

Snatching Some from the Fire

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Because we have been shown tremendously undeserved mercy, we should not hesitate to show that mercy to others. At the same time, we need to be careful, because we have come to understand what we have been saved *from*, and because of it we recognize the dangers of the flesh and the sin that results from it.

Jude tells us to show mercy to some who doubt. Rather than become angry with them or desire to attack them for what we may see as faithlessness, we should approach them in gentleness, understanding the situation. Because of our humanity and our fallen nature, it is at times difficult to continue to believe. People experience doubts of all kinds where God is concerned. Even Job, as righteous as he was, experienced numerous doubts about God and his relationship with Him.

It is not unusual for people to doubt, especially in difficult times: when we lose a loved one, when things simply don't go as we think they should, or when life simply hands us lemons. It is especially normal for new Christians to doubt God, simply because they often lack the wisdom and discernment to understand.

Folks who have been Christians for years can also succumb to periods of doubt, in spite of how mightily God may have worked in their life beforehand. John the Baptist is a good example of this. He paved the way, as the Scriptures foretold he would, for Jesus. Yet when it was time for John to be taken out of this world, he wondered if Jesus really *was* the Messiah, or should they expect another? Jesus responded *not* with anger or frustration, but with love and kindness (cf. Matthew 11:4-6). There are some who make a big deal because of John's obvious doubting here, but the man was *human*. He was facing death. He had a moment of unnerving doubt. Jesus responded to those who would report back to John in prison with these words: "*Go and report to John what you hear and see: the BLIND RECEIVE SIGHT and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM. And blessed is he who does not take offense at Me.*"

Jesus could have come down on John, but He understood that John's doubts were human, and though not what Jesus wanted, His answer helped John *re-establish* faith in Jesus. Jesus responded to John in a very loving, understanding way. Because of it, He did more to help John than He would have if He had gotten angry with him, don't you think? In essence, Jesus showed mercy on John because of John's human frailties. Don't forget, John was about to be executed, and that may have also created some fear or trepidation. How many of us can look death straight in the eyes, even though we know what awaits us on the other side? Death is a sobering concept.

Aside from using mercy, Jude tells us that depending upon the circumstances we may need to address a situation as if we are approaching a fire. We need to be extremely careful so that we are not burned in the process of pulling someone else out of the fire.

Of course, the imagery here is trying to extricate someone from a house or car fire. As you approach the situation, the heat from the fire can push you back. It's daunting. However, it is possible to get in, get the person, and get out without getting singed or burned, depending upon the nature of the fire and how severe it is at the start.

Normally, saving someone from a fire requires extremely quick reflexes. It doesn't take long for a home to become completely engulfed in flames, and once that happens, forget about trying to rescue anyone. In the early stages of a fire, it is possible – with a good deal of speed – to get into the burning home and remove the victim before they burn to death or die of smoke inhalation.

There will be some situations we will encounter where people are on their deathbeds. This will be the last opportunity they have to respond to the Lord. Will they? It may have nothing to do with what we say, but everything to do with the way we pray.

I am always amazed whenever I think of the thief on the cross. I stand in awe of that section of Scripture because there we see both thieves who were simply hurling abuse at Jesus one moment, and the next moment, one of those very thieves was now standing in Jesus' corner, defending Him against the ridicule and cowardice of the other thief. We can read about this narrative in Luke 23.

My question is, what happened that caused the one thief to turn from his stupidity, blindness, and selfishness to all of a sudden want to *defend* Jesus? What changed? Well, obviously, the man's eyes were opened and he saw the truth. From that new vantage point, he was now able to see that he had been wrong.

After this realization takes hold, he turns to Jesus with an apology of sorts. Certainly, he had been humbled, and because of that he was able to approach Jesus with this new attitude. It was this new attitude that prompted him to ask if Jesus would simply *remember* him when He (Jesus) came into His Kingdom. Jesus responded that he (the thief) would be with Him in paradise that very day.

So what happened? I can only guess. It is likely that both thieves witnessed Jesus' scourging, and they also likely witnessed and heard the abuse He received as He walked toward the hill on which He would be crucified. They would have also seen that Jesus did not retaliate in any way to those who scourged, scorned, and mocked Him.

Once at the crucifixion site, they saw more harassment hurled His way, and they saw how the soldiers treated Him and His belongings. They also noticed that a sign was placed

above His head just as they (the thieves) had signs above theirs. These signs were essentially placed to inform the public what the crime was for which the victim was being executed.

The sign over Jesus' head indicated that He was a King. In fact, it did *not* say that Jesus *said* He was the King of the Jews. It said simply "*The King of the Jews.*" Was it this sign, along with Jesus' demeanor, that allowed the eyes of the one thief to open wide? It could be. We don't know for sure. All we know is that this thief received salvation on his deathbed, mere hours before he passed from this life to the next. I think this is what Jude means here when he speaks of *snatching them out of the fire.*

But Jude also provides one more scenario when he says that we should save some out of fear, hating even the clothing polluted by fleshly living. By the way, when Jude refers to our "saving" anyone, he of course is *not* saying that *we* do the saving. At the most, we only introduce a person to the One who actually does the saving. It is only in that sense that we save anyone.

In this last scenario, we need to exercise great caution because if we are not careful, we ourselves could be dragged down into those areas that are born of the flesh and have trapped the person we are attempting to help. We need to be diligent to ensure that this does not happen to us.

That's our show for today. Join us next time for a brand new series. Until then, may the Lord open your eyes to show you how blessed you are in Him!