

Mark: Jesus' Family

Mark 3:31-35

By [Dr. Derek Thomas](#)

May 2, 2004

Turn with me to the gospel of Mark and we come to the section at the very close of chapter 3. Last Lord's Day evening we were looking at the so-called blasphemy against the Holy Spirit which ends there in verse 30. We pick it up this evening in verse 31. Before we read the Scripture together, let's look to God in prayer.

Once again, O Lord, we bow in Your presence. We need Your help even as we read and try to study the Scriptures together. Come, Holy Spirit, and illuminate these words to our minds and understanding and heart and affections and will. And may all the glory be Yours, for Jesus' sake we ask it. Amen. Hear the word of God.

Mark 3:31-35:

Then His mother (that is, Jesus' mother) and His brothers arrived, and standing outside they sent word to Him and called Him. 32A crowd was sitting around Him, and they said to Him, 'Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are outside looking for You.' 33Answering them, He said, 'Who are My mother and My brothers?' 34Looking about at those who were sitting around Him, He said, 'Behold My mother and My brothers! 35For whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother.'

Amen. May God bless to us the reading of His holy and inerrant word. This morning Ligon delightfully reminded us of those verses at the end of 3 John, that we are to greet the friends by name. He issued an impossible challenge that we were to be familiar with everybody's name. Some of you know to my shame and consternation...you've met me in a store somewhere and I'm sorry I couldn't remember your name. It's a beautiful, beautiful picture of the church. I grew up as a many of you...I grew up in a dysfunctional family. My parents were coming apart at the seams in my teenage years. I would never want to be a teenager again. The church is my family. I still love my family, you understand, but in many respects the church is my family.

I think I've told you this before. I remember the time when I walked into a meeting for the very first time, a meeting where there were Christians; they were all roughly my age. It was a meeting at the Christian Union at the university. They were studying a passage of Scripture; they were meeting for the purposes of prayer. And I remember thinking to myself—it was a strong, strong sensation. It was 30 years ago and more but I remember it as though it were yesterday. I remember thinking, 'These are my brothers and sisters and mothers.'

Jesus is still inside this house, the house that's been referred to back in verse 20. He went home. This is in Capernaum. It's more than likely Peter's house. If you go to Capernaum today, there is a monstrosity of a church built on the site of Peter's house. The remains of Peter's house you can see underneath but some architect has gone berserk and built the monstrosity of an edifice on top of Peter's house. It's the house where Jesus had healed Peter's mother-in-law. It's also the house, by the way, that has a hole in the roof where four men had torn apart the roof and let down that man who couldn't walk, that paralytic, and Jesus healed him and sent him home.

Jesus has just made this statement in response to the religious police of Jerusalem that "All manner of blasphemies will be forgiven the sons of men but blasphemy against the Holy Spirit cannot be forgiven," that there is an unforgivable sin, a deliberate act of resisting, belittling the work of the Holy Spirit so grievously that He withdraws, withdraws His convicting and enabling power so that we're never able to repent and be forgiven. It's a solemn, solemn word we were looking at last Sunday evening. Jesus is still inside this house. I'm sure you could've heard a pin drop when He uttered those words. I'm sure it puzzled the first hearers as it still puzzles many of you and myself. And Jesus' family has gathered outside the house. They are the ones, you remember, who had been making accusations in verse 21: "When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, 'He is out of his mind.'" They were calling him mad, his whole family, and they send word. They can't get inside. The place is full of people. They cannot get through the doors. They send someone, a messenger; word is passed along to Jesus, 'Your family are outside and they want You.' In middle eastern society families were hugely important. And Jesus utters this bombshell.

I. Jesus had a family.

I want us to see three things. First of all, that Jesus had a family. That's a fairly obvious, commonplace point but it needs to be expanded a little. Jesus had a family. He had a mother. He had a father—well, a *father figure*, Joseph. He had brothers and sisters. Well, that's more startling than you might expect. There's been a traditional belief in the church going back to the Council of Constantinople, and ratified and codified in the Lateran Council of the seventh century, of the perpetual virginity of Mary, that Jesus was born of the virgin Mary

and she remained a virgin until she was taken and assumed into the very presence of God—a longstanding belief, the perpetual virginity of Mary.

Now, family—if you turn to chapter 6 and verse 3, there's an accusation that's going to be made and it's going to be made by folk from Nazareth, when Jesus is in the synagogue and they say, “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?” Roman Catholics have long argued that these are cousins and not brothers and sisters of the flesh, or perhaps that Joseph was a widow and when he was betrothed and eventually married to Mary he brought these children along with Him so that they are half-brothers, if you like, step brothers of Jesus.

Where is Joseph here? There's no mention of Joseph. He's nowhere in the story. He doesn't mention him in verse 34 when He mentions, “Here are my mother and my brothers.” He mentions sisters but He doesn't mention a father, and in all likelihood Joseph died before the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. The gospels make no record of it. There is an apocryphal document, the story of Joseph the Carpenter, that says that Joseph lived until he was a 111. There's another document of some antiquity that says Joseph was 90 when he died. We have no comment to make about those. He's not here. More than likely Joseph has died. He's not in the picture anymore. Jesus would have related to Him as a father figure, learned the skills of carpentry as He grew up as a boy.

There's Mary, brothers and sisters. Protestants have never balked at the idea of folk like James and Jude and they are brothers of Jesus. Two of the New Testament authors are brothers of Jesus. In that passage in Matthew chapter 13, and the parallel that I've just read in Mark chapter 6, it says, “Is not this the carpenter; the son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not His sisters—?” Now Matthew says, “Are not *all* of His sisters?” And *all* means there's more than two of them, otherwise it would say “both of His sisters.” The grammar is very precise. So there are at least three sisters and there are at least 4 brothers. I'm not sure that we think of Jesus growing up in a family of at least eight children. He knows what it is to relate to family.

Let me elaborate on this just along two different lines of thought. Jesus has a family—What does it mean? It means that we do not have a high priest who cannot be touched with a feeling of our infirmities. He knows what it is to live in a family. He knows what it is to live in a family where there's tension. And there is tension in this family: They don't believe Jesus. They're accusing Him of being mad, his brothers, sisters. Now we'll leave Mary out of it for now, but at least His brothers and sisters think He's mad. This is a family where there are some tensions, to put it mildly. There are some problems here. And Jesus knows what it is to live in a family context of relating to siblings, relating to those who we dearly love with whom sometimes we don't get along, don't understand us, who may accuse us falsely. I don't know about you but I find that to be enormously

comforting that Jesus understands family troubles. Some of you this week, I know some of you this week have experienced family trouble: a brother, a sister, tension, accusations. And this passage is saying, 'Take it to Jesus.' "Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere? You should never be discouraged; take it to the Lord in prayer." Jesus grew up in a family. He grew up in a family where there were problems. He grew up in a family where there was tension because of who He was, because of who He claimed to be.

But the relationship with His family was unusual too. I want to expand that thought. It was an unusual relationship that He had with His family. Look at what He says in verse 33. This incident—the family are outside; word gets inside, "Your family are outside." And Jesus says, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" Now those are pretty shocking words. They would have been startling. They would have been offensive to some in a middle-eastern context where family was very important; and those of us here who live in Mississippi and Jackson, we can relate to that. Family is still important. It's still a mark of our identity and we're proud of it and we love that. It led to a heresy. These words of Jesus, they led to a later heresy. The Ebionites suggested that Jesus wasn't fully human.

Do you see that what Jesus is saying is that, 'I don't really have a physical, earthly mother' or 'I don't really have physical, earthly brothers and sisters because I'm not fully human.' Imagine Mary hearing these words. I don't know whether Mary is outside and listening to this. Probably, my instinct tells me that she wasn't. The brothers and sisters were sent to do this job, and the brothers especially...and I don't know maybe sisters, maybe they had more influence over Jesus or they thought they had. Imagine Mary hearing these words. Imagine her son who she had grown to believe that He truly was the Messiah. She knew that He had been conceived virginally and imagine the shock now, the bond between a mother and son and the son saying not in private, you understand, but in public. You know when you send your children to Mrs. Manners, that course that they do here? I don't know what it is called but you know what I am talking about. You don't expect them to teach this sort of thing. To think of mothers in this way there would be shame. She'd be embarrassed. She'd blush at the very thought when somebody would report, 'You know what your son said, "Who is my mother?"' Maybe she would shed a tear or two.

No one ever loved His mother more than Jesus. In the final hours of His life, when it would have excusable for Jesus to have been so preoccupied with his Messianic task of dying in the place of sinners, you remember that sweet, tender moment when he speaks to John, beloved John, and He says to Mary His mother, "Behold your son"? And to John, "Behold your mother"? The tenderness of it, the thoughtfulness of it, the pathos of it, the sadness of it—no one ever loved His mother more than Jesus did.

But His relationship to God, His calling to be the Savior of sinners was more important to Him than even these earthly relationships. He didn't put family first:

He was the divine Messiah first. His call to be obedient to His Father came first and everything else, even His relationship to His mother, came second.

There's a word there: We can make a religion of our family. We can make a religion of our children and what we think of as their needs and their wants. And here is Jesus and He's saying, "Who is my mother?" You remember in the first miracle—? It's not in Mark's gospel but it's in John's gospel in the wedding. Maybe a relative...and Mary's been invited to the wedding in Cana of Galilee, not a long way away from Nazareth...maybe a cousin. Great festivity of a wedding celebration, and you remember the wine runs out and Mary goes to Jesus and tells Him the wine has run out? You remember His response? "Woman," He says, "Woman, what is this to do with Me?" Now you don't call your mother, "woman"...not unless you're on the other end of a telephone. You don't do that.

What's going on? In John there's something very specific going on. It's an echo of words that you find in the opening of Genesis, "The seed of the woman will crush the head of Satan." Jesus is the seed of the woman and we're meant to pick that motif up. There's something strange and different going on here. The point is that His family didn't believe in Him. They hadn't, apart from Mary, embraced Him and His claim to be the Son of God. And Jesus is putting His office and He's putting His mission and He's putting His calling on our behalf, *on our behalf*, first and foremost. Jesus had a family.

II. Jesus creates a new family.

But then in the second place, Jesus creates a new family. He creates a new family. He says this extraordinary thing. He looks about at those who sat around Him. Imagine the scene. There's a hush. There's been a hush because of the words about the blasphemy about the Holy Spirit but now there's a different kind of hush, a shock that Jesus is saying He doesn't have a mother and He doesn't have brothers and He doesn't have sisters and they're standing outside. And He looks about at the faces that are sitting before Him in this house, Peter's house in Capernaum by the side of the Sea of Galilee, and He says, "Here are My mother and My brothers."

It's an extraordinary thing. He's doing the unthinkable, you see. He's starting a new family, a new holy people without regard for precious family bonds. There's a different kind of family. You had in Israel in Jesus' day a religious covenantal sense of belonging. If you were a descendant of Abraham, your religion would be Jewish. If you're Irish, you're considered to be Roman Catholic. If you're from Iran, you're considered to be a Muslim. If you're a good Indian, then you're considered to be a Hindu. Jesus is tearing all that apart and He's saying, 'This is My family. This is My family, My mother, My brothers. Our relationship is now more meaningful, more substantial than the bonds, the genetic bonds of physical family relationships. The Holy Spirit comes into the hearts and lives of men and

women as the spirit of sonship, the spirit of adoption witnessing “with our spirits that we are the children of God; and if children then heirs, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ,” so that Jesus is our elder brother. “He’s not ashamed,” the book of Hebrews says, “to call us brothers.” We’re in a family. We’re in a household where Jesus is the elder brother. He is the vine; we are branches. We have this union; we have this fellowship. We come to God and we call Him “Abba, Father”—not even *Jehovah*, not even *Yahweh*, not even *the Holy One*, but “Abba, Father,” this distinctive new covenant name. We belong to a distinctive society more precious than the golf club, more precious than the college fraternity, more precious than a professional society. It’s God’s family. It’s my family. It’s your family if you have faith in Jesus Christ. And outside of this house there are blood relatives who think Jesus is slightly nutty. And He says, ‘They’re not my family. *These* are my family. *These* are my mother. *These* are my brothers. *These* are my sisters.’

It’s shocking even to us, isn’t it, a little? We try to put ourselves in that context and imagine our own family to be outside of the house, a family that doesn’t believe, a family that doesn’t have faith in Jesus Christ and, ‘This is our family. These are our brothers. These are our sisters.’

I was telling a group of men at the Twin Lakes Fellowship just a couple of weeks ago, I read Calvin’s *Institutes* as a student because every student, every theological student who is worth anything has read Calvin’s *Institutes*. They don’t dare come into my office and say, “I’ve never read Calvin’s *Institutes*.” They can’t cross the threshold of the door. And I remember reading Calvin’s *Institutes* as a student and being shocked by something that I found then...not shocked anymore but I was shocked then. And this is what he said, ‘No one can have God as his Father who doesn’t have the church as his mother.’ Yeah, I can see you’re not swallowing it as you should. I understand that you need to go with it a little. It sounds somewhat medieval. It sounds a little Roman Catholic perhaps. But Calvin is saying that something about the church, the fellowship of God’s people, the bond that unites believers together that is altogether precious. It’s like the relationship that we might have with our mothers.

You know, following Jesus has cost many a Christian their relationship with their earthly families. I know of Roman Catholics in Ireland who have been ostracized. They have never been allowed back into their families again. They’re not invited at Christmastime. They have been disinherited for leaving the fold and embracing Christ. I’ve met them. We read all the time of Muslims in similar circumstances where there is severe persecution. Men, women who claim to believe in Jesus, who own Him as Lord and Savior and their family disowns them, disinherits them.

You know there’s an example of this very thing that Mark would have been familiar with. Mark records the story at the end of the gospel. He records the story of Simon of Cyrene who carries the cross of Jesus through the streets of Jerusalem. And Mark says here, “Two sons” and one of those sons was a man

by the name of Rufus, and the name Rufus...and the assumption is that it's the same Rufus, and it is an assumption, but the name crops up again at the end of Romans. And Paul tell us at that very end of Romans something interesting. "Salute Rufus, the chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine," Paul says. This is a very, very interesting statement. When Paul became a Christian his family disinherited Him. He was ostracized by his family when he became a Christian. He was no longer welcomed in his own family, and it's interesting in his epistle to the Romans that he talks about Rufus's mother as being his mother, that there's a bond that has now developed in Christ that is far stronger than any earthly bond, any physical bond, any genetic bond.

Those of you who grow up in Christian families you're struggling to understand this—I know that. But those of you who've grown up in non-Christian families, and when you became a Christian it cost you something and your families thought that you were a little bit crazy and that you needed to see a psychiatrist perhaps, you understand what it is that's going on here when Jesus says, "This is my mother. These are my mothers. These are my brothers. These are my sisters.'

III. Jesus defines His family.

And then Jesus defines His family. There's one more point and that is that Jesus defines His true family. And do you notice what He says, verse 35, "For whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother." It would be interesting to do a little test. Get a paper and pencil, no peering, not asking your neighbor and the question is: "If you haven't read this verse and I was to ask you 'what defines a member of the family of God?' What do you think Jesus would say?" And I think most of us would think Jesus would say, 'He who believes in me is my mother and brother and sister.' But that's not what He says. "Whoever does the will of God."

What's the mark of somebody who belongs to the family of God? What are the distinctive marks? Well, it's this, "They do the will of God," Jesus says. What does that involve? Have we come to Christ? Let's start there. Have we come to Christ? Have we repented of our sins? Have we come with empty hands? "Nothing in my hands I bring simply to Thy cross I cling." Have we done that? Have we come to Jesus "just as I am without one plea but that Thy blood was shed for me, and that Thou bids me come to Thee. O Lamb of God, I come."

Have we done that? Have we been obedient to that command to come to Jesus Christ in faith and in repentance? To take Him as our Lord and Savior, as our prophet and priest and king? Have we done that? "I heard the voice of Jesus say, 'Come unto Me and rest. Lay down, thou weary one, lay down thy head upon My breast.' I came to Jesus as I was, weary and worn and sad. I found in Him a resting place and He has made me glad." Have we come to Jesus as He bids us come to Him, with empty hands—not the doings of the law, not the trappings or

our self-righteousness but taking Him and Him alone as our Lord and Savior and prophet and priest and king?

But it's even more than that because Jesus says, 'My mother, My brother, My sister is the one whose life is marked by a serious, conscientious attempt to obey My Father in Heaven.' We utter those words, "Thy will be done on earth as it is Heaven." We seek to be poor in spirit, to mourn over our sins, to be meek, to hunger and thirst after righteousness, to be merciful, to be pure in heart, to be peacemakers, to rejoice in tribulation, to seek to be reconciled to our brother quickly. We'd cut off hands if necessary. We'd pluck out right eyes if they offend Him. We'd seek to love our enemies, to go the second mile to turn the other cheek. Our "yea" is *yea*; our "nay" is *nay*. We'd go into the secret place and pour out our hearts before the Lord. We don't judge harshly or self-righteously. We don't speak about specks in our brother's eyes when there's a big plank sticking out of our own eyes. Is there an obedience in you because of what God has done for you in Jesus Christ that you want to give yourself entirely to Him? "All to Jesus I surrender, all to Jesus I freely give." We don't do so perfectly but we want to do so. There's a resolve to do so. We desire to do so. Everyday we say, 'Not my will, not my will, but *Thy will* be done.' Jesus says, 'Whoever does the will of God, that's my mother; that's my brother; that's my sister.' These are the marks of those who belong to Jesus family.

Do you belong to Jesus family tonight? Do you belong to the household of God? Are these your brothers and sisters more precious to you than any other relationship in all the world? May God make it so. May He write that assurance upon your hearts. Let's pray together.

Our Father, in Heaven, we thank You for the enormous privilege that we may call You "Father." We thank You for the bonds—family bonds, spiritual bonds—that unite us together as brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. Oh, call those who are here who are strangers to You. Give them no rest until they find that rest which is to be found in Christ and in Him alone. And hear us for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Please stand and receive the Lord's benediction. Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

A Guide to the Evening Service

The Theme of the Service

We begin with a great Psalm! It contains the thought that one day in the courts of God is better than a thousand spent elsewhere. Meditate on that as you worship and ask God to make it so for you tonight!

The Missions Report

From time to time in our evening services, we hear from missionaries supported by our church. We trust that these communications are informational and inspirational. Tonight, we hear from Scott DeVries of PCA MTW (our denomination's missions sending agency).

The Psalm, Hymns and Spiritual Songs

O Lord of Hosts, How Lovely

Psalm 84 contains a beautiful and haunting picture. It was alluded to in our recent production of the Brahms *Requiem*. It is of a swallow who in the days of the Temple could fly to parts where no ordinary worshiper could ever go! The ritual allowed for the High priest to enter the Holy of Holies once a year with the blood of sacrifice. Even then, a rope was tied around his ankle lest he collapse and no one could enter and retrieve him. At least they could pull him out! But the swallow could fly in and make a nest on the altar of God! And no doubt it happened. Perhaps one of the Levitical tribe who worked in the temple noticed each springtime a pair of swallows flying in and out with bits of twig and feather, building a nest somewhere inside. The longing to come that close to God is something the New Testament answers: through faith in Jesus Christ.

Day Is Dying in the West

This evening song of praise to the holy triune God has been a favorite of American Christians. It was always the opening hymn of the Sunday evening service at Chautauqua (the famous New York Christian summer retreat center) for many, many years. The first stanza calls us to praise as darkness falls. The second stanza asks that the Lord Himself, the Light of light, would ascend in our hearts even as darkness descends outside. The final stanza anticipates the final night and the eternal morning that follows. All end with a doxology.

How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds

This is my favorite hymn in the hymnbook—come to think of it, in all of hymnody! I have loved it from the first moment I heard it as a believer in 1971. Written by John Newton, it says all that can be said about his love for Jesus Christ. We'll sing the first stanza before the children's devotional.

All The Way My Savior Leads Me

A favorite hymn by someone (Fanny Crosby) who knew what it meant to trust in God through a lifetime of hardship and handicap. As we sing this hymn this evening, we should spare a thought for those around us who are passing through great trials and tribulations. It is a call for renewed faith in the overruling providence of God in our lives. "I will trust Him no matter what...."

The Sermon

This is a special text for the preacher tonight! I have told many of you before how, at the age of eighteen, I became a Christian, having lived my entire life up until that point outside of the organized church. Walking into church for the very first time after being converted was, for me, like meeting a family I had never known. The church became dearer to me than anything else. From that moment onwards, I loved the church as I would my own family.

Tonight's passage is an insight into Jesus' family and His relationship with them. In the previous passage (which we looked at last week), His own family had accused Him of being mad! But this passage also signals to us how we may join this family. What are the marks of belonging to the family of God? Paul will elaborate on this truth, talking of the doctrine of adoption and referring to the Holy Spirit as "the Spirit of sonship" (Romans 8:15). "Whoever does God's will is My brother and sister and mother" Jesus says. But what does it mean to do God's will? That's the theme of our sermon tonight.

A Note about Sermons at First Presbyterian

At First Presbyterian Church, all of the messages are what is called "expository sermons," that is, the main idea and application(s) of the sermon are drawn out of the text of Scripture. This insures that God's wisdom, not man's, is the centerpiece of our public proclamation. Generally (though not exclusively), we preach straight through Bible books. Sermon tapes/CDs are available (individually or in sets) from the church library or via the website at <www.fpcjackson.org>.

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