Jude 1:17-25 (Walter Thomas Prideaux Wolston) 61373

Handfuls of Purpose, Faith's Encouragment in Evil Days (1:17-25)

(Jude 17-25)

It is quite clear the Apostle Jude writes for and contemplates the last state of things: what comes under the Lord's eye, and what the saints have to meet. He is showing the resources are the same even to the very end, when such a state of things arrives as is depicted in the earlier verses of the epistle. This we see thoroughly fulfilled in the history, and present condition of the church. But the Spirit of God gives us a word of cheer, to carry us on at this time, when things are outwardly and inwardly so depressing. In Peter's second epistle the Lord tells us what would be the corruption inside, whereas Jude unfolds the apostasy, that is, departure from first estate.

Jude addresses the faithful, however, and says, "But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost; keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." Four sweet words: "Building," "paying," "keeping," "looking." "Building" — take care you do not pull down. What the Spirit prescribes here is building; this is beautiful, because Jude is describing decay, and dissolution, as the fruit of the corruption all around.

Faith is peculiarly sweet to the eye of the Lord when all is going to ruins. What is the warrant for saints meeting like this. "Building yourselves up."

It is the end here, and there is a resource which is competent for the state of things, and enough to keep the saints joyful. Joy in the Holy Spirit is the expected, and suited state of the saints always. Is it not to be the same now? Surely. As the history of God's people darkens, God ever raises a light; the deeper the darkness, the brighter the light. This principle is sweetly illustrated in the Old Testament, and I turn to three scriptures which show that the greater the ruin, the brighter the light, where faith was operative.

First, 2 Chronicles 30. Things were bad enough in Hezekiah's day, with doors shut, and lamps put out, but he addresses all the people of God, and they came together and kept the passover on the fourteenth day of the second month, taking advantage of a privilege God allowed (see Num. 9:13). "Great gladness" prevailed, so they determined to have other seven days, and we read " they kept other seven days with gladness" (30:23). Hezekiah got simply before the Lord, and as a direct and natural consequence, "there was great joy in Jerusalem; for since the time of Solomon, the son of David, king of Israel, there was not the like in Jerusalem" (vs. 26).

They were very palmy days in Solomon's reign, doubtless, but these were even better than they. You find, too, that when all were thoroughly happy before the Lord, they began to be occupied with the Lord's interests. The people brought in the tithe of all things "abundantly," and the priests and Levites were "encouraged" (31:4-5). When they began to give, the Lord began to bless. As the joy in the Lord rises, the interest in and care for His things break out, and " heaps, heaps" (vss. 6, 12) meet the eye of the gladdened king. The Lord has given us a brightening up many a time, but, alas I how soon we sink down. So was it also in Judah's history.

Secondly. Things got very low indeed till Josiah's time. Then there was another revival. Evil was judged (2 Chron. 34:3,7). Then "Hilkiah the priest found a book of the law of the Lord," and "Shaphan read it before the king" (vss. 14,18). The Word of God produced repentance and humbling, and thereafter "Josiah kept a passover unto the Lord in Jerusalem" (chap. 35:1). And the record is given, "And there was no passover like to that kept in Israel from the days of Samuel the prophet, neither did all the kings of Israel keep such a passover as Josiah kept" (vs. 18). It was the most remarkable passover since the kingdom had been established. Not even Solomon's could approach it. What an encouragement for faith!

Thirdly. But, alas! enjoyed blessing will not keep the soul unless the eye be single; so deeper failure follows; the people go away again from God, and then into captivity. God's grace, however, never gives up His own, and, through mercy, there is partial recovery in Ezra's time. A remarkable revival occurs, and many return from Babylon to God's earthly center, Jerusalem. This is but a type of what has happened in our days, in which the Lord has worked blessedly by His Spirit, revived interest in His Word, and gathered back His saints to divine ground. Nehemiah, following Ezra, begins to build his wall.

That was separation. Ezra built the temple, Nehemiah the wall, and many true helpers had he. Nearly all were in the work, sisters and all. Some built two bits, notably the Tekoites (Neh. 3:5,27), though of them it is said, "but their nobles put not their necks to the work of their Lord" (vs. 5). Verbum sap. But the Lord notices every mark of devotedness, evidenced by repairing the wall, whether it be "Shallum and his daughters" (vs. 12), or Baruch, who "earnestly repaired" (vs. 20), or the priests "every one over against his house" (vs. 28), or Meshullam "over against his chamber" (vs. 30), for I suppose he was but a lodger.

Again does the Word of the Lord become precious, and heeded (chap. 8:1-8), and what good cheer it brought verses 9, to indicate, as "this day is holy to the Lord" twice fell on their ears, and "the joy of the Lord is your strength" was the trumpet call of the Spirit. "The joy of the Lord is your strength." How beautiful! If our hearts are delighting in Christ there is always strength and power, and understanding too, so the next thing is, they kept the feast of tabernacles. They anticipated the millennium; in fact, there was more apprehension of the mind of the Lord at this moment than there had ever been in their previous history — for "all the congregation of them that were come again out of the captivity made booths, and sat under the booths; for since the days of Joshua, the son of Nun, unto that day, had not the children of Israel done so. And there was very great gladness" (vs. 17). Never in the brightest day of kingly power did such a thing happen. I just show this principle in the history of God's people, that if there be faith, and a desire to follow His Word, the darker the day, the brighter will be the blessing, if there be only obedience; and the further into the ruin you trace them, the bolder does faith become in its action.

In Jude, who speaks of days of church ruin and failure, we are encouraged to expect great things, if only faith be in exercise. “Ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith.” This evidently is the revelation of God — Christianity as such — on which we are to build. The trowel is ever to be in the hand; “building up,” not pulling down, is our business. The Christian is not an “Iconoclast” — a destroyer of idols — but a builder, an unfolder, and living expositor of the truth.

One brother was speaking this morning of the Holy Spirit as the Testifier of Jesus, and here the Spirit of God is the abiding spring of power, realized by our having none, and, therefore, in dependence, we are to be found “praying in the Holy Ghost.” Joy in the Spirit, is the result of our yielding ourselves unreservedly to the care and guidance of this abiding Comforter of our heart. We shall thus only be kept to the end, walking in “the communion of the Holy Ghost” and “the comfort of the Spirit.” We were exhorted to love this morning, but how can it be maintained? Here we get it: “Keep yourselves in the love of God.” Yourselves the objects of love; born of God, you cannot help loving. If kept in the enjoyment of the Lord’s love, it flows out, you cannot help it, there is no effort. No apple tree tries to grow apples. Do not try to be anything; you keep yourself in the love of God, and you will be like the Son of God; you cannot help it. The atmosphere we live in will tell upon us, just as the ointment on Aaron’s head went down to the skirts of his garments and diffused an odor wherever he went (see Psa. 133). If we get near to the Lord we shall carry away some of the savor of His presence. We always become like the thing we are occupied with.

“Looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Not the Lord’s coming exactly, but the effect of it. It is connected with our being taken out of this scene, and into our home — heaven. We know we are welcome there — that it is our home: the Spirit even now conducts our hearts there; the more you go, the more you get the sense of the welcome there.

Christ is there, and Paul was always pressing thither by the pathway of resurrection from among the dead. It was his goal. When you wake up in His likeness you will say, “Bless the Lord, His mercy endureth forever.” The deepest desire of the heart will be gratified when we reach the spot the Lord is carrying us to. Do you mean it is not a mercy? It is the greatest mercy the Lord can bestow upon us. We have to serve here, and He is to be manifested in us. But if every saint here were caught up this afternoon before four o’clock, each would draw a deep breath and say, “Thank God, that is the greatest mercy I have ever known; I am out of the world forever, I am with the Lord, and like Him, and shall never wander from, or be unlike Him again.” The Lord, in His grace, keep us, and encourage our hearts to go on “looking.”

How beautifully the epistle closes with a doxology of triumph: “Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.” Is not that thought lovely? “With exceeding joy.” That is not ours, but the joy on Christ’s part, when He presents to Himself that Church He has loved, and cherished so faithfully these eighteen hundred years. It will be the day of the gladness of His heart.

The Lord enable us to go on “building” (do not drop the trowel!), “keeping”... “praying in the Holy Ghost,” and then “looking.” That fills up the whole life of the saint, and the next thing is, we find ourselves gathered home in the cloudless perfection of His own presence.

Well may we sing-

Lord, we can see, by faith in Thee,

A prospect bright, unfailing;

Where God shalt shine, in light divine,

In glory never fading.

A home above, of peace and love,

Close to Thy holy person;

Thy saints shall there see glory fair,

And shine as Thy reflection.

O how we thirst the chains to burst,

That weigh our spirits downward;

And there to flow, in love’s full glow,

With hearts like Thine surrounded.

No more as here, ‘mid snares, to fear

A thought or wish unholy;

No more to pain the Lamb once slain,

But live to love Thee wholly!

No more to view Thy chosen few

In selfish strife divided;

But drink in peace the living grace

That gave them hearts united!

Lord, haste that day of cloudless ray,-

That prospect bright, unfailing;

Where God shall shine in light divine,

In glory never fading.

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