

Jude

HEY JUDE

Over thirty years ago, The Beatles had a song about “Hey Jude” – back when lots of young people (now middle-aged) thought The Beatles were the new messiah. In case any of you wonder, the Jude of that song has nothing to do with the Jude who wrote the second-to-last book in our Bible. Actually, I am told that song was written to comfort the young son of John (also not the biblical John), who was divorcing his wife. The boy was devastated, and as it turned out, it was the beginning of the breakup of The Beatles as well. That may have a lot more to do with the concerns of the biblical Jude than anybody ever noticed, then or now. But I will let you track that, if you care.

Many years and generations ago, a man calling himself Jude wrote a general letter to the churches which appears in our Bible just prior to the Book of Revelation. It is relatively short. I just read the entire contents for our Scripture Reading this morning. That is the good news, for some of you: Jude is short. The bad news is that I will be preaching about it all during August. Some of you may get tired of it, but I already know that I shall not. In fact, the details and the drama behind this “letter” go far beyond what we will have time for in five Sundays.

Anyway, we just read the entire Book of Jude, but if you are like me, you didn’t get it all in one reading. My suspicion is that many of you don’t remember ever hearing about this Jude character before. If you read it, as some of you must have, it did not register very deeply. Depending on the mood you’re in, it can go right on past, sort of like when your parents were giving you advice when you were a teenager.

Why five Sundays on one obscure book? Only in a liberal church could I get away with calling any biblical writing “obscure.” In any case, unless you are in a really good study group, we are always in too much of a hurry with everything in the Bible. We rejoice, and rightly so, at the possibilities the modern world makes available to us. Speed means we can cover vast distances in a single day – we can contemplate endless issues and concerns from anywhere on our globe on a single day. In one day, you can be in Jerusalem or Istanbul or Sidney or Vienna. Not long ago, the same journey would have taken months.

I just drove down here from the state of Washington. I stay pretty close to the speed limits, so it takes me about twenty hours of driving. A hundred years ago, it would have taken most people at least three months to get from Seattle to Los Angeles over land. It still crosses my mind, as I drive: How much do I learn about the people, the towns, the churches – the problems, and hopes, and dreams of the people I am driving by? There is life, full spectrum, going on all around me, all along the way. And though I have driven through it twenty times now since I first came here, I know nothing of it. Speed is a wonderful thing. It saves me from so much pathos, involvement, caring, and heartache as I whiz by. And how much meaning and learning and love does it steal from me in return?

Of course, if we remember, we can slow down once we arrive. We can move faster to spend more time where we really want to be. But speed is insidious. It can become a “way of life” – an approach to life that stays with us all the time. See more, know less. Speed plays havoc with our prayer lives. Speed is involved in nearly all the mental and physical health issues of our time. Our tradition has been warning us for two thousand years that speed is one of Satan’s favorite tools – not just moving fast, but the principle of haste: A way of life that is in too much of a hurry. No patience. No calm. No trust. No peace. *“They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.”* Some people pray all their lives and never ever wait long enough to hear the Spirit’s response. They do not have time or patience enough to wait for the dialogue – to listen for a reply. Then they go around saying asinine things to malign God’s love and care, like, “Be careful what you pray for ...” Or, “Sometimes God just says *no.*”

So the world is moving by us at a screaming pace, and we have so many important matters to decide. Do we approve of the latest Supreme Court nominee? Do we still like the President? How shall we conduct the affairs of Afghanistan, or treat Iran and North Korea? Is China a future friend or our greatest threat? Will the economy continue to plummet? Who will win the pennant this year? Who has time for God? Who has time to deal with the issues of being faithful in their own life, and right now? And now I want you to slow down enough to contemplate this ancient letter from somebody named Jude ... for a whole month? Glad we got that cleared up.

We don't have any other writing from this Jude, except what you heard this morning. By the principles of "publish or perish," Jude barely squeaks through. Apart from Jesus, it is obvious that none of us would ever have heard of Jude. Even *with* Jesus, some of you will tell me you have never heard of him. Put it a different way: But for Jesus, this letter would never have gotten into the New Testament because there would not have *been* any New Testament. So the sermon title, "Hey Jude," just means: Who are you? Let's get acquainted. Where do you come from? What do you care about, and why? Quite clearly, if you appear as the author of a New Testament writing, the Christian community thinks you have something tremendously important to say, and they have come to see what you wrote as extremely helpful. Naturally, as Christians, we do not want to miss that.

Hey Jude, who are you? And where do you fit in the picture and drama of the early church? And what is it that you are so concerned and eager to tell us?

Jude is a very familiar and common name in New Testament times. That's not surprising, since the Hebrew form of the name is Judah, and one of the sons of Jacob – hence one of the twelve tribes of Israel (alias Jacob) – is called Judah. Judah is the tribal territory in which Jerusalem lies. So when the civil war split the nation after the death of Solomon, the Southern Kingdom was called Judah. "The great lion of Judah" was a phrase to thrill patriots. Indeed, Judah was always the last bastion to fall, and the holiest place of all because that was where the temple was.

In any case, if you called Jude by his Hebrew name, it was Judah. If you translate Judah into Greek, it's Judas. In English form, we say Jude. The frequency of the name is illustrated by the fact that two of Jesus' twelve disciples are named Judas – Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot. For obvious reasons, it's important to distinguish between these two men. So in Luke and Acts, the first is called Judas, son of James, and in Matthew 10:3 and Mark 3:18 he is called Thaddaeus. It would have saved confusion if Luke had also called him Thaddaeus – more confusion than you know, since some still claim that "son of James" can be translated "brother of James," thus contending that the author of the Book of Jude is Thaddaeus. It's a stretch, but those who do not want to think about Jesus having brothers find it compelling.

Have I lost you, or did you just let your mind wander? We are wondering who wrote this letter from Jude. Jesus had two disciples and

one brother named Jude. Judas Iscariot cannot be the author – he died young and few have mourned his passing, though I suspect that Jesus did. That leaves Jude the son of James, and Jude the brother of James, who was also the brother of Jesus.

Hey Jude, who are you? Are you the brother or the disciple? Or, as I cannot help but suspect, are you a second-generation Christian who writes in honor of the brother of Jesus, hoping thereby to get a better hearing for a message you think is crucial for the health of the church, and for the well-being of Christians everywhere? This I suspect by content, language, and presentation. But you need not go there with me. A scholar as renowned as William Barclay, looking at all the possibilities, still concludes that the author is Jude the brother of Jesus.

While we are this close, a detail only a few of you will care about: If you conclude that Jude was the brother of Jesus, you probably also conclude that Second Peter was written by the Apostle Peter. There is a close connection between Jude and Second Peter (Second Peter borrowing theme and material from Jude, more likely than the other way around). That dates the writing of Jude somewhere in the mid-60s A.D. (if both were written before Peter's death). Those who think Second Peter and Jude were written by later Christians in honor of former leaders would date Jude closer to 150 A.D. It doesn't matter, of course, because, as everybody knows, it doesn't matter who is speaking (or writing), only what they are saying. Nor does the context out of which they speak make any difference, since truth is timeless. And if you can swallow either of these last two statements, you probably belong in some other, nearby church.

The puzzle is intriguing, but we can never be sure. Nevertheless, it leaves us wondering about Jude the brother of Jesus. Do you ever wonder about the brothers of Jesus? This is not any opinion or theory from me, it's straight out of our earliest Gospel: *"Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?"* (Mark 6:3) *"Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas?"* (Matthew 13:55) Hey Jude, there you are – one of Jesus' younger brothers.

What would it have been like to be one of Jesus' brothers? I get no hint from the Book of Jude. Actually, I have a very big complaint about that! If this is indeed Jude the brother, why doesn't he talk to us about Jesus? He can tell us about the problems of the church later, but if this is a man who grew up with Jesus, what a tragedy to have a source so close and get not one word to help us fill in our picture of the most important man who ever lived. Hey Jude, thanks a lot! One brief, often scathing treatise, and not one personal word about your brother?

I am not trying to conclude from mere silence. Maybe in person Jude talked a lot about Jesus and felt there was no reason to write it in a letter. Doubtless he thought the world would soon end, and there was no need for such information to those of us who would be hungry for it so many generations later. Why did Jude call himself the brother of James, but not mention that he was also the brother of Jesus? James had become head of the Jerusalem church and, as such, was institutionally the most prominent Christian alive at the time. Many suggest that Jude, like James in *his* letter, was too humble to parade his relationship with Jesus too openly. Humility might well have been mixed with shame, since the biological brothers were no part of Jesus' mission while He was alive. What few comments we have suggest that the family tried to shut Jesus down, was afraid for Him, or thought He was off the deep end. And John's cryptic comment still rings in our ears: "*For even his own brothers did not believe in him.*" (John 7:3-5; Matthew 12:46-49; Mark 3:31-33)

The information suggests that while James was the next oldest brother, Jude was last or second to last. He may not have been old enough to understand much of what was going on when Jesus was alive. He may have formed his opinions by what the rest of his family was thinking and feeling. And what about sibling rivalry? We would like to assume that with somebody like Jesus, relationships with the brothers would have been ideal. Is Jesus not the quintessential source of the demands and expectations we have about "brotherly love"? Yet the few comments we have from New Testament accounts do not give us any reason to suppose harmony and peace in Jesus' family, or a closeness between Jesus and His brothers – never mind any loyalty, understanding, support, or belief. What of Jesus' own comment, "*and a man's foes will be those of his own household*"? (Matthew 10:36) Where did *that* come from? If Jesus was perfect, should He not have had perfect family relationships? How sad that Jesus had to deal with

misunderstandings, disagreements, lack of support, and all the other marks of our broken world – just like we do. It’s hard to grow up, isn’t it? But I’m going to try it, just as soon as I get a few more things organized ...

In any case, one more time the realism of the Bible corrects our desires to believe that if we are just faithful and good, everything will be easy. Faith is its own reward. If we want a different reward, we must walk a different path. Most around us do.

If this author was Jude the brother, he had stories to tell. And we don’t get to hear them in this life. What was it like for him as events moved on and the light shifted? What must it have been like for *any* of the brothers, as their kooky, off-the-wall elder sibling got into more and more hot water? In all likelihood, Jesus had been the provider, the surrogate father to the family, the eldest male (Joseph seems to have died young) while they were growing up. But then suddenly, when the rest of the siblings were able to take care of themselves, off He went into some completely loony Never-Never Land – jousting with windmills and misleading a few gullible peasants. Anybody with a shred of common sense would know that His course had to collide with the chosen and responsible leaders of the time. How embarrassing! How shameful for the family. And how much pathos for Mary, and for whatever natural affection and concern they all must have had for Jesus under all their consternation.

But then the real drama unfolds. What was it like for the brothers as their awareness of who Jesus was began to change? In all likelihood, Jesus was already murdered by the time this began to register on their consciousness. In the sorrow and the shock, perhaps they began to talk with and get to know the real followers in a different way and on a different level. What would it have been like to slowly, but with ever more certainty, come to realize that this strange, wondrous, uncompromising brother had been living with a mission and purpose far beyond anything you had dreamed of – that He had impacted other people in ways profound beyond anything you had imagined? Until finally, in some personal encounters with His Living Spirit, you yourself had come to realize that He was indeed the Messiah: that despite everything, He still loved you and wanted you to be in the Kingdom He had lived for all along – the Kingdom He had died for. If in the end these brothers became leaders and apostles too, then Jesus had revealed Himself to them after the

Resurrection – just like He does to us. (I Corinthians 15:7 says straight out that He appeared to James.)

You think I'm merely speaking of ancient history? Some of us can identify with the reluctant brothers far more poignantly than that. We did not all come to be His followers easily, or without reluctance, or as early as we wish we had.

Even so, we never hear from Simon or Joses. Even Jesus doesn't bat a thousand, at least not in this world. But for James and Jude, it was the beginning of a new life – just like it is for us. How then do they respond? How can they get into the Christian community they had once scorned, or at least avoided, and what role can they play when they get there? Once again, ancient history threatens to blur with our own personal biography.

How many times Jude must have been asked: "Where were you? What was it like growing up with Him? What part did you play?" And what could he say? "Well, actually, I didn't do much. I was too young. He was too busy. I didn't really know what was going on. It was only later that I realized what He had done for me, how much He loved me, how much He had cared all along. And finally it was like the scales began to fall from my eyes, and I began to see who He really was."

Some of us also awaken to the realization that He has done more for us than we once realized. Formerly we were not grateful, or appreciative, or aware in any adequate way at all. And now, how do we get back "in"? We are shy; we are embarrassed. Is it too late? Who are we? For the truth is, nobody can start to comprehend who Jesus is without confronting all the connecting questions and awakenings about "Who am I?"

Hey Jude: All this time about who you are, and we have said almost nothing about what you wrote. No time now, until next week. Except maybe for the opening: "*Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James, to those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ: May mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you.*" (Jude 1:1-2) There it is; never mind my opinions, or all the details.

Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James.

Whoever he is, those are his credentials – the only ones he needs or wants. Jude, a *doulos* of Jesus Christ. My translation renders this Greek word as “servant.” The translators do not want to give offense, I suppose. They think we will not be able to handle it straight. *Doulos* does not mean servant, it means SLAVE. Of course, a slave serves and, in that sense, is also a servant. But this phrase means that Jude’s life is no longer his own. He cannot change Masters at whim. His obedience has gone far beyond that now.

Quite obviously, this slavery is not an overt or worldly affair. It cannot be forced on Jude, nor on any of us, from the outside. Nor can any earthly institution or authority impose or maintain it. Jude claims it. Jude takes this title of his own free will. Jude is a slave of Jesus Christ because he wants to be. There is more meaning and freedom and purpose and delight in being a slave of Jesus Christ than in any other life Jude knows about. Nobody can make him say this. He *claims* it. He has gone from brother to slave of Jesus Christ. That is, in fact (if you can accept it), why he claims to be the brother of James but not of Jesus. He has moved, by choice and on purpose, to a new relationship with Jesus. From brother to slave. You perhaps think this is a reduction, a blunder – and the translators agree with you. But Jude does not agree with you. There is no higher title or honor than knowing ourselves as the slaves of Jesus Christ. Living as brother or friend or consultant or partner can never touch it. Because Jesus is who He is, being His slave is the only way in the world to come into our own – to have our lives enhanced beyond anything our own wisdom or opinions or plans or strategies can match. But that is *after* we trust Him, *after* conversion, *after* surrender – after truly giving our lives and our wills over to His will and WAY.

Still, I am amazed at the brazen claim, the assurance, the matter-of-fact assertion of Jude: “*Jude, a slave of Jesus Christ.*” No qualms? He really is, and knows he is? Wow! Oh friends, that is what I want to be, what I hope I am – what I know I am not, at least not nearly as much as I long to be and try to be. “A slave of Jesus Christ.” That is what I want to be able to say.

Is that something you can say? Or want to be able to say? I am the slave of Jesus the Christ, my Savior and my Lord.