

"A HANDBOOK FOR SURVIVAL"

"Rescue the Perishing"

Scripture Reading – II Peter, 3:9-15a, 17-18

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.

Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless, and at peace with him. Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation.

Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever! Amen.

'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.'

Jude, 1:22-23, NIV

This series, 'A HANDBOOK FOR SURVIVAL', is based on THE LETTER OF JUDE.

To protect from harm, to guard from attack, to repulse enemies – for centuries rugged defenders have built walls, launched missiles, and waged wars, expending materiel and human resources in the battle to save nations and cities. With total commitment and courageous abandon, individuals have fought for their families. It is a rule of life that we fight for survival, defending with all our strength what is most precious to us, from every real or imagined attack.

There are many people who live in opposition to God and his followers.

They twist God's truth, seeking to deceive and destroy the unwary, but God's truth must go forth, carried, and defended by those who have committed their lives to God's Son. It is an important task, an awesome responsibility, and a profound privilege to have this commission.

This was Jude's message to Christians everywhere.

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The New Testament\Jude\A Handbook For Survival\08 Rescue The Perishing

Opposition would come and godless teachers would arise, but Christians should 'CONTEND FOR THE FAITH' by rejecting all falsehood and immorality, remembering God's mighty acts of rescue and punishment, and the warnings of the apostles. His readers are encouraged to build up their own faith through prayer, keeping close to Christ, helping others, and hating sin. Finally, Jude concludes with a glorious benediction of praise to God.

There are many false teachers waiting to destroy your Christ-centred life, the credibility of God's Word, and the unity of the Body of Christ. THE LETTER OF JUDE calls Christians to stand firm in their faith and defend God's truth at all costs, because nothing else is more valuable...

"RESCUE THE PERISHING"

Jude wrote firmly and forthrightly about the subject of apostasy.

Although he wrote with a firm hand, he also wrote with a heavy heart. He knew that many people are paving a one-way street of spiritual error that dead-ends in the fires of hell, the fire of God's judgment. He encouraged his readers to avoid the dangers of false teaching, and to light a candle in order to bring spiritual light into this dangerous darkness.

The Louvre, housing 35,000 pieces of art, is one of the most famous museums in Europe. Among its greatest treasures are two of the most famous sculptures of the ancient world: 'THE VICTORY OF SAMOTHRACE' and 'THE VENUS DE MILO', along with Leonardo da Vinci's famous portrait, MONA LISA'. The Louvre also displays works by Raphael, Rubens, and Rembrandt. A Paris newspaper once ran a contest offering a prize to the person who contributed the best answer to the question: 'If a fire broke out in the Louvre, and you could save only one painting, which one would it be?' Tristan Bernard, a French novelist, won the prize with his brutally honest submission: 'I would save the one nearest the exit'.

This is not quite the type of courage I want to speak about today.

We need to have and display a much greater courage in rescuing the lost from the eternal fires of God's wrath. The Church is far too often filled with modern day Nero's – who prefer to fiddle, not while Rome burns, but while a world without Christ heads directly towards these unquenchable flames. The world today needs us to condemn falsehood, and to confront those who are vulnerable, reaching out and rescuing them from the very flames of God's wrath.

Even to the worst of heretics, to those far gone into error, and to those whose beliefs are most dangerous, the Christian has a binding duty not to destroy, but to save. His aim must be, not to banish them from the Christian Church, but to win them back into Christian fellowship.

John Seeley: 'WHEN THE POWER OF RECLAIMING THE LOST DIES OUT OF THE CHURCH, IT CEASES TO BE THE CHURCH'.

'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.'

Jude, 1:22-23, NIV

Different translators give differing translations of these two verses.

The reason is that there is much doubt as to what the true Greek text is. That being the case, we will attempt to cover as many ideas as possible, whilst we seek to follow the best understanding of Jude's instructions. Jude divides those who cause trouble in, and to, the Church into three classes, to each of whom a different approach is necessary.

Jude calls us to rescue the doubting, the burning, and the dangerous...

1. RESCUE THE DOUBTING

BE MERCIFUL TO THOSE WHO DOUBT

Jude is writing here about saints and sinners who are just not sure...

CARE FOR CONFUSED SAINTS

These are the people who are wavering and plagued with doubts.

They are probably the 'UNSTABLE SOULS' Peter wrote about (see **II Peter, 2:14**). These people are converted, but they are not firmly grounded in the Christian faith.

Our responsibility is to 'BE MERCIFUL TO' them.

We should seek to lead confused saints away from hurtful and harmful influences. By necessity, this ministry demands a great deal of love and patience. We must keep in mind that immature believers are like little children who think they already know right from wrong. If you say "NO" to them, they can rebel and become even more stubborn!

One of the best ways to draw confused believers away from false teaching is to magnify all that they have in Christ, and to share his love for them in practical ways. If you can make their salvation so wonderful, and the Word of God so exciting, then they will lose interest in all falsehood. It is not enough merely to refute false doctrines; there must be a warmth of love that assures the young believer that we care for them.

False teachers prey especially on disgruntled church members.

Therefore, it is important that each person exhibits special love and concern to every new Christian. Every young Christian needs a more mature Believer to teach him or her how to stand up for Jesus and to walk the Christian pathway. We must also remember to minister to mature members of the church, lest someone strays because of neglect. Every mature believer needs a fellow established Christian to encourage him to again stand up for Jesus and continue to walk closer with God.

CARE FOR CONFUSED SINNERS

Many people are not Christians, and they are not against the Christian faith.

They are just not sure. Such unstable souls wander in a spiritual no man's land, vulnerable to the attacks and opinions of both sides. Such people listen to anyone and everyone, to anything and everything. They are doubtful and confused.

The fourth largest Christian Church in America is 'THE NONE CHURCH'.

When people were asked to declare their religious preference, more in the USA answered 'NONE' than Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Mormon and even Jew and Muslim. I am sure that there would be a similar response here in the United Kingdom. 'THE NONE CHURCH' will have a much greater attendance than The Salvation Army and most other Christian denominations – if not all! It reveals how great the opportunities are for our witness.

Jude instructs us to 'BE MERCIFUL TO' or 'TO HAVE COMPASSION' on such people.

The word 'COMPASSION' is a compound word made up of the prefix 'COM', which means 'WITH' and 'PASSION', which means 'TO SUFFER OR FEEL'. Therefore, when we suffer with someone, or feel with someone, we are displaying compassion. Compassion is an inward sympathy which results in an outward act of service.

'Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in the synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field".'

Matthew, 9:35-38, NIV

The Church today has three great problems concerning the lost.

The vast majority of Christians are not winning the lost, but a greater problem is the vast number of people who are not witnessing to the lost; they are not even trying to win people for Christ. But perhaps the greatest concern is caused by Christians who no longer weep over the lost. Do such believers no longer care about the lost?

Raymond Dunn turned sixteen on 28 July 1990. On his birthday, he did not eat cake, to which he is allergic, but ate the only food his body can process – a bland brown manufactured baby formula. Five years earlier, Gerber Products stopped manufacturing this specific meat based product until they heard that if Raymond ate anything else, he would die. Volunteers at the factory worked during their own time and without pay in order to produce a supply of food that only one person in the world requires for life. After donating production time and the raw materials, Geber Products presented Raymond Dunn with a birthday present of a further two year supply of his life giving food.

Why would a company and its employees go to such trouble for a market of one?

The cynics of this world would claim that they did it to get some good press coverage for their company. Perhaps this is true; perhaps it is because they cared enough for one man to go to such trouble. How much more should we care enough to get spiritual food to the multitudes who are starving without the life-giving Gospel of Jesus Christ?

'OF SOME HAVE COMPASSION. MAKING A DIFFERENCE' (KJV)

A little boy lived by the sea, and every day he would go to the shore to pick up starfish and put them back into the ocean. One day, after a hurricane had washed up thousands of

starfish, the little boy went out and started picking them up one at a time, placing them carefully back into the water. An elderly man, who was watching him, said to the boy, "Why do you waste your time picking these starfish up? There are so many of them that you cannot possibly make a difference". The little boy picked up another starfish, boked at the old man and smiled, "To this one I can make a difference". Then he picked up another one, and said, "To this one I can make a difference".

2. RESCUE THE BURNING

SNATCH OTHERS FROM THE FIRE AND SAVE THEM

These are people who have left the fellowship and are now a part of the apostate group. They are believers who have turned off the highway of truth onto the slip road of error. These former believers have fallen into the theological snare of falsehood. They are stubborn, fallen Christians who are not entrenched sinners, but endangered sinners, who need to be 'SNATCHED FROM THE FIRE'.

One cold winter night in Epworth, the church bell began to ring. People ran into the dark night and discovered that a house was on fire. Samuel and Susanna had escaped the flames along with six of their children, but no one could find little Johnny. Realising the worst, Samuel headed back towards the inferno but the crowd that had gathered held him back from certain death. As they stood helplessly watching the house burn, a face appeared in an upstairs window. Little Johnny had awakened and come to the window but he could not escape. Two men came out from the crowd to help and one climbed up on the shoulders of the other. The flames were so intense that their clothes began to smoke, but the little boy was pulled through the high window by the arms of that human ladder. The little boy was John Wesley, who later founded the Methodist Church. Looking back on the incident, he wrote in his journal: "That night I was plucked as a brand from the burning".

"I overthrew some of you as I overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. You were like a burning stick snatched from the fire, yet you have not returned to me", declares the LORD.'

Amos, 4:11, NIV

Jude is referring to eternal fire, not to earthly fire.

There is a remarked difference between earthly fire and eternal fire. Earthly fire consumes whilst it burns, but eternal fire burns whilst it does not consume. Jude is referring to a fire that burns continually. He is writing about the fires of hell.

Up until the early 1800's the indigenous people of Hawaii, who claimed to be descended from the goddess Pele, performed human sacrifices to the goddess of the volcano. They would erect altars beside the lava streams that flowed from Mount Kilauea. They believed Pele was a sorceress that had to be continuously appeased by human sacrifices; otherwise she would make life on the islands miserable for them. They would take the warriors they had captured

in battle up to the summit and engage in an elaborate ceremony with drums and dancing before throwing their hapless victims into the molten lava of the volcano.

Scientists have calculated that it would take seven-tenths of a second to die.

The last smell you would be aware of would be the putrefying stench of your own burning flesh. The last thing to be destroyed by the fire would be the temporal lobe – the area of the brain that stores memory. You would see visions of your mother and father, your spouse, your children – you will never be able to see them, or laugh, or play with them again. You will never be able to hold their hand, or kiss them, or feel their loving touch. On the stroke of the eighth-tenth of a second you would be launched into your eternal destination.

But what if the fires of hell were your eternal destination and experience?

William Booth, the Founder of The Salvation Army said, *"If I had my way, I would not put my officer cadets through college at all. Instead, I would put each of them in hell for five minutes, because that would be the best training they could receive".*

Jude instructs us to 'SNATCH OTHERS FROM THE FIRE AND SAVE THEM'.

The Bible records that angels took Lot by the hand and pulled him to safety out of wicked Sodom (see **Genesis, 19:16**). Sometimes that must be done in order to rescue ignorant and unstable Believers from the clutches of false teachers. They have actually started out on the wrong way and have to be stopped, as it were, forcibly, and even against their will. It is all very well to say that we must leave a man his freedom and that he has a right to do what he likes. All these things are in one sense true, but there are times when a man must be even forcibly saved from himself.

3. RESCUE THE DANGEROUS

TO OTHERS SHOW MERCY, MIXED WITH FEAR – HATING EVEN THE CLOTHING STAINED BY CORRUPTED FLESH

We must beware of those who have set up their tent in apostasy.

Nonetheless, we still show mercy and rescue those who are caught up in wrong behaviour as well as wrong belief. This mercy must be mixed with fear lest we ourselves become corrupted.

The phrase 'MIXED WITH FEAR' literally means 'MIXED WITH CAUTION'.

In trying to help those who have erred, we must be careful not to be trapped ourselves! Many a would-be rescuer has been drowned himself. When an unstable Believer has been captured by false doctrine, we must be very careful as we try to help him, for Satan can use him to defile us. In trying to save him, we too may be stained or burned!

The principle is: 'STRONG BELIEVERS ARE NEVER BEYOND SATANIC INFLUENCE'.

Even while serving the Lord and seeking to rescue one of his children, we can become defiled by those we want to help. The Old Testament Jews had to be very careful to avoid ceremonial defilement, and this included even their clothing (for example, see **Leviticus, 13:47, 14:47,**

15:17). If a 'clean' person touched an 'unclean' garment, then he was defiled. The picture Jude paints is of clothing (underwear) that has been soiled by human excrement. It is not a pretty picture – but then only Satan attempts to paint a pretty picture out of sin!

We certainly must love God's people, but we must also hate their sin.

Wherever there is sin, Satan has a foothold and can go to work. Defilement spreads rapidly and secretly, and it must be dealt with drastically. If a Jewish priest thought that a garment was infected with leprosy, he had the garment burned.

Not every Christian is equipped to deal with false teachers or with those they have influenced and captured. It takes a good knowledge of the Word of God, a faithful walk with the Lord, an understanding of Satan's devices, and certainly the fullness of the Holy Spirit of God. It also demands spiritual discernment. It is much easier to instruct new Christians and keep them away from false teachers than it is to snatch established Christians out of the fire.

A soul-winner needs intensity but he must never compromise his integrity.

We have all heard the phrase: 'WHEN IN ROME, DO AS THE ROMANS DO'. Well, if you were in Rome and you did as the Romans did, then the Romans would have won you, as opposed to you winning them for Christ! The Christian should not allow himself into a compromising position on the pretext of trying to bear witness for Jesus. The greatest danger a lifeguard faces when trying to rescue a drowning man is not the wind, the waves, or the water. The greatest danger is that the drowning man will pull the would be rescuer down with him.

'You do not have to dress up like a clown to witness to a circus' (Vance Havner).

We do not have to drink the world's booze, speak the world's language, go to the world's bars, or dance to the world's beat, in order to get worldly people to listen to us. We should never be isolated from lost people. Jesus was a 'FRIEND OF SINNERS', and we should have sinners for friends. Although we are not to be isolated from sinners, we must remain insulated from them.

Peter Apples was a soldier during the American Civil War. Whilst he was not a particularly bright or good soldier, he did know that when his superior officer said, "charge", he was supposed to go. He was the kind of man who never came back until he had made contact with the enemy. During one charge, his company came under severe enemy fire that the call to retreat was made. Apples never heard the order and just kept going – straight across no man's land and down into an enemy ditch. The opposing army was so busy firing that they did not see him, so Apples took hold of the first soldier and subdued him with his rifle butt. Dragging him out of the ditch, Apples started towards his own lines. The enemy soldiers could not get a clear shot at him because he was shielded by the unconscious soldier. Finally he got to his own lines and dropped the captured soldier at the foot of his superior officer. The officer took a deep breath, looked at him, and asked, "Apples, where on earth did you get him?" Peter Apples replied, "I got him from over there in that ditch, and there are plenty more of them. All of you could have had one if you really wanted one".

There are plenty of lost people all over Malton and Norton on Derwent.

They are next door, down the street, in the shopping areas, in the supermarkets, in offices and factories, and everyone can have one – if they show that they really want one!

'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.'

Jude, 1:22-23, NIV

'Watch over others as well as yourselves; and give them such help as their various needs require. For instance, (a) Some that are wavering in judgment, staggered by others' or by their own evil reasoning, endeavour more deeply to convince of the truth as it is in Jesus. (b) Some snatch with a swift and strong hand out of the fire of sin and temptation. (c) On others show compassion, in a milder and gentler way; though still with a jealous fear, lest you yourselves be infected with the disease you endeavour to cure. See therefore that, while ye love the sinners, ye retain the utmost abhorrence of their sins, and of any, the least degree of or approach to them.'

John Wesley

*Rescue the perishing, care for the dying, snatch them in pity from sin and the grave;
Weep o'er the erring one, lift up the fallen, tell them of Jesus, the mighty to save.*

Rescue the perishing, care for the dying, Jesus is merciful, Jesus will save.

Fanny Crosby, SASB 691:1

A sobbing little girl stood near a small church from which she had been turned away because it "was too crowded". "I can't go to Sunday School", she sobbed to the minister as he walked by. Seeing her shabby, unkempt appearance, the minister guessed the reason and, taking her by the hand, took her inside and found a place for her in the Sunday School class. The child was so touched that she went to bed that night thinking of the children who have no place to worship Jesus.

Some two years later, this child lay dead in one of the poor tenement buildings and the parents called for the kind-hearted minister, who had befriended their daughter, to handle the final arrangements. As her poor little body was being moved, a worn and crumpled purse was found which seemed to have been rummaged from some dump. Inside was found 57 cents and a note scribbled in childish handwriting which read, 'This is to help build the little church bigger so more children can go to Sunday school'. For two years she had saved for this offering of love.

When the minister tearfully read that note, he knew instantly what he would do. Carrying this note and the cracked, red purse to the pulpit, he told the story of her unselfish love and devotion. He challenged his congregation to get busy and raise enough money for a larger building. A newspaper heard of the story and published it. It was read by a realtor who offered them a parcel of land worth many thousands of dollars for just 57 cents. Church members made large donations. Contributions came from far and wide, and within five years the little girl's gift had increased to \$250,000, a huge sum of money near the turn of the century. Her unselfish love had paid large dividends.

**SHE MADE A DIFFERENCE WITH JUST 57 CENTS!
HOW ARE YOU MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN THE WORLD TODAY?**