

January 2, 2011

Who Are My Mother and Brothers?

Mark 3:31-35

INTRODUCTION

Earlier in Chapter 3 we saw that being physically close to Jesus wasn't the same thing as being spiritually close to him. Even his own biological family did not understand him. Verse 21 says, *And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, "He is out of his mind."* One of the most challenging truths to some and encouraging truths to others about the Christian faith is how our identity changes in Christ. When we are called out of the world, one of the institutions of the old age that we are called out of is our own family! The reason that's encouraging to most people is that most people who have ever lived as followers of Jesus don't have a family who share their faith in Christ. Most people who come from Christian homes never hear the clear message of the gospel because their Christian faith is assumed for them, so this truth is also a challenge. Now being called out of your biological family doesn't mean dissolving or neglecting your biological family. God has created all of the institutions of this age to speak about him, and your family is the one that you are nearest to and therefore will be the clearest expression of God's glory from day to day. So *physically* leaving behind your family, No—though in many cases, it might mean that. Just ask a Mormon or a Muslim convert! On the other hand, it does mean (for every believer) that your ultimate identity is now with the family of God that is eternal. And the most loving thing you can do for your biological family is to live a life that starts, not with the bloodlines of Adam, but through the blood of Christ.

- YOUR TEMPORARY FAMILY CALLS YOU TO BE TEMPORARY
- LOOK AROUND TO SEE YOUR ETERNAL FAMILY

The Big Idea is that Jesus leads his people out of their temporary families into his permanent family.

I say that Jesus "leads" his people here because He goes first. What He asks us to do, He does first. As the "first Man of the new race," the Bible also calls him the "firstborn among many

brothers” [Rom. 8:29]. And notice that this will not be incompatible with him grafting his biological family back in. For one thing, Mary already understood much and was left with much after the cross; and for another, at least two of his brothers wound up believing in him and writing letters in the New Testament (James and Jude). So Jesus isn’t giving us a doctrine against earthly families. Far from it! Earthly families were his idea and they were ordained to speak about him—so actually He is very fond of earthly families. But He *is* giving us a doctrine of how the kingdom grows, how people grow and what lasts forever.

DOCTRINE

I. YOUR TEMPORARY FAMILY CALLS YOU TO BE TEMPORARY

A) What Does this Call Represent from the Family? {31}

1. The family was all there: *And his mother and his brothers came (31a)*. And they apparently came a long way. We could make all sorts of excuses to excuse our unbelieving family’s hardness of heart. They didn’t come all the way here on the holiday to hear a sermon!

2. The family is described as *standing outside (31b)* of the church. Now this is important for two reasons. One because in fact the biological family just does start outside of the church; secondly, because this is intentional. They are standing on their own: not standing on the solid rock of Jesus. But the biblical authors recognize this and it never makes them less passionate to reclaim their families. Paul says that,

I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, **my kinsmen** according to the flesh. They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen. But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and **not all are children** of Abraham because they are his offspring, but “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring [Rom. 9:2-8].

It never occurred to Paul—or to Jesus—to love his family *by* pretending along with them! It caused him great pain that his kinsmen were not of one mind with him on their way to heaven. But they *weren't* and so love demands a line in the sand and clear signposts!

3. The family was deliberate in their message: they *sent to him and called him (31c)*. This should not be seen as overt hostility to the man Jesus but rather a sympathetic concern to rescue him from what they perceived to be a delusion: “For not even his brothers believed in him” [Jn. 7:5]. But just because it may have been motivated by feelings of tenderness doesn't mean that it wouldn't become hostility if it was empowered. The end result of their demands would have been eternal doom to all who would have believed! Talk about ruining everything for everyone! That is exactly what this tender, loving appeal represented. If Jesus gave into them—no cross, no gospel, no rescue from the wrath of God.

4. And the truth for most Christians is that it does get hostile. Jesus promised that, “Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, and you will be hated by all for my name's sake” [Mat. 10:21-22]. When your temporary family calls you to be temporary, you love them by calling them to be eternal!

B) What Does this Call Suggest to the Crowd? {32}

1. This *crowd was sitting around him (32a)* so, in other words, they were either disciples or would-be disciples. They were gathered around to hear the teaching.

2. It is distracting enough if your students think you have a bad reputation with outsiders. It is another thing altogether when your resume of supporters doesn't include those who are closest to you. This temptation for the disciples to remain a crowd or to leave altogether will always be there for Christians. It's called being “ashamed of the gospel” [Rom. 1:16]. And if shame would attempt to press up against Jesus it will press in to you as well. Why? Because: “A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household” [Mat. 10:24-25]. And then Jesus brings it all home in Luke's Gospel:

For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels [Lk. 9:26].

We have got to get an eternal perspective on what is acceptable and unacceptable in family relations. We have got to get over this whole ‘polite company’ ethic that says, “there’s two things you don’t talk about in polite company—religion and politics.” That is a philosophy for people who don’t care about the people in their polite company. Besides, what is so polite about not warning people that they’re on their way to hell! If you ask me, no one was ever more kind to his mother and brothers than Jesus was in not caving in to their delusions of family business as usual.

II. LOOK AROUND TO SEE YOUR ETERNAL FAMILY

A) Jesus Rightly Divides the Theological from the Biological {33-34}

1. *And he answered them, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” (33).* The first principle of this doctrine is that the family of God is exactly what the church is: “and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty” [2 Cor. 6:18]. And the second principle of this doctrine is that we are born into this eternal family, “not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God” [Jn. 1:13]. So, first, the kingdom of God is also called a family; and second, our entrance into this kingdom-family of God—in other words, our status as people who will live a life that lasts forever—is one-hundred percent an invisible, free act of God upon the individual. It has nothing to do with any other action or ability or status of man down here.

2. And clearly Jesus wants to use this opportunity to teach that truth. He was not ignoring his family or being rude. He knew full well that they were there, what they were thinking and feeling, and, most importantly, what they really needed. They needed to hear this and so do we: *And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers! (34).* Matthew’s account calls these who are seated around him “his disciples” [12:49]. Remember that a disciple of Christ is one who has left everything behind to follow Jesus, and, in particular, to listen to his words. This word of Christ is divisive all the way into your front door and through all the rooms of your home: “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword” [Mat. 10:34]. Jesus divides disciples from this world, but the hostility comes from the world. You may be assuming up front that the world is either neutral to God or else better off without him so that all this ‘follow-Jesus-or-else’ talk is an unnatural intrusion into what is *really* good and peaceful. But this isn’t the clumsy sword of a bull in a china shop, wielded by someone who doesn’t care about peace. He is the Prince of Peace and his sword of division

is the only surgeon's scalpel that you would ever want operating on the diseased body of your biological family.

For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me [Mat. 10:35-37].

With his eternal words, Christ commits destructive war and a healing operation. But with even the best surgery comes a division: "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart" [Heb. 4:12]. You don't want to hide your family from the surgeon's knife of the Great Physician. The division comes first: the true healing follows your family members being pierced with God's truth (pierced by the truth, not your tone!). Every other peace in the home is a false peace.

B) A Family that Does the Will of God {35}

1. The principle characteristic of what the believer does is to believe: "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent" [Jn. 6:29]. This is the center of the will of God for the believer: the believer's faith in the character and promises of God: "Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith" [Gal. 3:5]. The main thing that makes any activity of the believer truly "Christian" is that the thing is done trusting in the righteousness of Christ and for the reward of seeing more of God in it. In other words, a believer believes God! We believe God to save us and we believe God to satisfy us. If we do anything for any other motive, it is not a truly Christian action—"For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin" [Rom. 14:23].

2. Now what is the relationship between this changing of our family identity and this principle characteristic of the believer? The answer is *faith in God's salvation of us into his family*. We are saved *from* our natural state and our natural status. We are saved *to be* in God's own family! No matter how well off—materially or spiritually—we think our biological family is, *as* a biological family, the Bible tells us that our biological status is destitute and cursed and impotent. It does not deliver on its promises.

But I have stripped Esau bare; I have uncovered his hiding places, and he is not able to conceal himself. His children are destroyed, and his brothers, and his neighbors; and he is no more. Leave your fatherless children; I will keep them alive; and let your widows trust in me [Jer. 49:10-11].

Now there the children of Esau—the Edomites—were a reprobate people, and so God was speaking to them collectively. He is not going back on the biblical teaching for us to take care of the weak as individuals. He is calling individuals out of that cursed people. And all in Adam are a cursed people (the Edomites are just a choice segment of the cursed): “For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the LORD will take me in” [Ps. 27:10]

3. Making this exchange communicates to those in your family that they are not your idol; and since they know deep down that they cannot save or satisfy you, this will communicate good news to them that there is a better treasure elsewhere. Later in Mark’s Gospel, in response to Peter’s appeal for evidence of this grace, Jesus responds:

Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life [10:29-30].

At first this teaching sounds either harsh or inconsistent with what the rest of the Bible teaches about family. We accept it as a piece of scenery (because “it’s in the Bible”), sort of like the half-hearted inspiration we take from reading the opening scene of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, where Christian leaves his family behind for the Celestial City. We miss the fact that it is a symbol of something that is quite real. Our hard work of living lives that leave behind this life is the only thing that will be good for our families. The author of Hebrews tells us that even Jesus’ work on the cross was a picture of this:

So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured. For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come [Heb. 13:12-14].

Is that the gospel you tell your family? Or do you tell them by your lifestyle that *you* can save them, that *you* can satisfy them? Let us go outside the camp, outside the house, outside of the visible, physical people who bear his name and see him and hear him and bear the reproach he endured! Because out there—out of our earthly homes—into our new family we seek a treasure that nothing in this world can satisfy! What kindness the Savior showed to his earthly family by not honoring their very ironic, *insane* request!

APPLICATION

To the Skeptic – The Mormons have a saying: *Family is forever*. But it’s not—if by ‘family’ you mean the institution in the old creation that God designed to tell the good news about

his Son obtaining a bride and children for the true Father. That family (like a shadow) will pass when the substance is complete, when the story is all told. Now of course if, by family, we mean the actual individual member of the family—namely the person, the soul that can never die—then such a family member is forever. But now we are talking about something so different that I wonder if we have ever stopped to think about how utterly different these two things are.

So here is my question: Can an unbeliever love his or her spouse? Can an unbelieving parent love their children? Now what if I told you that the answer is No? By degrees, No. Consider for a moment what the definition of an unbeliever is. Isn't an unbeliever someone who doesn't believe that Christianity is true, and so someone who doesn't believe in the soul, or at least that the soul experiences either heaven or hell forever? Now what if they are wrong—so here I am talking to the Christian—if they are wrong, then they are saying to the object of their love: "I don't care whether you spend eternity in bliss or in torture!" Would anyone consider such an attitude loving at any level? Of course not when we put it that way! But what other way *can* we put it? The unbeliever is someone who, by definition, cannot love the soul of a person, or, cannot love the person that this person really is. If every person just *is* a soul that can never die, and if a parent doesn't believe in that soul, then it follows that that parent doesn't believe in the real existence of that person. That child (or spouse) is a selfish projection of their narcissistic lifestyle. No matter what level of feelings they produce, that person who seems like the object of the unbeliever's love really turns out to be nothing more than a prop on the stage of their play.

To the Saint – What kind of unbelievers live in this community that we have just now moved into? What kind of families do you think they come from? What kind of families do you think they now have? Now,

consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord" [1 Cor. 1:26-31].

What gospel are we getting ready to tell in and from this new building? What kind of a family are we getting ready to be for people who—if they thought of ‘family’ and ‘Jesus’ in the same sentence, they—would throw up and run a million miles in the opposite direction!

To the Sinner – Maybe for you, when you think of your biological family, you think of sin. You may assume up front that you come from a bad seed and so you are damaged goods. Well you *do* come from a bad seed and so do I! But that is the same bad seed we all come from, namely Adam’s. What God is having you do when you consider coming into his family is the same thing He has you doing when you come to his Son—Trust him. Believe him for it.

CONCLUSION

When Jesus wanted to remind his people of the gospel down through the ages, He chose bread and wine (or juice) as the symbols partly because the act of eating a meal together in the ancient world—particularly the Passover meal—was an intimate act. It made the statement that ‘You are welcome into my home, with my family—with my own flesh and blood.’ And it is one thing for us to make a place in our home, to inconvenience ourselves a little bit, to prepare our family members to make room, to buy more bread and more drink to accommodate more guests. But it is another thing altogether to spend all of your own flesh and blood, to have your own flesh torn to pieces and blood emptied out, to bring in more flesh and blood. This is what Jesus did for us. And anyone who would turn from their sins and trust in what Jesus did for you may come and remember and receive it all freely.