

POSTCARDS: Jude Jude

INTRODUCTION:

Have I told you that I wrote a novel? I did. I wrote what is called a historical novel or historical fiction. A little bit like the monologues that led up to Easter, my novel was a first-person narrative based on a historical figure but fleshed-out with details that I supplied.

Didn't know that? Haven't seen it in the bookstores? There's a reason. I'll have you know I received rejection-letters from some of the largest publishers in the book business.

I based my novel on the Biblical character, Jude. I am intrigued by Jude. Jude was one of the other sons of Mary, the mother of Jesus. And I have wondered what it would have been like to have grown up with Jesus as your older brother. Was that a burden or a blessing?

Do you suppose that Mary ever told Jude, "Your brother never lied to me"? Do you think she ever said, "Your brother always cleaned up his room"? Is it possible that she might have pointed out to Jude that Jesus had never once disobeyed her? With Jesus as an older brother, Jude had a lot to live up to.

And I have wondered if he might have resented that fact. You see, we know from the Bible that Jude did not believe that Jesus was the Son of God until after the Resurrection.

In fact, shortly after Jesus selected his apostles, Mark records what Jesus' family thought about him and his ministry. From Mark chapter 3:

*²⁰ Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. ²¹ When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "**He is out of his mind.**"*

Jude, his mother and his brothers thought Jesus was suffering from some form of insanity.

In John 7, we read:

*² When the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles was near, ³ Jesus' brothers said to him, "You ought to leave here and go to Judea, so that your disciples may see the miracles you do. ⁴ No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world." ⁵ **For even his own brothers did not believe in him.***

So, with these pieces to the puzzle, I wondered what Jude might have thought when word began to filter back to Nazareth that Jesus was healing sick people, restoring sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf. I wondered what Jude must have assumed when he learned that his brother was claiming to be the Messiah. I wondered how Jude might have reacted when people told him that Jesus had raised dead people back to life.

As I say, the book was never published. But the curiosity has never left. And I bring all of that with me when I approach the little letter by Jude, which you will find as the next-to-the-last book in your Bible.

Jude wrote this postcard to some people whom God loved dearly. The letter was prompted by Jude's concern that these believers were being misled into thinking that, as long as they professed their faith in Jesus Christ, it didn't matter how they lived. They were being taught that since we are saved by our faith, not our works, our deeds don't matter.

President Obama has famously said, "words matter." Jude wants us to understand that works matter. Would you listen to what he wrote? If you'd like, you may follow along. The book of Jude begins on page 1213 of the pew Bible in the rack in front of you.

*Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James,
To those who have been called, who are loved by God the Father
and kept by Jesus Christ:*

² Mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance.

³ Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints. ⁴ For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.

⁵ Though you already know all this, I want to remind you that the Lord delivered his people out of Egypt, but later destroyed those who did not believe. ⁶ And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home—these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day. ⁷ In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.

⁸ In the very same way, these dreamers pollute their own bodies, reject authority and slander celestial beings. ⁹ But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not dare to bring a slanderous accusation against him, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!" ¹⁰ Yet these men speak abusively against whatever they

do not understand; and what things they do understand by instinct, like unreasoning animals—these are the very things that destroy them.

¹¹ *Woe to them! They have taken the way of Cain; they have rushed for profit into Balaam's error; they have been destroyed in Korah's rebellion.*

¹² *These men are blemishes at your love feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm—shepherds who feed only themselves. They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted—twice dead. ¹³ They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever.*

¹⁴ *Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men: "See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones ¹⁵ to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in the ungodly way, and of all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against him." ¹⁶ These men are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage.*

¹⁷ *But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold. ¹⁸ They said to you, "In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires." ¹⁹ These are the men who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit.*

²⁰ *But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. ²¹ Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.*

²² *Be merciful to those who doubt; ²³ snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.*

²⁴ *To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—²⁵ to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.*

In his brief letter, Jude takes pains to point out four types of people who were found in the church to which he was writing. I wonder if they are in our church this morning.

I. THE TRANSFORMERS (verses 3-4)

The first type of person Jude identifies is The Transformer. Jude says of them that they change the grace of God into a license to sin.

Jude wrote that these people had secretly slipped in among the Christians and were now preaching a perverted form of the Gospel.

In their twisted teaching, God's grace becomes permission to disobey. Their illogical logic went something like this: if I sin, it isn't serious because I can always ask for forgiveness and get a pass.

The apostle, Paul, confronted a similar distortion of grace. In his letter to the Christians in Rome, in chapter 6 of Romans, Paul posed this question:

Since God's grace is freely given to all who sin, and
since the more we sin, the more gracious God becomes to forgive
our sins, and
since the more grace God bestows, the more amazing He is
revealed to be, therefore
we should sin more and more so God's grace can be more
dramatically displayed.

Paul said that such stinking thinking is just wrong. He posed the question, *"What shall we say then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means!"*

Likewise, Jude called out the false teachers who said that it doesn't matter how you live so long as you've been saved. And he does that rather dramatically by appealing to history to call our attention to The Tormented.

II. THE TORMENTED (verses 5-11))

Jude gives us several historical illustrations that we must not abuse God's grace by using it as an excuse to disobey.

- The Hebrew people, after living in bondage in Egypt for over 200 years, God delivered them and led them to Canaan, the land that He had promised to them. The Hebrews knew that God had delivered them from Egypt but they did not believe He would deliver Canaan to them so they turned away from His promise. God loved those people and had graciously delivered them but that did not prevent Him from destroying them for their actions.
- Heavenly angels who usurped their rightful place, were cast into darkness and bound in chains until the Final Judgment when they will be condemned for eternity.
- The Twin Cities of Sodom and Gomorrah engaged in a pattern of sexual sin and although God loved the people, He hated their sin and as a result, these two cities were destroyed by fire.
- Cain, one of the sons of Adam and Eve, killed his brother, Abel, and was punished as a result even though he was one of only two natural-born humans on the face of the earth.
- Balaam, the Old Testament prophet, accepted money to condemn God's chosen people so God dispatched an angel to destroy him.
- Korah led a rebellion against Moses' leadership. As a result, he and his followers were destroyed by fire sent from God.

Jude's teaching technique in all of this is to say that if God punished sinful behavior in the past, He will punish sinful behavior today. Those who play fast and loose with grace need to learn from the torment of those who have disregarded God's will in the past.

Do you suppose there is anyone here today who has fallen into the habit of believing that sin isn't that big a deal since God will forgive it anyway? If so, we'd better learn from history that even if we don't take sin seriously, God does.

III. **THE TARNISHING (verses 12-16)**

Jude addressed the whole church when he wrote about those who teach a diminished and diluted doctrine of grace. Jude wrote that they are not only endangering their own salvation, they are tarnishing the church of which they are a part. Jude's word was that they were blemishes.

That's probably a good enough description but in case you didn't get the picture, let me put it this way, people who do not take sin seriously are zits on the face of the church.

At this point in his postcard, Jude piles metaphor upon metaphor to drive his point home. He says they are:

- Shepherds who neglect the flock and feed only themselves.
- Clouds without rain: getting your hopes up for refreshment but unable to fulfill those hopes.
- Autumn trees – no fruit and twice dead. That is, they died while they were dormant.
- Wild waves, tossing others about.
- Wandering stars that lack the discipline to stay where they belong.

Then Jude makes reference to Enoch and he closes this section with a scathing rebuke. Jude says that these people follow their own evil desires and do so by boasting about themselves and flattering others for their own advantage. They are manipulators.

Be warned. Do not be taken in by people who tell you that discipleship to Jesus is easy, that grace is cheap and that your lifestyle really doesn't affect your salvation.

IV. **THE TRIUMPHANT (verses 17-25)**

James closes his postcard by focusing on the triumphant. These are they who take all these warnings to heart and who give evidence to the sincerity of their faith by demonstrating good character with their good conduct.

Their good conduct is not only shown in the morality and obedience of their own lives but also in the way they regard those who are not yet strong in the Lord. They are merciful toward those who doubt and they do all they can to rescue the disobedient from the eternal fire into which they are in danger of falling.

CONCLUSION:

It makes perfect sense, don't you think? If you take sin seriously, it will change your life. And if you take sin seriously, you will want to reach and rescue those who are in danger of the eternal fires of hell.

INVITATION: #441 – *“Rescue The Perishing”*