

Jude - Uncompromising Yet Merciful

by Mariano Di Gangi

The sermon emphasizes the importance of being merciful, yet uncompromising, in our dealings with others, and the need for wisdom to apply the law of God and the gospel of God's redeeming grace in our interactions with them.

Duration: 29:43

Scripture: Matthew 5:22, John 1:33

Topics: "Mercy"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of being merciful and compassionate towards those who doubt their faith. He references the story of Lot's rescue from divine judgment, highlighting the role of Abraham's intercession in saving him. The preacher encourages believers to show compassion, offer prayers, and speak words of encouragement to help others avoid God's judgment. He also emphasizes the need to have a holy fear of God and to hate sin, even the smallest traces of it. The sermon draws from the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount and the book of Jude in the Bible.

Transcript

During these summer Sunday mornings, we have been taking a fresh look at the little but powerful letter of Jude, the brother and servant of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have seen how he refers his letter to those who have heard the call of God, who are loved by God the Father, who are preserved by the power of Jesus Christ, how he has sought on their behalf mercy, peace, and love in abundance. We have noted how that he had an original intention of producing a thorough treatise on the whole range of the doctrine of salvation, but put aside the treatise in favor of a pointed telegram to alert the Christian community to a dreadful danger of deviation from biblical morality and doctrine, and how he urged them to be defenders of the faith without being defensive in the pejorative sense of the word, to contend earnestly for the faith without becoming contentious and cantankerous in the process.

We have noted how that he has encouraged Christians to build themselves up on the solid basis of their most holy faith, to pray with the encouragement of the Holy Spirit, to keep themselves in constant remembrance of the love of God, and to look forward for the revelation of Jesus Christ, who will give them the resurrection of the body as well as the perfection of their spirit. And today we come to the text found in verses 22 and 23. Jude says, Be merciful to those who doubt.

Snatch others from the fire and save them. To others show mercy mixed with fear, hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh. The question arises, to whom were these words spoken? For whom are the words of the servant of Christ meant? Well, you might say, obviously, it's addressed to those in the Christian ministry, to the clergy, to those who have been solemnly ordained to the ministry of the word and sacraments.

Someone has defined the word of the ministry in terms that have now become proverbial, namely, to comfort the afflicted as well as afflict the comfortable. There are enough ministers present here today on holidays to form a minor presbytery, and I'm sure that each of you could give you details of what the job description involves. Planning, studying, preaching, visiting, resolving conflict even among the saints, praying by people's bedside, praying with them over the phone, referring matters to one committee or an individual or another, corresponding, participating in the work of the presbytery, the synod, and the general assembly, participating in interfaith ventures that are consistent with the basic goals of the church.

And you say, these words surely must be part of the minister's job description. Right on, but incomplete. Ah, you say, I see what you're getting at.

This is not only something addressed to those in the ministry, but to the elders of the church, since we in a presbyterian system are governed by presbyters or elders who are overseers of the flock of God, which he purchased with his own blood. The pastoral care of the congregation is not the exclusive responsibility of the ordained ministry, but is a shared responsibility by the elders of the church who are ordained by the laying on of hands, but called and commissioned by the spirit of the Lord Jesus to share in the oversight of the flock of God. Right on again, but still incomplete.

To whom are these words addressed? Go back to the beginning of the letter. Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James, to those who have been called, who are loved by God the Father, who are kept by the power of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is something that goes far beyond the ordained ministry.

This is something that goes beyond the eldership of the church. This is something that is addressed to everyone who has heard the call of God, to everyone who knows the love of God, to everyone who is held in the hollow of the nail-pierced hand of Christ. In other words, the responsibilities of which Jude speaks in the words of our text apply to every Christian.

We must all be concerned with comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable. The responsibility is ours to deal with people in a way that is appropriate to their need and to God's standards. Recall how our Lord dealt with the apostle Peter.

Over and over again, our Lord varied his approach to do what was appropriate at the particular time. When Peter, given an insight from heaven, realized that Jesus of Nazareth was not a mere carpenter, but the Son of the living God, the Messiah whom God had promised to send from the days of the Old Testament, Jesus commended him and told him that he was blessed because he had a flash of insight given to him by the Heavenly Father, and he had responded by confessing it openly. But the Christ who commends Peter at that point in his career soon criticizes him for savoring not the things that belong to God, but the things that belong to the enemy of God and the enemy of God's plan by seeking to deter Jesus from the way of service and suffering and sacrifice for the redemption of sinners like ourselves.

And after Peter is painfully aware of having denied the Master, after Peter has gone through days and nights of agony wondering if he can ever be forgiven of the sin of denial, Jesus takes him aside, asks him

about whether or not he can really count on him as his friend, asks him, Do you really love me? And Peter opens up to Jesus. You know everything. You know that I love you.

And the Christ who on one occasion commended him, the Christ who on another occasion criticized him, on this occasion comforts him, consoles him, and restores him to office and commits to him the care of his sheep and the tending of his lambs. The response of Jesus to Peter was appropriate at every point. And the way in which you and I deal with various people ought to be appropriate at every point.

Listen again with this as a background. Knowing to whom the servant of the Lord speaks, let us now ask ourselves, what is it that he is telling each of us to do? Be merciful to those who doubt. Snatch others from the fire and save them.

To others show mercy mixed with fear, hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh. Be merciful to those who doubt. In the context, Jude has told us to build ourselves up on our most holy faith, to pray in the Holy Spirit, to remain in the awareness of the love of God.

And now he tells us that that is good, but it's not all. We must be concerned with the plight and the need of others. And he refers to those who doubt, not those who raise intellectual objections to the Christian faith, to lay down a smokescreen, to hide their unwillingness to make a moral commitment and have an openness to the Lordship of Christ, who would rearrange and cleanse what is gone amiss within their lives.

No, we're dealing here with people who have genuine doubts, with people who are hesitant, with people who have not yet made a commitment, with people who need to be convinced. People who are confused, people who have prejudices concerning Christianity, people who labor under misapprehensions, people who have been infected and affected by cults. They are interested in Christianity, but have never made a commitment.

They are doubtful. They are hesitant. And with these, we must deal mercifully and we must convince them.

How do we do this? By clarifying the confusion, by clearing away the prejudice, by speaking the truth in love, by speaking of our faith in a way that is intelligent and intelligible. The Apostle Peter, who once failed to speak up for his Lord, later on reflected on his failure and counseled others as to what they should do. And he said that we ought to be ready to give to everyone who asks us an answer concerning the hope that we cherish in our hearts, and we ought to do it with meekness and with reverence.

Mercifully to convince those who doubt, mercifully to persuade those who are undecided, mercifully to nudge them without doing violence to their personality, but gently to nudge them in the direction of Jesus Christ, in whom alone is found certainty, because he is God's Amen. To convince the doubting and to do it with the wisdom that comes from above. The goal, we see, is not to win an argument with people who doubt, although there must be argumentation in the setting forth of our case in a way that is reasonable.

The important thing is not to prove that they are wrong and we are right. The important thing is not to give the right answer but with the wrong attitude of an arrogant, repellent self-righteousness. The important thing is that the hesitant should choose Christ, that the undecided might move in his direction.

It is not an argument that we seek to win. It is men and women, the casting down of the strongholds of Satan, so that Christ might captivate the minds and loyalties and wills of men and women everywhere. This must be our desire, and if that is the case, then we will deal with those who doubt mercifully,

compassionately, with sensitivity.

Again, he says, snatch others from the fire and save them. In the Old Testament, when God revealed himself, we find over and over again the accompaniment of smoke and flame, Moses at the burning bush, the people of Israel in the wilderness journey led by the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. This was most appropriate for, as the author of the letter to the Hebrews tells us in the wind-up of the twelfth chapter of that epistle, that our God is a consuming fire.

And it is no accident that the term for fire is related to the word family from which we get the word purity and purifying and pure. A God of holiness manifests his presence and there is the symbol of flame, particularly with reference to the sin of man, which like moral garbage is burnt up by the searing flame of the holiness and the majesty of God. No wonder the author of Hebrew says that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God if we persist in our rebellion against him.

What someone might say, isn't this Old Testament doctrine? Isn't this a character of the God of love who is portrayed in the New Testament? What does the New Testament say? Listen to the preaching of that courageous man sent from God, John the Baptist, and he will speak not only of the forgiveness of God and the baptism of the Holy Spirit, but he will also speak of unquenchable fire that burns up the moral refuse of the world. And listen to Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, in the fifth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, as he refers to that fire which is the expression of the burning indignation of a holy God against all the unrighteousness of man. Snatch from the fire and save.

And that word is addressed not merely to a Jonathan Edwards who is used of God to spark a revival in colonial New England. That word is addressed not to someone who has shown effectiveness in mass evangelism. That word is addressed to every pastor, it's addressed to every elder, it's addressed to every Christian.

For those who persist in living a life of willful disobedience to the revealed will of God run the risk of his burning indignation. And these, with mercy, with compassion, we must seek to snatch from the fire and to save. In the Old Testament, we find the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, which God was determined to visit with judgment.

But Lot and several of the members of his family are spared, plucked as brands from the burning. The cities are destroyed, but Lot and some of the members of his family make it to safety. How did that happen? If we study the context of that episode in the early chapters of Genesis, we will notice that behind the deliverance of Lot, behind the snatching of Lot and his loved ones from the searing flame of divine judgment was the prayer, the intercession of a man of faith named Abraham.

By the words we speak, by the compassion that we show, by the intercessions that we offer, we can show compassion and we can show mercy and we can be used of God that others might be snatched from his burning indignation and the judgment they would otherwise deserve. As the ambassador for Christ puts it in 2 Corinthians 5, 11, Knowing the awesome character of the judgment of God, we persuade men and we seek to draw them back from the edge to safety, convince the doubting, rescue those endangered by the fire of divine judgment, and to others show mercy mixed with fear, hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh. One of the most beautiful melodies ever written to this untutored ear, at least, is the meditation from *Thais* by Massinet.

Once you hear it, it will haunt you for many times to come. That beautiful meditation comes from an opera that tells a rather sordid tale. A Cenobite monk, filled with passion for the conversion of those who are rebels against God, becomes fascinated with a prostitute by the name of Thais.

She ends up in a convent. He ends up in despair, for he cannot get her out of his mind, associated with sexual passions that have gone unbridled. We must be concerned to show mercy to others, and yet a mercy mixed with fear, hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh, lest we should ourselves become contaminated in the process.

Merciful and uncompromising at one and the same time. Jude speaks of clothing that is stained by corrupted flesh. Now that word flesh helps us to understand the phrase in which it occurs.

And the word flesh is used in the Bible in a variety of ways. On some occasions, it simply refers to meat, period. On other occasions, it refers to humanity.

The word that in the beginning was with God, the word that in the beginning was God, that word in the fullness of time became flesh. The Son of God, without ceasing to be God's equal, also became our brother. He became flesh.

He became man. And so we experienced hunger, and thirst, and joy, and sorrow, and bloodshed, and death. Flesh meaning our humanity.

Flesh is also used in scripture to describe not merely our humanity, but our frailty. Think of the passage in Isaiah 40. All flesh is as grass, and all the goodliness of man is as the flower of the field.

The grass withers, the flowers fade, and in contrast to the transiency of frail man, only the word of our God abides forever. But there are times when that word flesh does not mean meat, where it does not refer to humanity, where it goes beyond frailty, and it has to do with the fallibility and depravity of man. The fleshly mind, the mind that is unregenerate, the mind that has not been transformed by the renewing of the Holy Spirit, the mind that lives in rebellion against God, is considered in Romans 8 to be a fleshly mind, not dominated by the Spirit, but corrupted and corroded and dominated by the unruly desires that dominate and destroy.

And that's the sense in which Paul uses it in Galatians 5, where, before speaking of the wonderful fruit of the Spirit, he describes the catalogue of human corruption and goes to the very depths of human depravity in listing the works of the flesh. And these have to do as much with pride as they do with sexual sin. He speaks of corrupted flesh.

He speaks of the contamination that comes through undiscerning contact with those who are thus infected. We must be merciful, and yet we must hate even the clothing that is stained by corrupted flesh. You get alongside of someone.

You want to be of help to them. You have a sense of moral indignation. You have a merciful concern that they should turn to Jesus and live.

And then you begin to form an attachment. And then you begin to feel that their situation is different and rather exceptional. And then you begin to tolerate the moral aberration or the flagrant, blatant, doctrinal heresy that they have espoused.

And then you begin to compromise and to tone down your own convictions. And then, being vulnerable, you run the risk of yourself being contaminated because there's been a lack of discernment. How we need to experience the blessed tension of maintaining biblical standards of morality, biblical standards of doctrine, and yet being merciful toward those who have departed or have never come to those convictions at all.

To be merciful, to be outgoing, to be open, to get alongside of rather than standing over in some kind of self-righteous superiority, and yet to realize that there are some things in the Christian life that are absolutely non-negotiable. The faith once for all delivered to the saints and the biblical morality given in the Decalogue where God spake all these words saying, On this, there can be no bargaining. On this, there can be no retreat.

On this, there can be no compromise. And so we need wisdom, the wisdom that comes from God, to know when we should apply the law of God that shatters human pride and reduces people to repentance, and when to apply the gospel of God's redeeming grace which helps people pick up the pieces and make a fresh start, which helps people to see that all the sins of yesterday and the dilemmas of today can be overcome by the grace of him who makes all things new, when to apply the law of God that brings people to conviction of sin, and when to apply the gospel of God that brings wholeness and help as well as hope. This takes wisdom, and if any of us lack it, let us ask of God, who upbraids us not for our failure, but will generously bestow upon us his wisdom for our task.

There are two of our Lord's beatitudes that form the fitting conclusion to our study this morning. Jesus said, Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

Let us pray. Spirit of the living God, create and sustain within our hearts a godly zeal for what is true and what is good, and a depth of mercy and compassion, for those who are lost without God and therefore without hope. Grant that in the likeness of the Lord Jesus, we may weep for those who do not recognize the moment of opportunity, the day of God's visitation.

Grant, O Holy Spirit, that we might experience the passion of the God of Israel, who said, As I live, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that he turn from his evil way and live. Spirit of the living God, make us like the uncompromising yet merciful Christ in our dealings with those who need to be won to the Savior. In his name we pray.

Amen.

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