change your behavior. 49 words. You can say it easily in less than 20 seconds. That means you can learn it by saying it aloud for two minutes per day. You can say it in the car, in the shower, on the elliptical, or in your bed. You can make up a tune for it and sing it. Then of course ponder its meaning as you say it. Meditate on its truth. Share it with others. Let it shape your prayers. Then let me know what happens. I really don’t know any better way to increase intimacy with God than to praise him through speaking back to him the words of Scripture.

But let’s dig a bit deeper into what this doxology declares. It actually gives us God’s goal for our lives. The Triune God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit has undertaken a great work in your life. He is determined to see it through in a

way that includes your participation and results in your joy. Here's the purpose of God for each one of us: *to present you blameless before the presence of his glory*. Yes, it takes your whole life to work this through, but God has undertaken to present you before his throne as blameless.

God's glory is magnificent. Bright. The very fire of holiness. The splendor of his beauty. The dazzling radiance of his person. Before his glory, everything else is dull. We know how this works. In the bright lights of the dentist's office with those incredibly clear mirrors, my teeth always look stained, especially compared to the gleaming pearly whites my dentist and his assistant are flashing at me. Hmm, maybe I do need to get some work done. Light shows up what is tarnished or blemished. That's why a friend of mine used a particular strategy when she was having people over. If she ran out of time to adequately clean her house, she would turn off the lamps and light a lot of candles. Everything looks good in candlelight because the blemishes and the dirt are not visible. But the holiness of God's presence will be brighter than any sunlight we have seen. Everything will be exposed. All will be revealed. Nothing can be hidden.

Standing in the presence of God sounds terrifying to me. When the books are opened and all the deeds are noted, I shudder to hear some things I have done read aloud. And then when the thoughts, the true, raw, unfiltered thoughts inside me get exposed, it will be like having the lid taken off an overflowing sewer. How can I possibly stand before God and not get incinerated by his glory?

But Jude tells me that God himself has undertaken to present me faultless before the presence of his glory with great joy. I will stand before the throne of God where all the true truth is known and told and he will say, "Blameless! Pure. Entirely acceptable. Enter into my glory my beloved." Now that would be cause for great rejoicing. For dancing and leaping and shouting thanks and praise. But how can this possibly be?

The answer is that I will be included in the blameless life of the God-man Jesus. I will be judged as one united to the righteous Jesus Christ. I will be evaluated through his life to which I am everlastingly joined.

It's important to get this as accurately as we can. For there is a popular way of talking about Christians at judgment that I actually find very *unhelpful*. People say, "When God looks at you, he doesn't see you, he sees Jesus. So seeing Jesus he loves his Son and therefore you get accepted because God doesn't actually see you." I know what they're trying to say. I get credited with the record of Jesus'

perfect life and love. That's great. But there are three things that bug me about this picture. The first is that it's like a great deception. If God saw me for me, he would condemn me. But as long as Jesus blocks the Father's view of me, I'm fine. Well, I don't think any creature anywhere pulls one over the eyes of God. He knows me. He sees me for who I am. There are just too many Scripture passages about a true reckoning to believe that somehow we just keep some kind of mist before God's eyes. Next, this view of Jesus' standing in front of me doesn't actually change me. I'm still the sinner. Still the filthy one. And that's not where I want to stay. I want to be made right from the inside out. I want to be authentically a friend and son, a servant and brother of Christ. Third, this view makes the Father and the Son different in their attitude toward me. The Father is angry and if he saw me, he would condemn me, but the Son, like a good big brother, covers me. That makes God somehow against God.

I think it's a lot more helpful to understand salvation in a Trinitarian way. We've talked about this before but I think it's super important to keep it in mind constantly. This is the idea from a guy named Irenaeus way back in the 2nd century. Irenaeus declared that the Father loves us, his wayward children, so much that he undertook a great mission to save us. The Father saved us by reaching his two "hands" into the world. One hand is the eternal Son, Jesus, God come to us in the flesh. The Father reached his hand into the world by sending his Son to us as the man Jesus. He was the new Adam. The beginning of a new race of human beings. Jesus lived the life of perfect love and faithfulness to his Father and his fellow humans. He took our sins upon himself on the cross and he broke the power of death in his resurrection. This "hand" of the Father created a new man. He achieved the salvation of the human race.

But such salvation is not automatic. We have to get in on it. So the Father sent his second "hand" into the world. His Holy Spirit comes into us and creates faith in Jesus. He makes our dead souls alive. He makes us new creatures. He joins us to Jesus the new Adam. So all three persons of the Triune God love us and want to save us. The Father sends the Son to save us. He sends the Spirit to join us to the saving Son. You notice that all this turns out to be about not me, but about God. The work of saving us is the Triune God's work first to last. He creates the means of salvation and then gets us in on it.

His goal is to present us before his throne blameless with great rejoicing. We can put it another way by saying that God in Christ gives us two things: a new record and a new heart. In terms of a legal judgment, the Father allows the record of Jesus to be substituted for mine. My account of selfish deeds and evil intent

gets replaced with Christ's record of continual perfect love and obedience. Now an external change of record may save me from condemnation but it doesn't lead me into the joy of an everlasting intimacy with the Father. For that I need not only a new record, but a new heart. I need my heart of stone to be replaced with a living, responsive heart for God. I need to be changed into someone who really wants to love God. I need to be saved from the pool of myself into the freedom of loving God from the heart.

Now Irenaeus did not make this up. Paul puts it this way, "When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. Now because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba, Father!" (Gal. 4). The Father sent forth his Son and his Spirit to give us a new record and a new heart. The Son took upon himself the penalty of breaking God's holy law. He gives us his own record of being the only man to keep the law. But the point of the new record is to adopt us as his sons in the one Son Jesus. The new record makes it legally possible for us to be adopted into God's family. But then he sends his Spirit to give us a new heart, and to make us his sons and daughters in truth. We become "blood" by being joined to Christ.

So how do I know God will finish the work of salvation in me and not let me fall back into sin and lostness? Because his own Spirit is within me. He does not overlook anything but he forgives everything and then begins the transformation process of my innermost being. Because he has organically joined me to himself. His Spirit is crying out through me. He is molding me and changing me so I can live fully the joy of the new status he has already given me: a son in Christ the Son.

The purpose of human life is not to achieve some kind of designer paradise. Our faith does not lead us to imagine a paradise of Islam where every man gets a harem full of virgins, nor a Mormon paradise where people get given their own planets. Both these ideas assume that the goal of life is a personally designed, self-centered pleasure in which God gives these things to the faithful. In this way, paradise is about getting stuff. But these heavens do not involve an ongoing intimacy with God himself. The Christian idea is that we get taken into an everlasting relationship. Christ lives in me. And I live in Christ. We participate in the very life and purposes of God. We never become independent free agents. We become more ourselves by growing deeper in love and offering and worship and giving. We live deeper into Christ and so discover true life there, in him.

For us as Christians, this means growing into the status and place in Christ we have already been given. Let's think about the parable of the prodigal son for a moment. The younger son squandered his inheritance following every impulse toward self-fulfillment and pleasure. He enacted his freedom to try to create his own paradise, convinced it would be better than life in his father's house. Of course he ran out of money just as a dire economic turn down hit the country. The once proud young man ended up slopping pigs with hardly enough to eat. Finally, his ego broke and he set out for home, planning to appeal to his Father's mercy in hopes of being taken back as a servant. We know how the wonderful story goes. The Father saw the ragged boy in the distance and ran to embrace him. The Father didn't even let the boy get out his apology. He called for the finest robe and a gold ring. He called for a feast to be held because, he said, "This my son was dead and is alive, was lost but has come home." The son got restored to his position as a son while he was still filthy, destitute and absolutely unworthy. He got a new record and a new status.

But what about his heart? How did the story go from there? Imagine the ending if the son had said, "Whew. I have my place back. Now I can start living it up again. Now I can live for myself. My habits have to be reined in a little bit, but I can still have lots of fun again and charge it all to Dad." Would that have been right? Of course not. The story wants to go on with the Son now living as a thankful, joyful, hardworking, obedient son taking his place in the glory of his Father's house. He has given up his selfish heart and entered not just a position, but the relationship of being the loving Father's beloved Son.

The Father has sent his Son to remake us. The Spirit has joined us to the Son so that we can partake of that great salvation, that new humanity. He gives us a new record and a new heart. He clothes us in the life of his Son and says, "Now the rest of your days I want you to learn to fill out these clothes. I want you to learn how to wear the robes of righteousness I have given you as if they really fit you. I am working to bring you to the place where your record and your heart match up, where your thoughts match the reality of your position, where the love you show matches up with the love you have been given. I'm working in you to bring you to participate in living as what I have made you to be: one whose life is remade by Christ and in Christ.

What does our participation look like? Well, earlier in our passage, Jude urged us to keep ourselves in the love of God. God keeps us by his love. We also keep ourselves in his love. It's sort of like saying to a loved one, "Keep safe as you drive back." Now we're not saying that the loved one has power to keep away

all accidents and harm. No, we pray that's God's power will keep them. But we urge them to participate. Do all you can to stay safe even as we trust God to keep you safe. God alone can keep you joined to Christ. But do all you can to stay aware and participating in this love. It's not about doing as little as possible and still getting saved in the end. It's about doing all you can to participate in the joy of being taken into an everlasting relationship of love with the Father through the saving work of the Son given to us by the joining work of the Holy Spirit.

This will happen. If you have received Christ in faith, his Spirit is within you. He has undertaken a work that cannot be denied. He will work out this salvation in you. He overlooks nothing, but he changes everything. *Ultimately, God's holy heart inside you will outbeat your sinful heart.* For you will be presented in Christ Jesus, without fault, blameless before his presence with great exalting joy.

When we get this, we cannot help but join Jude in his praise: to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time, and now and forever.

Such praise ushers us straight to the heart of reality. Before all time, God is love, God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Right now, God is, God is the sovereign savior who adopts us into his life, and forever more he will rule and reign amidst the joyful praises of his redeemed people.

How sure is your salvation? As sure as God himself. For it is his work, and if you have place your trust in Christ Jesus, you are his, forever.