

Message #11

Mark 3:31-35

We live in a day and age in which one big push is on the family. In some respects, there needs to be this push because the family is under attack. We live in a time when many in this world can't even figure out that a family is supposed to consist of a man and a woman and children. One push we need today is just to Biblically define what a family actually is. As one commentator said, "the fabric holding nuclear families together is...threadbare..." (David Garland, *Mark*, p. 139).

Now there have always been people and programs and organizations who will tell you that the only thing that matters is your family. I have read several books about Wyatt Earp. In fact, I got so interested in history about him that two times I actually went to Tombstone, Arizona, just to look the place over where he became so famous. Wyatt Earp was told by his father that the only thing that matters is your family. In part, this is why he had such a close relationship with his brothers: Morgan, Virgil and James. They lived by a code that all that matters is family.

For most people, every sacrifice they make is for the family. Every commitment that is made is for the family. Every moment of life is taken up with the family. For most people, everything revolves around their family.

In fact, there is an entire Christian organization that is a good organization that tries to get everyone to "focus on the family." With the family under such attack, it is probably good to have such an organization as that. But there is also a danger. Many have made their family their high-priority idol. **When our life ends on this earth, it will not be our commitment to our family that will mean the most; it will be our commitment to Jesus Christ.** When your family keeps you out of church and keeps you from the Word of God and the will of God and keeps you from serving the Lord, something is drastically wrong. **In the mind of God, family business must never become more important than the Lord's business.**

When Jesus Christ was here on earth, He would have never won the Jim Dobson "Focus on the Family" man-of-the-year award. Jesus Christ would have never been asked to speak at a family enrichment seminar. He would have never been asked to give a father or mother's day address in any church. In fact, most people would think what He says about family and family relationships is very disturbing. **Because to Jesus Christ, the matter of real kinship with God was not a matter of flesh and blood.**

Jesus Christ was not interested in coming up with some 10- or 12-step program for getting the family to operate in a non-dysfunctional way. In fact, He actually said to one guy who wanted to go to the funeral of his own father, "follow me and allow the dead to bury their own dead" (Matt. 8:22).

He shocked the religious world in His day because everything He did and said was totally contrary to the way these people thought and frankly, I don't think things are much different today.

There are many people who put family above God. In fact, most people do. If given a choice between family and God, family wins. If given a choice between a family gathering and a church gathering, God loses. If given a choice to sacrificially give to the Lord or to the children, God ends up short-changed. In fact, there are church marketing strategies that are designed to promote and elevate the family, not necessarily to reverently elevate God.

Now Jesus was not anti-family. He is God and He designed the family. **But a biological family will always be secondary in God's mind to His spiritual family. Jesus' family members were those who believed in Him, loved Him, loved the Word and followed Him.** That family was more significant to Him than His own biological family who thought "he had lost His senses" (Mark 3:21).

What Jesus teaches is this:

THOSE WHO PUT CHRIST FIRST IN THEIR LIVES AND LOVE HIM AND HIS WORD AND SEEK TO OBEY IT ARE THOSE WHO ARE HIS TRUE FAMILY.

In the mind of Jesus Christ, spiritual relationships take priority over human relationships.

Sometimes a commitment to Jesus Christ and a real desire to understand and apply God's Word can actually split biological families. Jesus Himself said, "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came 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 man's enemies will be the members of his household. He who loves father and mother more than Me is not worthy of Me and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me" (Matt. 10:34-37).

If you take a stand for truth, you may discover you are standing against some of your own family members. God expects us to stand for truth, no matter what the cost. He expects us to defend what is sound and true, even if other family members don't agree. That is what Jesus taught.

Now Jesus Christ was for the family. Paul said in I Timothy 5:8 that a man was to work to provide for his family and there are multiple passages that teach how a husband is to relate to his wife, how a wife is to relate to her husband and how both are to relate to the children. There is even instruction as to how children are to relate to their fathers and mothers.

However, **Jesus Christ never taught a family first at all cost philosophy. What Jesus Christ taught was a God first at all cost philosophy.** Never is that point more vivid than here in this text.

Now let's set the context. According to **verse 21**, the family of Jesus had traveled to Capernaum to take custody of Jesus because they thought He was out of His mind. The distance from Nazareth to Capernaum is about 25 miles.

As we come to **verse 31**, we learn that His mother and brothers arrived to Peter's house in Capernaum.

Now of course Jesus' mother's name was Mary. What is somewhat odd about this is that Mary, above all people on earth, specifically knew who Jesus was. Unless she has some form of dementia, there is no way she could forget about what happened to her when she got pregnant and ultimately delivered Him as a baby in Bethlehem.

She had been a virgin, who was told by Gabriel that she would have a baby by the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:31, 35). She was well aware that He was the Jewish Messiah because an angel named Gabriel showed up and told her that (Luke 1:31-35). Furthermore, when she gave birth to Jesus, shepherds came to her and told her how angels appeared to them and revealed that her baby was the Savior and Messiah and the Lord (Luke 2:11-12, 15-17). Mary had treasured those things in her heart. Then when she took Jesus to the Temple to be circumcised, Simeon took the baby into his arms and said I can die in peace because My eyes have seen the Savior who will be a light to the Gentiles and the glory of Israel (Luke 2:29-32).

We must assume that she could never forget that. She must have known that Jesus was not your average child. In fact, she was the one who asked Jesus to turn water into wine at a wedding (John 2:3-10).

I am not certain about Mary's faith at this point. It is possible that she was a little confused about His identity because her other children were a bunch of skeptics. We do know that she traveled with the brothers to get him here and those relatives were saying, "He has lost His senses." We also know that at the wedding where Jesus turned water into wine, Jesus addressed her as "Woman."

We learn from **verse 31** that Jesus' brothers came also. We know from **Mark 6:3** and Matthew 13:55 that Jesus' brothers names were James, Joses (*Joseph*), Judas, and Simon. We also learn from Matthew 13:56 that Jesus had sisters. In fact, some manuscripts include his sisters in this account.

Since His mother Mary is with the brothers, some assume that His whole family showed up at this house, brothers and sisters. However, the text says it was the brothers with Mary. **This family is here not because they believe in Him, but they are there because they oppose Him. John 7:5 says, "for not even his brothers were believing in Him."** The truth is they are there to oppose the will of God because they do not believe in Him.

So Jesus is in a context of people opposing Him. The Pharisees are against Him; the Scribes from Jerusalem are against Him (3:22-30) and now His own family members come and they are against Him. **Their objective in coming to Him is not to honor and worship Him; it is to take Him back home because they think He has had some mental breakdown.**

Verse 31 says that when the family got there, they were standing outside and they sent word to Him and were continually calling Him. Probably due to the size of the crowd, they could not get into the house, so they called out to Him. **They are really presuming on their relationship with Jesus Christ because they don't realize who He actually is.**

Now the preposition “to” (sent word **to** Him) is a preposition (pros) that carries with it the idea of a near, face to face association (Dana & Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, p. 110). **This preposition is used to show that these brothers of Jesus saw themselves on the same level with Him. They saw themselves as being His equal.**

But in contrast to His biological family who is outside calling, **verse 32** informs us there was a crowd inside sitting and listening to Him teach. The crowd on the inside had been with Him and thought He was a wonderful teacher. They had left their own homes and had followed Him from place to place, even up a mountain because they believed in Him.

So on the inside you have people who really believed in Him and loved to hear Him teach and on the outside you have His biological family who thinks He is nuts and want to take Him home because they think He is out of His mind.

Verse 32 says that the crowd informed Jesus that His mother and brothers were outside looking for Him. I understand the language to mean that many of the crowds were telling Him that His family was outside.

Now if you are a famous individual, most people want to get a look at your family to see what they look like. Probably Jesus had some of His mother's features, as did His other brothers and sisters and the people would want to see His family. Many famous people will go to great lengths to see to it that their families are kept out of the limelight because people want to see them.

I am certain that most people in this crowd were curious and would certainly want to meet His mother and brothers. **But here is the problem, His mother and brothers were not committed to Him, like the group sitting before Him.**

So when Jesus is told by the crowd that His mother and brothers are outside, what Jesus does next would be a shock to the Jewish world. In fact, what He does here would be a shock to most in our world. As we said, He would not be invited as a guest speaker for a “Focus on the Family” conference rally.

According to **verse 33**, Jesus responded to the crowd and said, “Who are My mother and brothers.” A. B. Bruce said this appears to be “harsh question.” By the way, as one theologian points out, this question is a real slap in the face to the Roman Catholic Church, who places such a great emphasis on Mary. Mary was nothing more than a sinner who needed a Savior, like everyone else did. Jesus is not giving her high accolades here that promote some elevation of Mary. In fact, he is elevating the women in the room more than his own mother.

According to **verse 34**, He “looked about” at those sitting around Him. The participle “looked about” (peri-blepo) means He carefully and very perceptively looked around at everyone sitting round Him. He took a very personal look at everyone in that room and He says, “I am looking at My family.” My real family is sitting in this room because they are here because they believe in Me and they want Me to teach them God’s Word. Matthew adds that He gestured with His hands that those sitting there were His family (Matt. 12:49).

According to **verse 35**, Jesus took it a step further when He opens it up to “whoever,” not just those sitting in that house. He says whoever does the will of God is my family. They are My close relatives. They are My brothers and sisters and mother. **We know from John 6:40 that the will of God is that a person believes on Him for eternal life. So Jesus is saying whoever believes on Me and wants to take in the Word of God is My true family.**

Now in the Hebrew world this was shocking. The Jews place a heavy emphasis on family sticking together. We know from a text like Mark 7:9-13 that Jesus promoted the highest standards of honoring father and mother. In fact, He rebuked those religious leaders who had invented some way to skirt around this.

But having said that, He also said that our relationship with Jesus Christ takes precedence over every earthly relationship and people dedicated to Jesus Christ sometimes must stand against their own family members.

Jesus would later say that whoever has left brothers, sisters, mother or father or even children to do His will, will inherit 100 times as much not only here, but also in the age to come (Mark 10:29-31).

Now it is quite apparent that we are lacking this kind of commitment with most people today. Truth is most people are far more dedicated to their children and earthly families than they are to Jesus Christ and His Church. What is happening today with most people is, as one writer said, a form of “domestic idolatry.” There is a form of family narcissism that is being promoted today even in churches, which is exclusive to one’s own family. But you need to know this. **When you leave this world, the relationship that will truly count the most will be the one you had with Jesus Christ.** No one will ever regret a commitment to Jesus Christ, the Word of God and the Church of God. But if you put your family above these things, you will regret it forever.

The church of God should be a refugee camp, in which people come who love the Lord and love the Word. These are true people of God who are separated from and even rejected by other family members for their commitment. Well, those who are rejected are in good company. They are in the company of Jesus Christ.

When you come to faith in Jesus Christ, you come into a new family, the family of God, and when you go to a church dedicated to the Word of God, you enter into a new family sphere. When you think like Jesus Christ, His spiritual family takes precedence over every other family. Our shared commitment to Jesus Christ and His Word takes precedence over any biological relationship.

There is a touching story in church history that illustrates this perfectly. It is in the memoirs of Perpetua, which are said to have been written in her own hand. Perpetua was a young 22-year-old, newly married girl with a baby. She was a strong Christian who refused to sacrifice for “the welfare of the emperors” during the African persecution in Carthage, in A.D. 203. As a result, she was arrested. Her father wrote her a letter, pleading with her not to hold to her Christian commitment:

“Daughter have pity on my grey head—have pity on me your father, if I deserve to be called your father, if I have favored you above all your brothers, if I have raised you to reach this prime of your life. Do not abandon me to the reproach of men, think of your brothers, think of your mother, and your aunt, think of your child, who will not be able to love while you are gone. Give up your pride! You will destroy all of us! None of us will ever be able to speak freely again if anything happens to you.”

Her father went to see her to beg her to turn from Christianity. The last time he saw her he kissed her hand and wept. She would not turn from her faith.

She was hauled into a coliseum in Carthage, and a gladiator slit her throat and she was killed. She rejected the pleas of her own biological family and she was executed for her faith in Jesus Christ. Her commitment to Jesus Christ meant more to her than her own biological family.

Now most of us will not be asked to make this kind of decision to lay our physical lives on the line for Jesus Christ. But this text certainly challenges us to never permit our family to take priority over our relationship with Him. I fear for many people.

Some will use their family as an excuse for not coming to church, not giving to the church and not serving in the church. We all need to know this, there will come a day when time on this earth will run out and we will be in the presence of Jesus Christ. At that moment we will never regret sacrifices we made for Him.

There are seven clear marks that you may look for to determine you are part of Christ’s family:

- 1) The birth mark—born again.
- 2) The book mark—love the Scriptures.
- 3) The bended knee mark—pray and talk to God.
- 4) The body mark—love to go to church and be with the body of Christ.
- 5) The blossom mark—desire to grow in grace and knowledge of the Lord.
- 6) The benefit mark—love to use gifts and abilities to benefit others in church.
- 7) The benevolent mark—love to generously give to the work of God.

This passage is great news for any who come from any family. You can have a close family relationship with Jesus Christ, regardless of how functional or dysfunctional your biological family may be. If you will believe in Jesus Christ and purpose to understand and apply His Word and put Him first in your life, you will forever be honored by God.