

PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS PART THREE
JUDE 1-2, 4-5, 20-21, 24-25

(NASB) "Jude, a bond-servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, To those who are the called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ: ² May mercy and peace and love be multiplied to you. ⁴ [C]ertain persons have crept in unnoticed, . . . , ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. ⁵ Now I desire to remind you, though you know all things once for all, that the Lord, after saving a people out of the land of Egypt, subsequently destroyed those who did not believe. ²⁰ But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, ²¹ keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life." ²⁴ Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, ²⁵ to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, *be* glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen."

INTRODUCTION

Our sermon theme today is *perseverance*; staying power; not giving up on achieving our dreams and goals no matter what setbacks or delays we must endure. Some demonstrate staying power by continuing to trust God to bring them the right marriage partner if their heart's been broken or their opportunities for a good marriage seem to have passed them by. A minister planned to conduct a wedding at the close of the Sunday morning service. But he got so caught up in worship and his sermon that he totally spaced the names of the couple who were to be wedded. Therefore, after the closing prayer, he asked, "Will those wanting to get married please come to the front?" Immediately, nine single ladies, three widows, four widowers, and six single men stepped to the front! Their dream of marital bliss had staying power.

Ali, born in Tehran, Iran's capital, to a family of nominal Muslims, is a better example of staying power. As a teenager, Ali tried to fill his heart's emptiness with drugs and sex. His despair increased. Sometimes Ali would cry out in his home, "God, I feel that even You have forgotten me, and there is no one caring about me. I really need to be saved, but I don't know how." He became a devout Muslim hoping to ease his aching soul, but faithful devotion to Muslim duties failed to bring him the peace and purpose he craved. He was taught Allah is such a remote ruler He can be contacted only if one of his prophets acts as mediator with Allah. Ali decided his best hope of finding salvation and having his prayers for a better life answered was to be blessed by the Mahdi. Muhammad, Islam's founder, prophesied several events would occur just before the Day of Judgment. One prophecy concerned the advent of one of Muhammad's descendants known as Al Mahdi (the guided one). This Mahdi would materialize at a time Muslims were being abused worldwide. He would fight the oppressors, unite Muslims, bring peace and justice to the world, rule all Arabs for 7 years, and lead a prayer in Mecca at which **Jesus**, the Promised Messiah, would be present.

Syed Muhammad (1443-1505) proclaimed himself the Mahdi who taught the inner meaning of the Quran (the holy book of Islam) and who would return to earth before the final judgment. After his death, a Muslim claimed Syed had visited him in a dream and commanded that a mosque (a Muslim worship site) be built on a particular spot where people might seek blessings from him. Over the years, this Mosque of Jamkaran has grown to great size, but it's so remote that it requires hours for anyone to reach it. People seeking the Mahdi are also told they must pay him homage on Tuesdays for up to 40 weeks, nearly 10 months, before the Mahdi might speak to them or bless them. Nevertheless, on any given Tuesday, 200,000 people can be found there, hoping against hope the Mahdi might get Allah to answer their prayers, heal them, or secure their eternal salvation. Ali spent almost a year's salary on cab fare to appear at this mosque on forty Tuesdays. When he discovered all his efforts to gain peace with God proved useless, he experienced even more desperate frustration and emptiness! Isn't it convicting to think of the lengths to which people will go, and the time and energy and even money they will invest, to gain what any Christian can freely receive from the LORD God by coming to Him in **Jesus'** Name?

A Christian cousin of Ali then encouraged him to go directly to **Jesus**, who is described in the Quran as a "prophet," to find the answers to his life's questions and heart's longings. Ali had always felt favorably toward **Jesus**, from what little he knew about Him, but only ethnic minorities, as Armenians, are allowed to be Christians in Iran, not Arabs. Ali needed time to adjust his thoughts about **Jesus**. But one day, Ali prayed these words while alone in his home, "God, I am just going to repent of all my sins, all the things I have done. **Jesus**, if You are really the Lord, if You are the Son of God, please come and set me free." Christ's Presence came to him so wondrously that day that Ali now testifies to all who will listen, "I had the feeling everything had changed and I could find real freedom."

Because Bibles cannot be printed legally in Iran, it took some time for Ali to find a New Testament in a used bookshop. Reading the New Testament solidified his faith in who **Jesus** is and what He'd done for him. It took even longer, 7 months, before a house church would accept Ali as a member. They wanted to be sure he was not a spy pretending to be a Christian to learn the names of Arab Christians and turn them over to the authorities. So many Christian leaders and church members have been killed in Iran over the past three decades that it would take an Iranian version of *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* (1563) to list them all. To Iranian Muslims who will listen, Ali tells them, "If there were peace in Islam, I would not have come to Christianity. When I was a Muslim, I had all these lustful thoughts, I had hatred, I was hypocritical and just trying to look good, but inside of me there were all of these horrible thoughts and feelings that I had. Now in **Jesus** I have a new heart." Every step Ali has taken to grow in his faith as a Christian, to worship with other believers, or to witness to Iranians about **Jesus**, has been fraught with danger. The Iranian Government declares all Arab citizens are born as Muslims. All converts to Christianity are declared to be without protection of the law so that anyone might kill them. At most they gather in groups of 20 in homes so as not to arouse undue suspicion from the authorities. Their singing must be muffled so neighbors won't report them for being Christians. Each time they encourage people to go directly to **Jesus** as the Son of God for personal and spiritual help, they risk arrest and abuse. But Ali prepares himself mentally and spiritually for persecution. Ali calls upon his Heavenly Father for staying power to remain faithful to the Lord, so he can experience the joys, blessings, and freedom from sin that are our privileges as Christians. He's confident, as we should be, God the Father will give him this staying power.

Iranians know **Jesus** warned us to "count the cost" of following Him, insisting we must be willing to value Him above everyone and everything else we hold dear (**Luke 14:25-33**, NKJV). But Ali believes his new life in Christ makes whatever persecution he suffers seem well worth it. He is also sustained by "the glorious future that is ahead of us" as Christians in God's Heavenly presence, surrounded by "many millions of sisters and brothers" who are already part of our forever loving family.

This is the third week we are taking a close look at the Christian doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints, better known as the eternal security of the believer. **Jude 5** provides a stark warning to all professed Christians today: Don't base our security of having our sins forgiven and of being guaranteed everlasting life in Heaven upon nothing more than false presumptions about God's grace [read **Jude 5**]. Most of the Israelites whom God delivered from slavery in Egypt, who experienced salvation and baptism with many similarities to our experience as Christians today, according to **I Corinthians 10:1-12**, later received a divorce from **Jesus Christ** due to their persistent unfaithfulness to Him, and due to their abuse of Christ's saving grace to indulge their sinful lusts. **Jude 4** condemns to judgment all who "pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality" (NIV).

II. SECURITY BASED UPON PERSEVERANCE

Perseverance of the Saints from God's viewpoint is that all who truly belong to **Jesus Christ** *will* persevere and *must* persevere in their faithful devotion to Him. In **Jude 1**, God the Father is described as the primary agent in preserving us as believers in our relationship with **Jesus** as our Savior: "To those who are the called, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ." "Kept" here means our Heavenly Father

assumes responsibility to see that we are "guarded," "watched over," and "preserved" as we encounter various trials, temptations, and onslaughts by Satan and his forces. Sometimes we don't draw the assurance from God's protecting hand upon us that we should. We may be like the little girl in bed. Something had frightened her that day, so that night she became unusually scared of the darkness in and around her room. She went to her parents' room and told her mother she was afraid. Her mom said, "It's OK, sweetheart. There's nothing to be afraid of; God is in there with you." The little girl went back to her room. As she climbed into bed she said, "God, if you're in here, don't You say a word. You'll scare me to death!"

Jude 21 balances the truth of God the Father assuming responsibility that we are "kept for Jesus Christ" (vs. 1) by affirming our responsibility to cooperate with our Heavenly Father's efforts to save us from the doom of sin's consequences and control: "keep yourselves in the love of God." The NIV translates vs. 21, "Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life." "Keep" is an imperative; a command. God's love for us is unconditional, but our ability to benefit from God's love is conditioned upon our obedience. **Hebrews 3:12-14** (NLT) warns us, "Be careful then, dear brothers and sisters. Make sure that your own hearts are not evil and unbelieving, turning you away from the living God. You must warn each other every day . . . so that none of you will be deceived by sin and hardened against God. For *if* we are faithful to the end, trusting God just as firmly as when we first believed, we will share in all that belongs to Christ." "If," in vs. 14, uses an intensive form of the usual Greek conjunction "if" to emphasize the outcome cannot be assumed unless the stated condition is fulfilled. You should not assume you are passively entitled to the privileges of Christ's family as a right unless you are actively seeking to become Christlike by "building yourselves up on your most holy faith" and "praying in the Holy Spirit" (praying persistently to be filled with the presence and power of God's Spirit).

Is being "faithful to the end" too much to ask if we find in **Jesus Christ** the forgiveness, new heart, and adoption into God's family we'd longed for all our lives, like the former Iranian Muslim Ali? Faithfulness to, "our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ," honors His investment of loving grace in us. We should not abuse such precious grace by excusing sinful actions that distress our Heavenly Father or our Savior. We can have every confidence that as long as we choose to keep our hand securely in His, we can be confident **Jesus** will bring us securely through life so that we enjoy the blessings of salvation for time and eternity!

CONCLUSION

American Gospel singer Ira Sankey (1840-1908), who composed *Under His Wings*, teamed with evangelist D. L. Moody for many years. While on a preaching tour of the British Isles in 1873-75, Sankey gave his 7-year-old son his first winter topcoat. The small boy appreciated his father's recognition that he was beginning to become a man who could one day stand on his own two feet against life's challenges. But he mistakenly believed this meant he should no longer rely upon his father's help. Thus, at first he refused his father's hand while walking through an icy patch. He kept his hands deep in the coat pockets until a bad tumble on the ice convinced him his father's help might still be needed. Somewhat humbled, he said, "I will take your hand." But, still seeking to prove his independence, he merely reached up and feebly took hold of his father's hand. He started to fall again, his grip gave way, and he tumbled again onto the ice. Now deeply humbled, the boy raised his hand to his father and said, "You may take it now." The boy realized he needed to do more than take his father's hand; he needed to fully give his hand to his father. Ira Sankey then placed his strong hand upon his son's and held him up safely until they were off the icy patch.

This is the assurance our Lord wants us gain from today's sermon. As long as we demonstrate the obedient trust of a child in our Heavenly Father by keeping our lives fully in His hands, He promises to keep such a firm hand of protection upon us that we will persevere securely in gaining and maintaining all the blessings of salvation. "Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy,²⁵ to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, *be* glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen."