

Difficult Passages in Jude¹

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There are certainly difficult passages in the short epistle of Jude. At the least, Verses 5–7 present one difficult section and then following that section, at least two other difficult passages: Michael the archangel dealing with Satan (9), and the quotation from the book of Enoch (14–15). These difficult passages might present a challenge for the people in your congregation. So how do we deal with these difficult passages? In answering this question, I would like to do three things. First, I would like to briefly touch on how we deal with difficult passages, as practically as possible. Second, I want to deal with verses 24–25 specifically, because that doxology casts a shadow over everything else in the book. Finally, we are going to come back to the difficult texts of Jude and walk through them.

Dealing with Difficult Texts

Have you ever preached a text and just said, “This text is hard?” What makes that text hard? What makes it a difficult text? First, most obviously, there is exegetical difficulty. In other words, in reading the text you just say, “This does not make sense. I just do not know what this means.” Sometimes a more modern translation helps. My dad once jokingly quipped that he would never preach anything except the King James Version because when he preaches another translation, he does not have anything else to explain! No matter what translation, some texts are difficult to understand.

Second, there might be theological difficulty. In reading verses 5–7, the conclusion could be drawn that people who were genuinely in the faith are now no longer believers. That is, they have fallen from grace. However, that interpretation is inconsistent with what the rest of the Scripture teaches about the nature of salvation. So an apparent theological difficulty exists.

The third type of difficult passage is not one that is difficult to understand, but a passage that are difficult to apply. Some texts are hard because they are difficult to understand. Some texts are hard because they are easy to understand, but hard to obey. Sometimes what we do not like about the Bible is

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that it is too clear. This is what I think might be the issue with verses 5–7. The point that Jude is trying to make, as we will discuss, is that God judges all apostasy. If in your preaching that truth is not made overtly and explicitly clear, you might preach a fabulous message, but the text will have been misrepresented. It is a hard thing to say that God will judge people who apparently fall away from the faith.

With passages like this in mind, how do you deal with difficult passages? Let me provide some encouragement. First, preach with confidence. Sometimes when I hear the wisdom of great preachers I leave discouraged rather than encouraged. I think that I could never do what they do. Perhaps I should enter a puppet ministry. Maybe you read the insights of these men and you see how masterfully they use the Greek New Testament, and you think that you do not have the time nor the resources to do what they do. Remember, you are a pastor, which means two things. First, for your congregation you are the authority on that text. You might want to defer your authority to another professor or pastor, but you cannot do that. It is not their responsibility to shepherd your sheep, that is your responsibility. You are the authority, so you must enter the pulpit and preach it with confidence.

The second is this: God knows how much time you have to steward. This means you are not going to have the time to work out the fourteen exegetical options as to why Jude quotes the book of Enoch. If you could do that, you would need to neglect other responsibilities you are called to steward. God provides pastors a certain amount of talent to steward. He has given us a certain amount of time which I hope will be used more efficiently. He has given us a certain amount of resources: exegetical tools, experiences, and education. It is different for everyone, but he has provided a measure of these things. We are accountable to use them, to exploit them, and, to the best of our ability, to preach effectively. God knows that we do not have seventy-five hours to prepare every sermon. We just do not. You do not have to get up and apologize because you are not someone else. You are exactly who God calls you to be in that moment, so preach with confidence.

Second, preach with humility. When we are addressing any topic, we preach with humility, but especially as we preach these difficult texts. Many great commentators who have convictions regarding Scripture (e.g., infallibility, inerrancy, etc.) disagree on these passages. I walk away from some texts that I just do not know. My hope is to demonstrate that our convictions on these texts are less important than our convictions of doctrines like the deity of Christ, the virgin birth, or the sufficiency of Scripture. So, we understand that some difficult text are not “first-tier” doctrines and still make the application of the text that the author is making. That is the important part whether all the exegetical nuances are discovered or not. So we preach with humility.

Third, use hedging language. This is foreign to many of us since every sermon we preach *is* an expression of the Word of God. Inasmuch as text-driven preaching is preaching the Word of God, that *is*

the Word of God to the people. In other words, we preach with a tremendous amount of authority. But on these difficult passages, I have walked away from my study, as in Jude, without certainty as to what that particular text means. This lack of certainty makes us question: How do we preach that? The answer is in hedging language. I say things like, “Think about it this way.” Or, “Perhaps what is going on here is . . .” Many in the audience may not catch it, but the listening person is saying, “Look, here is the way to apply that text even if I am not choosing one particular side on this particular interpretation.” Use hedging language on the difficult texts, but do not use it on clear subjects like the deity of Christ or the virgin birth since we are absolutely clear on those things. But where there is ambiguity in the text, we have freedom to use hedging language.

Fourth, provide one confident interpretation and move on. In other words, do the opposite of commentators. Commentaries present a variety of options and conclude with what they believe is the best option. That is good commentating, but bad preaching. You do not want to present a passage with, “There are nine ways of interpreting this, so we will begin a nine-part series.” However, with difficult texts there are some exceptions. If it is a very difficult text, or a significant exegetical issue, you may say, “There are a few different interpretations: these two do not really make sense, but this one makes more sense.” This is acceptable in a rare situation, but in these texts, especially in Jude, just provide one confident interpretation and move on.

Fifth, show your congregation why you are reaching that conclusion from the text. There is an art to this. In sermon preparation, you may have spent ten hours of work to produce two sentences with a measure of confidence. You may say, “This is why we are explaining the text this way, and this is what is in the Scriptures teaching us to do this. Watch this participle here. Watch this verb here.” Though it may have taken a lot of time and study to make that assertion, simply show your congregation your conclusion from the text and move on. In doing so, you provide them confidence over a sustained period of time to look to the text in the way it is shaped, its nuances, its verbs, and all of these type of things, to find answers.

Finally, do not miss the point of the text. As you get into these difficult passages, as we will see with verses 5–7 below, all of the exegetical options can be discussed but in doing so you may miss the point. Do not get distracted and do not get your people distracted, and therefore miss the point. Sometimes we get so excited about cracking that exegetical nut that when we finally crack it, we forget to feed our people the meat that is inside of it. Do not miss the point.

Verses 24–25: Jude’s Exegetical Key

Let us now consider Jude 24–25 together. Imagine that it is an August day in Texas which is somewhere between about 110–194 degrees Fahrenheit. As you are walking around in a local park, you

feel very cool. It feels like it is about 55 degrees with a cool breeze. And you are trying to figure out why it feels like this. As you come to the end of a winding trail (we are using our imagination here) and you come to a 120 foot Oak tree, it is just massive. You then realize that the entire time that you have been walking on the trail, you have been shaded by something you could not see. This is what is going on in Jude.

In approaching the end of the book in verses 24–25, we come to a singular doxology, one that may be singular in its beauty in the New Testament. It is an unbelievable doxology that shades everything that comes before it. Because of its shading of all of Jude, and particularly the difficult passages, let us walk through this doxology line-by-line, before looking at the difficult passages.

*Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling.*² The idea here is God’s ability, and not only his ability, but also his willful action. Jude is not saying that this is something that God is able to do and might do. He is saying that this is something that God is fixated on doing.

Let us consider the idea of stumbling presented here. It is the same as 2 Peter 1:10, “Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.” The same word for “stumble,” is utilized in both of these passages. The idea is not sinless perfection, rather it is all eschatological. In other words, God has the ability to keep us from being apostates. In light of everything else that he has just discussed leading up to verse 23, God has the ability to keep us from stumbling.

This raises an interesting question pertaining to verse 21. Jude uses the verb “keep” in one of two ways five times throughout Jude. Look at verse 21. He says, *Keep yourselves in the love of God.* So which is it? Are we keeping ourselves, or is God keeping us? The theological answer, backing away and looking at the whole of Scripture beyond Jude, is yes. God is keeping me, but God has given me the desire to keep myself in the love of God. That desire to keep myself in the love of God is not what is ultimately keeping me, but is evidence to myself, and those around me, that I am genuinely in Christ. Nothing is more encouraging than this. Let me state it more clearly: I will never apostatize. This is not a statement of brazen arrogance, for there is no confidence in my ability, rather, the confidence to be had is in God’s ability. Now to him who is able to keep you. God is able to keep me from stumbling. Again, this is not referring to sinless perfection; this is about ultimately keeping you from stumbling.

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling *and to present you blameless.* Now the word for “present” is a good translation, but another option is “to stand.” Jude is pressing the same metaphor. God is not only able to keep you from stumbling, but he also allows you to stand. If you are not falling now,

²Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from the English Standard Version.

you will be standing then. God is protecting us and is keeping us from stumbling, as he also one day will allow us to stand before him. This standing will be one in which we stand before him blameless.

Though again, the idea is not sinlessness here, there are two important ideas. One relates to 1 Peter 1:19, “but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.” This is the same idea that God presented his ultimate sacrifice—his Son—without blemish. In the same way, metaphorically, that the sacrificial animals presented in the Old Testament were offered without blemish or spot, so too we will be presented to God absolutely blameless. You may say, “Well, I am not sinless,” this is exactly the point. How does it give God glory to present sinless people sinless? That which gives God glory is to present me sinless. God takes sinful people and presents them as if they were sinless before him, which is an ability he is able to do. Second, it is the same in Ephesians 1:4, God “chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.”

This idea thus far has been interesting, but here it becomes phenomenal. Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless *before the presence of his glory³ with great joy*. Where do you read in the Old Testament of someone entering into the presence of God, face-to-face with great joy? Do you see that in Exodus 33, where God told Moses, Look, you can come before me, but if you see me face-to-face, you are going to die? Do you see that in Isaiah 6? No, Isaiah says, “Woe to me, for I am undone” (Isa 6:5, KJV). He thought he was dead because he was in the presence of God. God is so phenomenal that he has the ability—even in his glory—to not only welcome us into his presence, but also to welcome us with great joy. In the context of Jewish culture this joy is not just an individual joy, this is the eschatological joy they believed was coming to them on that day. We must understand the broader Jewish context for the Jewish people believed in the same way that as David was a ruler for them one day God was going to raise up a Messiah figure like David. This Davidic Messiah would come and bring the “royal beatdown” on all the enemies of the Jews and then conclude with one great eschatological feast. This is the sense, one day all sinners will be gathered around the throne of God, but we will be presented as blameless. This gathering will be an incredible joy because of what God has done for us. Let me summarize verses 24–25 in this way: Because of God’s ability, he will keep us from falling away from him, and in fact, he will cause people who are sinful to stand as though they were sinless with confident joy before the very glory of God.

After this verse Jude moves into full-on praise in verse 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.” The Jewish people believed in time in two ways: there is time and future time. But here in Jude the concept is even before that. It is as if he is saying, here is what we have now, what is going to be forever,

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but it has been even before that, that is, before all time. So God has all dominion, all authority, in all places. With this as a shadow, that we are kept in Christ, let us go back to the warnings, the difficult passages, that begin the book of Jude.

Interpreting the Difficult Passages in Light of Verses 24–25

Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. (Jude 3–4)

These people who “have crept in unnoticed” are not coming from the local chapter of GLAAD. They are not coming from Planned Parenthood, nor are they coming from the People United for the Separation of Church and State. They are coming from within. These are interlopers who are trying to derail the work of the church of God. When I was in ninth grade I had a Sunday school teacher who taught on the book of Jude, and he gave me a metaphor about verse 3, they have crept in unawares, that I have never forgotten. He said, “Imagine taking a brick and throwing it into the pond and it just absorbs there without a ripple.” This is the idea in verse 3. Though we may think we know who they are we probably do not for they have crept in unaware. We do not know who they are.

This is a common experience for pastors. Have you ever looked around in your church and seen that empty pew where so-and-so used to sit and who were so faithful? Now they are gone because there has been a theological or moral apostasy and they have fallen away. This is the heart-breaking part of ministry, and we never see it coming. This is the idea in Jude 3. They have crept in unaware.

With that as a backdrop, let us now examine these difficult passages. As stated above, there is one difficult passage in verses 5–7 that we will first consider and then we will look at two other difficult verses in 14–15 and 17–18. So, let us begin with the difficult section in verses 5–7.

Now I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it, that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt (5). A preliminary question raised from this passage: why does he say Jesus? We do not often think of Jesus being the one who leads the Israelites out of Egypt. Why does he say that? We do not know.

afterward destroyed those who did not believe. Therefore we can summarize that Jesus led them, gave them every opportunity to repent, every opportunity to turn, every opportunity to walk fully and confidently into the promised land, but, ultimately, when they did not, he destroyed them. As Jude is

calling Old Testament history to our minds, we need to ask, did the Israelites who rebelled against God somehow evade God's judgment? The answer is clear, they did not.

This reference to Israel's Exodus is Jude's first illustration, but he provides second illustration in verse 6. *And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day.* Now what does this mean? What is Jude referencing in mentioning angels who have fallen? Perhaps in that fall, there are some demons, or angels, who were not let loose; they were kept in chains. There is another opinion that you find quite often in the commentaries. That opinion is that Jude 6 is a reference to Genesis 6, where the Nephilim (sometimes referred as Sons of God) who actually came down and married with the daughters of men. Why do some commentators take that position? They take it for two reasons. First, there is a strong relationship between Jude and 1 Peter. First Peter 3:18 says, "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah." There seems to be a strong correlation between these two texts. The second reason is that between the writing of the Old Testament and New Testament, a strong tradition developed affirming that this was in fact the case. That is, there was actually, out of Genesis 6, those who came down to earth, who God later put down in chains, and these were kept in chains in total darkness. These are angels. For these two reasons, many hold to this opinion.

In considering these two options we rightly ask, which is correct? In thinking through these interpretations, however, it is difficult to arrive at the "right" answer. Further, I would not stake my life on any of these answers.

In preaching this text, the point to make is not that I have gone to a secret place where commentators have never been and I have somehow resolved this. The point I would try to make is that God judges apostasy. The job of a preacher is to deal with the text. Make a decision about the text and move on. However, whatever you do, do not miss the point. Israelites did not evade God's judgment. The angels did not evade God's judgment. Finally, Jude offers his third illustration. Just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire. Now even though we know better, there is something within us that wants to believe, or has a tendency to believe, that people who are living in sin are somehow getting away with it. The reality is that they are not. Romans 2:2-4 clearly speaks to this issue. "We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and

forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?" The kindness of God leads us to repentance.

In relation to this text let me ask, why do unbelievers who hate God, or in this case, Jude's context, apostates experience a new-born baby, fall in love, have sunrises and sunsets, a better truck than you have, a nice house, or a nice car? The answer is because God is trying to lead them to repentance. Every breath that they take is a mercy of God. It is God's way of saying, "I am giving you one more opportunity to repent." Oftentimes, however, people mistake God's graciousness for his impotence or ignorance. We must remember that God is aware of sin; he has the power to punish sin. The reason why he is not punishing sin now is because he is gracious.

Let us continue in Romans 2:5. But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are *storing up wrath* for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. Unbelievers every day go out and ignore God's mercy and live in sin, but God is not ignorant of their sin. They are actually banking a credit in God's account that one day, he will reconcile. If, on that day, they are not reconciled by the blood of Christ, they will be damned. This is what Paul is saying in Romans 2. No one is getting away with sin.

There is a story that I heard when I was a nineteen year old preacher from another preacher who I loved and respected. This preacher told the story about a French philosopher, Voltaire. Since hearing this story I have tried to verify it, but I cannot find any record that it is actually true. I still tell it. I just say, "perhaps it is apocryphal," or that "we just do not know," or "it has been said." This is where hedging language comes in. I still use the illustration, but I do not have a source for this. The story is that Voltaire would go into small towns in France, climb up on a soapbox, and hold out a stopwatch. He then would look up to the sky and say, "God, I am going to give you 60 seconds to kill me." Nothing would happen and he would say, "Okay God, I am going to give you 30 more seconds to kill me." As the stopwatch would count down to zero, he would look up at the people and say, "You silly people, there is no God." Some of us think that if this occurred at our church it would be an awful, scary thing, but all Voltaire did was prove that God is gracious. What is true (though it is interpreted differently but remains a matter of historical record) is that on his deathbed, Voltaire had visions of Hell. He knows now. Voltaire is a Conservative right now. He is a Fundamentalist at this point. He gets it. And wherever he is, he understands the truth now, although it is too late.

Looking back to Jude 5-7 we can see two things. If you are an apostate, it warns you. Be warned. No one gets away with it. God will judge you. For those who are not apostates, it has the opposite effect, it encourages us. You can find any number of Ivy-League educated hipsters that are far more interesting, compelling, or provocative than you are on Sunday morning. But just because they are more compelling, provocative, or have more degrees does not mean that they are right. They are wrong if they do not

believe in Christ and you are right. The point of the text is to have confidence. No one is going to get away with anything. Israel did not. The angels of God did not. Sodom and Gomorrah did not. The apostates are not going to get away with it either.

Moving forward, let us look at the other two difficult passages in Jude continuing in verse 8. Previously Jude provided three negative examples; here he gives a positive example. *Yet in like manner these people also, relying on their dreams, defile the flesh, reject authority⁴ and blaspheme the glorious ones.⁵*

But when the archangel Michael, contending with the devil, was disputing about the body of Moses, he did not presume to pronounce a blasphemous judgment, but said, "The Lord rebuke you." Now where is that in the Bible? It is not in there. Deuteronomy 34 is the story of the burial of Moses and only a few verses are provided there. But what Jude is claiming (we know is not in the original sources) we know is true because Jude is in the canon of Scripture. Thus, when Moses was buried Satan tried to manipulate Michael the archangel for the purpose of obtaining the body of Moses. Why? I have no idea.

Perhaps he was going to make an idol out of him and distract Israel. But we do not have any idea why he was trying to do this. In asking the question "why?" in this text we will go down a road that will miss the point. The point is in verse 10. *But these people contrasted to Michael blaspheme all that they do not understand, and they are destroyed by all that they, like unreasoning animals, understand instinctively.* They are destroyed by what they understand instinctively. They are just ignoring it, as in Romans 2.

Jude's point is very simple. When Michael the archangel was in a confrontation with the devil⁶ he did not say "On my authority," or "I rebuke you," rather he called upon the authority of God. If the devil had to be rebuked on someone else's authority besides an angel, what position does that put humans in? Can we be flippant about spiritual authorities? The point is not to be like the apostate teachers who take spiritual things so lightly. Do not be like Israel. Do not be like the fallen angels. Do not be like Sodom and Gomorrah. Instead, be like Michael who understood this authority.

There may be another direct reference in Scripture that says, "the Lord rebuke you," and that is found in Zechariah 3:1–2. "Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD." Who is the angel of the Lord? It could be a Christophany, an Old Testament appearance of Christ or a pre-incarnate picture of Christ. "Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him." Here we see the angel of the Lord, possibly

⁴This is not his main point, but that is what is going on with Israel, and that is what is going on with the angels, and that is what is going on with Sodom and Gomorrah. They each had an opportunity to repent. They did not. They defied authority, and here is an illustration of that.

⁵That is a reference to angels. Why? We do not know. But they are guilty of blaspheming angels.

⁶Michael being an archangel is only referenced here and one other place in Scripture

the pre-incarnate vision of Christ, standing beside Satan. “And the LORD said to Satan, “The LORD rebuke you, O Satan!”” So the Son calls on the Father’s power to rebuke Satan.

These apostates in Jude had grown so arrogant and confident that they were flippant about their ability to have dominion in spiritual darkness. But it is as if Jude says, “Look, Michael the archangel did not even do that. He called on the name of the Lord.” Then he quotes Michael the archangel and gives an allusion to Zechariah 3, where Jesus himself did not use his own authority, but rebukes Satan in the name of the Father. Jude is painting a picture of how believers should be, and how deeply the apostates have fallen away from God.

Now let us look at the last difficult passage found in 14–15. *It was also about these that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, “Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his holy ones, to execute judgment on all and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness that they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against him.”* Now the question your people should be asking if they are thinking is, “What in the world is the book of Enoch? Why in the world is he quoting Enoch? Where is that in the Scripture?” The answer is simple, it is not in the Scripture, but it raises another question. Why is Jude quoting a source as an authority that is not actually in the Bible? As we answer this let us be reminded that we do this all of the time. In fact, C. S. Lewis once said, “The book of Enoch is awesome.” C. S. Lewis did not really say that, I just made it up. My point is that when I have a great point and I want to sound intellectual, I quote C. S. Lewis. Or, if you want to sound “preachery,” just quote Spurgeon. Is Lewis or Spurgeon Scripture? Absolutely not. But if someone affirms something I want to say, then I reach outside of Scripture and grab it as a source. I use it as an authority to comment on something. That is certainly not equating it with Scripture. He does not say, “It is written,” in the Greek, using the word γραφή. He is not claiming that this is Scripture. He is simply saying that this is an affirmation of something else that someone has said.

How then do we as preachers deal with the quotation from Enoch? You could have a Sunday night session on the book of Enoch and buy everyone a copy if you want to do that. I would say that I would deal with this in one or two sentences. “There is a book that existed in their tradition. Jude does not acknowledge it as Scripture, but he is referencing this book to affirm what Scripture is already teaching.” In two or three sentences, hopefully, you close their minds to what they do not need to be thinking about (i.e., extra-biblical literature), and direct their minds to what they should be thinking about, which is that God is going to come and judge. The idea of judgment remains in this passage as it references the angels who are blasphemed. In verse 14 we see this. “Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his holy ones.” The angels that are the ones that they blaspheme are the ones that are going to come at judgment. This angelic participation in judgment is consistent in Scripture: in passages like Matthew 13 and

Revelation 14. Jesus is drawing a great harvest and the angels are the reapers. They will be participating in that great judgment day.

Though we have covered quite a bit in these difficult passages, we glossed one looming question that will be in our people's minds as we deal with verses 5–7: did the people Jude is addressing lose their salvation? Any appropriate approach to preaching Jude will cause a congregation to think about that question. They should be thinking about it because verses 5–7 present a strong, stinging rebuke. We discussed using hedging language for things that we do not understand, but we cannot hedge the point that God will judge. This is absolutely and overtly clear. An appropriate approach to preaching Jude will make this overtly clear. Someone can theologically or morally reject God, walk away from the faith, and have no confidence that they are truly in Christ. If this text is preached wholly and clearly your people should be asking, "Is he saying that people can lose their salvation?" In other words, an appropriate approach to Jude will paint the bleak picture that God really does judge us so that we can find in Jude a message of hope and encouragement. The reason unbelievers do not appreciate grace is because they do not understand Law. Judgment is very real, but that judgment is not very sweet, compelling, nor even interesting unless God judges. This is why the question, "Have you been saved?" is such an odd question to the unbeliever. For unbelievers ask, "Saved from what?" We need to preface that question with, "the wrath of God that is coming."

Are these people who are able to lose their salvation? No, these people were never believers to begin with. We just did not know it because they did not come in the front door wearing a badge that reads, "Unbeliever here to mess up your fellowship." They crept in unaware. They slid in without even making a ripple in the pond. They were never believers to begin with and have ultimately demonstrated that they never were in Christ. Looking at verses 17–18 we should see that this is expected. "But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. They said to you, 'in the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions.'" We knew this was coming.

There are so many ways to illustrate this point, but think about the parable of the soils in Matthew 13. In that parable there are four types of soils that respond differently to the gospel. The first one has the gospel, but outright rejects it. It is like seed on pavement; it just lays there. The last one is a soil that actually receives the gospel. It lasts and it bears fruit. In comparing the first and last soils we clearly see that someone who rejects the gospel is not a Christian. But then you have these two middle soils. The first three soils all reject the gospel but the differences between the second two and the first is that for a moment of time, they give the appearance that they are genuinely in Christ. In whatever moment you pass by those plants, you would think that they are fantastic plants having no idea that while this plant is growing up, it is not going down. There is no sustaining root system underneath. This is impossible to

notice because the root system is subterranean. You cannot see below the surface. Half of the soils Jesus describes are fake but appear real.

Maybe the more pressing illustration is the parable of the wheat and the tares. The farmer has a field and he sows wheat in the field. He comes to take his crop and his farmhands say that everywhere they look there are tares. He sowed good seed but an enemy has sown tares among the wheat. The bad thing is that these tares look just like wheat. But he could not allow his farmhands to pull up the tares because they could not distinguish the wheat from the tare. The farmer commands to let them grow together until harvest time, which was when they would ultimately separate the good from the bad. In the application of this parable Jesus makes no bones about this connection. He says that one day everyone is going to be harvested. The good are going to go into his barn. Others are going to be burned up in eternal fire where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. This is a direct reference to Revelation 14, where Jesus will separate the good from the bad. The field in the parable represents the world, which is important to know when asking, Where are the tares sown? The tares are sown everywhere there is wheat—in government, in schools, in politics, and in the churches. This means that the devil sows tares in the churches. This is exactly one application. Every religious leader proclaimed that their faith would take off, but Jesus says that there is going to be fake among the real. Among the disciples, there was a Judas. There are going to be tares among the wheat. There are going to be goats among the sheep. There is going to be fake among the real. Nothing could be clearer from this in Scripture.

If you go back to the parable of the soil, it is only in exposure to the seed that we know what type of soil they are. This is why you have to preach the Word of God. You do not know what type of soil it is until it actually is exposed to the seed. This is why Paul says “guard the sacred trust,” and “protect the treasure” (1 Tim 6:20). He is saying this in the context of interlopers who have crept in unawares and are trying to take out the faith. One of the results of preaching the Word of God unashamedly is that eventually the false teachers and apostates in our churches are going to expose themselves. Though this may cause trouble, the alternative is to preach around the Word of God and let them in bed. In doing so they become the youth worker your 13 year old goes to for spiritual counseling. They are the tare that you did not have the spiritual guts to call out and they are now counseling your child. They do well in the youth, are likeable, and then become a deacon. Now they are in leadership. What in the world?

But, as my dad used to say, “Every problem in the church can be laid at the feet of the compromising pulpit.” I believe that is the truth. If we do not explain Scripture clearly, we will never be able to out the interlopers. Or to say it in the context of Jude, the apostates are never able to know that they are, in fact, apostate.

In conclusion, as we walk through that wood and on that hot day, and we feel the cool of the shade of verses 24–25. Verses 1–23 are hot verses. You can feel the fire of God at the heels of those who are

going to be judged. But praise God that will not be believers because we are over shaded by the incredible doxology of verses 24–25. Not my ability, but God’s ability to take those that are sinful and present them sinless before him. He is that great and worthy of praise.