

Jesus' Real Family

Mark 3:31-35

What do you think about when you hear the word “family” or “my family”?

What makes a family? What constitutes family ties?

In this chapter of Mark's gospel we have witnessed the courage of Jesus (vv.1-6) as Jesus heals a man with a withered hand. The miracle generates both wonder and malice as the religious leaders--the Scribes--the Pharisees and the Herodians all plot together to get rid of Jesus. We have witnessed the compassion of Jesus (vv.7-12); as he restores the sick and releases those who were under demonic and satanic oppression (vv.7-12); we saw the call of Jesus to those who would become apostles (vv.13-19); and the explosion of criticism from foes and family (vv. 20-30). If it wasn't bad enough that the religious leaders were accusing Him of having a devil, His own friends and family were accusing Him of being beside Himself, being mad, out of His mind. Mark said this back in verse 21, **But when His own people heard about this, they went out to lay hold of Him, for they said, "He is out of His mind."**

One man described his family this way. “Families are like fudge – mostly sweet with a few nuts.”

The family of Jesus have come looking for Him. All the curiosity and drama and animosity have brought the family of Jesus to see Him. They have come to Capernaum to rescue Jesus. They think Jesus has lost His mind. They are worried about Him and they have come to get Him, to take Him back home, so that He can get some rest. These people are there to help the Lord, or so they think.

Let's read Marks account of this event starting in Mark 3:31:

31 Then His brothers and His mother came, and standing outside they sent to Him, calling Him.

32 And a multitude was sitting around Him; and they said to Him, "Look, Your mother and Your brothers are outside seeking You."

33 But He answered them, saying, "Who is My mother, or My brothers?"

34 And He looked around in a circle at those who sat about Him, and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers!"

35 For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother."

A. v. 31 The Family's Request

Jesus is teaching and His family is on the outside of the crowd. They can't get to Him because of the multitude, so they send word through the crowd to tell Jesus to come to where they are. His family wants Him to stop His teaching, leave the multitude, and go home with them.

Now in Mark 6:3, we have clear proof that the Lord Jesus had brothers and sisters according to the flesh - now of course they could only be half brothers and sisters, as God was Christ's Father. Mark record the people in Nazareth saying, **"Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us?" And they were offended at Him.**" In John's Gospel we are told **"For even His brothers did not believe in Him."** (John 7:5).

The family of Jesus have come to take Him home! I assume that the family of Jesus had been in Nazareth but now they have traveled to Capernaum. Rumors had probably reached His family.

Maybe they heard about all the miracles. They heard about the statements Jesus has already made. Reports maybe had gotten to them that Jesus wasn't eating. It may be the family were rightly and deeply concerned; the religious leaders left many hints they were willing to have Jesus killed! Had they overheard the accusations that Jesus was possessed by a demon or even Satan?

You can see the scene if you try. His mother Mary, or perhaps one of His brothers, James or Jude maybe, tells someone at the back of the crowd to pass the word to Jesus that they are there to see Him. That fellow tells another fellow and he tells another. Soon enough the word reaches Jesus that His family is there to see Him and that they want Him to stop teaching and go with them.

B. v. 32 The Crowd's Reaction

Verse 32 shows the crowd's reaction. The crowd sees nothing wrong with this. In that society nothing was as important as one's family. Everything centered on the family. If Jesus' family needed Him, the crowd fully expected Jesus to stop teaching them and go to His relatives.

C. v. 33 The Lord's Response

Verse 33 tells the Lord's response. Instead of stopping what He was doing and going to His mother and brothers, Jesus asked, **"Who is My mother, or My brothers?"** The crowd must have been shocked. His mother must have been devastated. His brothers probably got angry. They had traveled all the way from Nazareth to get Him and He refused to even stop teaching to talk with them.

This is a tense scene and the Lord's reaction to His family seems cold on the surface. But His response to them was designed to teach some very important truths.

1. Being in the Family of God Comes from a Spiritual Relationship.

Spiritual relationship is more important than a human relationship.

What the Lord is teaching us through the story today is that ties of flesh and blood mean nothing spiritually. To put it specifically: being a half brother or sister of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself in the flesh, didn't make any difference to their spiritual condition. Some of them were unbelievers - and they had to believe, they had to believe to benefit from Christ spiritually, that's very significant. Being

a half brother or half-sister of Christ didn't matter in the spiritual realm. But being the mother of Jesus wouldn't make any difference to Mary either.

Luke tells us about Jesus in 11:27-28 that one day "... **as He spoke these things, that a certain woman from the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, "Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts which nursed You!" But He said, "More than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"**

Jesus is basically saying that it was more to Mary's credit to do the will of God than to be His mother. It meant more to do God's will than to be related to Christ in the flesh. So, being a half brother or sister of the Lord Jesus meant nothing spiritually, being the mother of the Lord Jesus meant nothing spiritually.

Jesus is telling us, lest any of you here have missed this fundamental spiritual gospel lesson, that ties of flesh and blood mean nothing spiritually! You need to be born again, and that is how you enter into the family of God - John chapter 3, Jesus said: "**Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.**" And John 1:12-13 says, "**But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.**"

It is a salvation that is not related to religion, or to works - in Matthew 7:21-23 Jesus made that clear, "**Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'**" Works mean nothing!

Now you might say: 'Well, is obedience not works?'. Jesus is saying in this passage that, 'Those who are related by blood to Me are not spiritually correct in God's eyes; but those that do the will of My Father in heaven' - are works not obedience?

Initially, no. You see, Jesus was asked on one occasion by religious people in John 6:28, "**What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?**" and Jesus answered and said unto them "**This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.**" They wanted to do a work, but Jesus here, I believe, is making the point that you need to be obedient to the gospel, you need to believe on the One who God has sent. That is not a work, that is faith - we are saved by obeying God's word to believe the gospel of Jesus Christ.

You're not saved eternally because of your relations, and you're not saved eternally because of religious works, you're saved because you're born again, having put faith in Jesus Christ and Him alone. So who you are related to in the flesh, or how religious or righteous you are in the flesh, is irrelevant: you must obey God through the gospel, that's what Jesus is saying.

2. Being in The Family of God Is Shown by Obedience.

He's telling us that the character trait of those who belong to God's family is obedience to the Father's will, not who you're related to or how religious you are. He asks: 'Who is my mother and my brothers?'. He looks around at the circle of people, and He stretches out His hand towards His disciples and says: 'Here is my mother, here are my brothers, those who do the will of God'.

The character trait, the family likeness of God's family, is to obey the Father's will as Jesus did, to have His resemblance. Now here's the reality check: are earthly ties greater to us than ties of the Spirit? Are earthly loyalties greater to us than heavenly loyalties? Let's do the test then: your home, has it become a temple for you? What about your family, and your career, and possessions - are they idols of devotion to you? Do you worship them? Do you covet them? This is elementary stuff, but in a world of increasing materialism, the fact of the matter is: we, even unconsciously, are putting things and people before God, ties of flesh and blood before spiritual.

Let me say to you: the best way that you can provide and protect your family is to love Jesus more than you love them, that's the best way. To put it negatively: a Christian should not use family as an excuse for giving Jesus second place - for the Christian there is no excuse for that! I know it's hard, and I know that there's great cost, and I know that I'm guilty of not doing it - but it is upon us as disciples of our Lord to be obedient, and the recompense for those who even lose relatives and friends because of their faith, the Bible says, is a hundred fold - Mark 10:29: 'And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life'. I always wondered at that verse, but do you know what it means? We are meant to have brothers and sisters and fathers and mothers in the church of Jesus Christ, and for those who lose their fathers and mothers and brothers and sisters and friends because they have followed Jesus, we ought to be greater fathers and mothers and brothers and sisters and friends to them by the ties of the Spirit than you could ever have in the ties of the flesh. The question is: are we?

Let me relay this story to you in closing. During the holiday there - one of my holidays! - I read a book on the persecuted church. It was quite technical in bits, but it's worth getting even for the last chapters of it. It's written by a man called Ron Boyd McMillan, who is the son of Pastor Ron McMillan who was in Templemore Hall for many years - he works with Open Doors. Near the end of the book he says that he once knew a Chinese Christian, an evangelist, to whom was given 5,000 copies of the Word of God to distribute among new converts. The organisation that gave him the Bibles was dismayed because they discovered two years later that very few of the Bibles had been distributed. They began to wonder was this guy selling them on the black market or something. So Ron Boyd McMillan was asked to be a mediator in this difficult situation, and he says that in a tense meeting this was the reason the evangelist gave for not distributing the Bibles at a faster rate. Now listen carefully: 'I have discovered that

it is dangerous to learn truth at a rate faster than we can practise it'. I have learned that it is dangerous to learn truth at a rate faster than we can practise it.

Now bear with me: this Chinese man began his ministry in the 1980s when Bibles were extremely scarce in China, and he travelled around and there was revival in several of the provinces of China. He found that each week roughly 100 people were professing faith in Christ. Because he was an itinerant, he could not linger to disciple these people, so he kept on moving - as well because of the police that were tracking him. His dilemma was this, and he says, I quote: 'I have no Bibles to give these new converts, but I must leave them something so they can keep on growing into God' - what a privilege we have. He devised a unique method of self-discipleship, this is what he did: out of 100 converts he picked five people at random, and he said: 'You are each going to lead a weekly group of 20 people'. He went down to the stream and he picked out five smooth stones, and on each of those stones he chiselled a verse of Scripture. He gave each a stone, and said: 'Each week give a different member the stone, let them live with this verse on the stone, think about it, pray about it, take it into the field as they farm, put it next to their rice bowl as they eat, put it under their pillow as they sleep, all the time asking God to speak through these words. Then next week, when you all come together, you're to listen to what God has told them about the verse on this stone. As long as the person holds the stone, they cannot be interrupted, after they release it you may extend the discussion to the others. After everyone has spent a week with the stone verse, swap the stone with another group and do the same again'. That's all they had.

He promised to return in six months, though in reality it was often a couple of years, and he frankly expected many of the converts to have fallen away - but he was astonished to discover that nearly everyone was going on in the faith. He felt he had stumbled on a Bible truth about discipleship, and that is why, he was explaining to those mission representatives, he did not give a Bible to a new convert at first but required that for a time they use the five stone method. He said, listen: 'I don't want them to encounter too much truth too fast, otherwise they will get into the bad habit of never using what they know'. I'm convicted - a lesson from the persecuted church: not learning the word of God faster than we can practise it. Let me put that on its head: practising as we learn, that we might wear the family likeness of the children of God, those who hear and do.