

The P in Tulip

Jude 1:1

I still remember those first weeks when I was a college student and walked into a new church where the subject of a Sunday school class was the Westminster Confession of Faith. That was all very new and strange to me. And I remember hearing for the very first time those five points of doctrine that have become known in history as the five points of Calvinism, those doctrines whose first initials spell out the word “TULIP”. At the time, it seemed all so unimportant to me, especially when compared to the more practical matters of living out the life to which God had called me as a Christian.

It didn’t take me too long to begin to understand that importance. It didn’t take me too long to see how profitable, and practical, the careful exposition and explanation of biblical doctrine should be. So as I studied those five points, TULIP, I realized how much more I needed to learn from God’s word. That began a process that ultimately directed my steps to seminary, and to the work which God has had for me now throughout the many years of my adult life.

So this afternoon I come to you to emphasize the P in TULIP, the fifth of those so-called five points of Calvinism, and I want to linger on that point for this whole sermon, which is why I skipped over it last week when we studied verse 1 of Jude. P stands for perseverance of the saints. And sometimes, wisely I believe, it is often identified as preservation of the saints.

The doctrine is simply this, quoting from the Westminster Confession chapter 17: “They, whom God hath accepted in his Beloved, effectually called, and sanctified by his Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but

shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved.”

For some people, this is identified with the simpler phrase, “Once saved, always saved.” That is a phrase I agree with as long as long as it is not abused to defend the ungodliness and sinfulness of your life by claiming that once you make an outward confession of faith you can live however you want, that you are saved no matter how you lived. But if you mean by “once saved, always saved” that if God has indeed changed your heart, if he has forgiven you your sin, if he has put his holy spirit in you and made you a new creation, and if he is in the process of actually transforming your life, then this doctrine would express the biblical truth that you “shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved.”

I will defend all of that in just a minute, but if you remember from last week, this sermon really is the third sub-point of my third main point last week. The introduction to Jude begins with the obvious introduction of Jude himself, a bondservant of Jesus Christ and the brother of James. James and Jude were both brothers of Jesus, sons of Mary and Joseph.

Jude then identifies his recipients, “those who are called, beloved in God the Father, and preserved [or kept] in Jesus Christ.” It is that third phrase that we will study today. Last week we focused on the first two, that as Christians, we are called and beloved. We are the called, the elect, chosen by God and effectually called by his power unto salvation. And that happens because God has loved us in Christ, since before the foundation of the world. We are the beloved!

And we are those who are “kept for Jesus Christ.” The King James and New King James versions give us a bit more insight

into the Greek word, translating it as “preserved.” So Christians, believers, are preserved by God. The P in TULIP refers, then, to,

I. THE PROMISE OF PRESERVATION.

God’s promise. Jude identifies his readers as those who have received a great promise, a great blessing, from God. They are “kept for Jesus Christ.” They are “preserved in Jesus Christ.”

Let me give you a very simple and non-technical definition of this doctrine. I will use Paul’s words that we find in,

Phil. 1:6 “...being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.”

That verse has always helped me define the doctrine of preservation correctly, because the meaning is so obvious. “He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion.” And what is that good work? Your salvation. And who began that work? God. The point is that,

A. The work of salvation is God’s work from beginning to end.

That’s where the assurance of preservation come. God is the author of your salvation. And God is the finisher of your salvation. God saved you in the first place, and really, that isn’t hard to understand. That salvation was by grace through faith, not of works, so that no one can boast. And God will continue to save you.

Rom. 8:30 “Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.”

When you study theology, that is identified as the order of salvation. Several of the components of our salvation are listed in that verse, in order. And what you need to realize, and recognize,

is that those components are all applied to the same people. So predestination is one component of your salvation. God did that. Calling, or what we usually identify as effectual calling, is another component. God does that. Justification is a key component of your salvation, and God does that as well.

So guess what, God finishes his work. God completes his work. It is his work at the very beginning, and it is his work at the end. It is a work he will finish. Therefore, those who are born again, those who are believers, those who are truly Christians “shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved.” God will see to it!

As Paul puts it when he writes to Timothy,

2 Tim. 1:8 Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, 9 who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began, 10 but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, 11 to which I was appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles. 12 For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.”

That is the promise of preservation. God’s promise.

Let’s look at that same promise from another perspective, from Jesus’ perspective. Here, the point to be made is that,

B. The work of salvation was accomplished and completed by Jesus, fulfilling the will of his father in heaven.

So, why do I believe that those who are saved by God shall be eternally saved? Why do I believe in the P in Tulip, the perseverance of the saints? Look at what Jesus says in,

John 10:27 “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. 28 And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.”

Jesus then goes on to say,

John 10:29 “My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand. 30 I and My Father are one.”

So it isn’t merely a reference to Jesus, but to the whole of the trinity. Jesus gives his sheep eternal life. How? By laying down his life for them.

John 10:11 “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. 12 But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. 13 The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. 15 As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.”

It is very important to be able to connect all of this, that the confidence and assurance of your own eternal salvation is directly connected with the finished work of Jesus. He laid down his life, the atoning sacrifice for your sins. He satisfied his father’s justice, having endured his wrath. That work was done, finished, completed, accomplished. And now that you are in Jesus’ own hand, no one can snatch you away. That’s the P in Tulip, the sure and certain promise of preservation!

But what about the goal? What is,

II. THE GOAL OF PRESERVATION.

Here, the focus is even clearer, and more encouraging. We’re not talking about a doctrinal proposition in a vacuum, unrelated to anything. Here’s the point of understanding preservation, simply that as a Christian, as a believer, you will gain,

A. The possession of an eternal inheritance.

So preservation is connected with heaven, the inheritance of heaven for those who die in this age. As Peter puts it,

1 Peter 1:3 “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”

Peter starts out like Paul in Ephesians 1, with a doxology, a song of praise. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!” Then Peter identifies the blessing of being born again, he describes our living hope that is established upon the reality of Jesus’ resurrection. And then he identifies an inheritance.

Listen to that description. The inheritance “is incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away.” The inheritance is “kept,” or reserved. The inheritance won’t perish, unlike anything and everything that exists in this world throughout this age. Everything perishes. Everything decays. Everything that is part of this world is corruptible. And the whole of the earth itself will be burned up in the day of judgment.

But, there is an inheritance kept and preserved in heaven for you. Then continue with Peter's words. Not only in the inheritance preserved, but so are you! According to verse 5, the inheritance is "reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." So you are kept, you are being guarded. That's a military word, a military guard, referring to the protection a garrison of soldiers provides against hostile threats or against an invasion. The inheritance is protected, and so are you! The inheritance is preserved, and so are you. So the Bible promises to the true Christian an eternal inheritance in heaven.

Amazing, the Scriptures identify us as "joint-heirs" with Jesus, co-heirs. Jesus inherits the new heavens and the new earth, and we are joint-heirs! Listen to this description of the hope of that same promise.

Titus 3:4 "But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, 5 not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, 6 whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life."

There, again, justification is connected with inheritance in heaven. Those who are justified shall be glorified. God promises the inheritance of heaven to all those for whom Jesus died.

But there is more. The goal of preservation is not just heaven, if I can say it that way. The goal of preservation is also current, applying to your daily lives here and now. Specifically,

B. Growth in holiness throughout this life.

So it is not simply that God preserves you so that you can say,

"Once saved, always saved," no matter how you live. But rather, the encouragement of God's preservation is that your live here and now is transformed, in the anticipation of heaven.

Notice how hope for the future is combined with preservation here in the present.

1 Thes. 3:11 "Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you. 12 And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you, 13 so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints."

The idea is something like this, that as God preserves his people so that they persevere unto the end and shall be eternally saved, God also causes them to "increase and abound" in all the graces which he offers to them in the gospel! So the promise of your preservation which ensures that your hearts shall be established in holiness before God at the end of the age, is the same promise which enables you more and more to abound in holiness of life now!

That is certainly the emphasis of the benediction in,

Heb. 13:20 "Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, 21 make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen."

That's what preservation means, that God equips you to do his will! And in that context, preservation also means,

C. An appropriate confidence in the battle against sin.

It is a battle that you will win! For God has promised. God protects. God preserves.

That is the idea of,

1 John 3:9 “No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. 10 By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil...”

That doesn’t mean that you achieve perfect sinlessness, but it does mean that sin no longer dominates and determines your life. It can’t! For God’s seed abides in you. You have been born of God. You can’t keep on sinning, you can’t continue to live under the slavery and dominion of sin. It isn’t possible, because God preserves you!

Further encouragement in that regard is found in,

2 Thes. 3:3 “But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one. 4 And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, both that you do and will do the things we command you. 5 Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience [or steadfastness] of Christ.”

Surely, we all need that protection. Surely we all need to be guarded, for in yourself, you know your own weakness. And you know the temptations of the devil, the evil one. “But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one.” That’s the point I’m trying so consistently to emphasize. Because the Lord will protect you, because the Lord will preserve you, you can have an appropriate confidence as you battle against sin day after day.

Again, words of a blessing, a benediction.

1 Thes. 5:23 “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify

you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.”

God will sanctify you completely, beloved. That’s his promise of preservation, you who are “kept for Jesus Christ,” as Jude identifies the recipients of his letter. You are kept, so when that battle against sin rages on in your soul, you have hope! When that besetting sin seems to come so easily and so frequently, you have hope! When the temptation seems so great, so irresistible, you have hope! It is a prayer, but more so, the promise of a blessing, “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely.”

That blessing comes with one more thing, one more way in which I would identify the goal of preservation. These verses have already made reference to this final item, and I want you to grasp it. It is not simply that you have an inheritance in heaven waiting for you, as glorious as that will be. But to make it better, you also have the hope of being found righteous on the day of judgment. In other words, when you stand before God on that day, you will be fully and finally acquitted. The goal of preservation is,

D. A sure and certain hope of acquittal when Jesus returns.

A final vindication. Our larger catechism, question 90, puts it this way, “At the day of judgment, the righteous, being caught up to Christ in the clouds, shall be set on his right hand, and there openly acknowledged and acquitted.”

In the words of the Bible, let me read again that benediction from,

1 Thes. 5:23 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you

completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.”

So you will be kept blameless. You will be preserved unto that acquittal before God on the day of judgment. Let me finish and complete the blessing I read just a few minutes ago from,

1 Thes. 3:11 “Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you. 12 And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you, 13 so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.”

Beloved, there are many things about your future glory that are so good and helpful to meditate upon. But in one sense, this is the greatest of them all, especially as you struggle with sin here and now. The Lord himself will “establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father.” You will be kept blameless, “openly acknowledged and acquitted,” when Jesus returns.

Let’s go back to our short text in Jude 1. Jude is writing to Christians. He is writing to you who believes in him, you who are “called, beloved in God the Father and preserved [kept] in Jesus Christ.” With that identification, then, comes a blessing, which we will look at next time. But let me end with that blessing this morning, because the blessing is the consequence of this great work of God in our salvation. Because Jesus is both the author and finisher of our faith, because he will bring to completion that work of salvation which he has begun, because no one can snatch you out of his hand, because all of those things are true, then beloved,

v.2 “May mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you.”

I was wrong when I first heard about the five points of doctrine identified by TULIP, including the P for perseverance, thinking they just weren’t that important. I came to learn, however, that they actually offer a life-changing perspective, especially this P for perseverance, such that you are able to live with the confidence and security of God’s promise of preservation. And thus to know, even when you struggle with sin, that you will persevere to the end, because Jesus holds you in his hand, and no one can snatch you away, you who are “preserved in Jesus Christ.”