

FAMILY REDEFINED

Pastor Lucas Almeida—Central Baptist Church—November 6th, 2022

TEXT

Mark 3:31-35

(ESV)

[31] And his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him. [32] And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you.” [33] And he answered them, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” [34] And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! [35] For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.”

INTRODUCTION

How important is family for you? Would you say that family is the most important thing in your life? We often hear that the breakdown of the family has been the demise of our society. Our society is failing because families are failing, because fathers are absent. But is the breakdown of the family the cause of a society in decline or is it the result of it?

A 2017 survey conducted by the website statista.com asked over 1000 Americans the question, “How important is family in your life?” Sixty percent of those surveyed answered, “Family is the most important aspect of my life.”

The answer was expected, wasn't it? It feels right to answer that family is the most important aspect of our lives, but should it be? Undoubtedly family is very important, but should it top the list of those things that are most important for us.

Friends, as important as family is, Jesus is more important. And a right relationship with Jesus will right our own perspectives on our families. In our passage for today, Jesus challenges this narrative that family is ultimate. But Jesus' challenge is not for us to love family less, but instead for us to love family more! How? By holding him as supreme in our hearts. Jesus calls us to love him above all other things, so we can love all other things more.

REVIEW

The Gospel of Mark opens with John the Baptist as the forerunner of the long-awaited messiah, Jesus Christ. Jesus encounters John, his cousin, in the Jordan River, where he is baptized. And Jesus' baptism is the inauguration of his three-year ministry on earth.

The heart of Jesus' preaching is found in **Mark 1:15**, “...repent and believe in the gospel.” But instead of focusing on the content of Jesus' preaching, Mark focuses on Jesus' actions. The Greek word ‘*euthus*,’ meaning immediately appears in the book 47 times, making it a fast paced, event-oriented book.

Jesus' Home—Capernaum

Jesus' ministry begins in the city of Capernaum. A city by the Sea of Galilee. Capernaum was an important city. It was a crossroads in the northern territory of Israel. It was wealthy and godless. Far from Jerusalem, the spiritual center of Israel, Capernaum was a city filled with dead religion. In Capernaum Jesus lived in Peter's and Andrew's house.

Jesus' Friends—The religious outsiders

Jesus did not associate with the religious class much at all. His twelve disciples were men of trade. Many of them fishermen who were just part of the regular commerce of the city.

But not only were his associates not in the high religious echelon, but many of them were actually ostracized and rejected by the religious insiders. Jesus associates with Levi, the tax collector, delivers the demon possessed, he heals the leper. Jesus is known as the friend of sinners.

Religious Opposition—The Scribes and the Pharisees

These associations drove the religious community crazy. Jesus didn't fit their pre-conceptions of the Messiah. They didn't have a category for someone who could be holy and associate with the unholy at the same time. For them, the Kingdom of God would come through religious discipline, so, they created laws around the Law, which completely obscured the purpose of God's Law to begin with. but Jesus taught love that leads to repentance.

Spiritual Opposition—Satan and his demons

Primarily, Jesus' opposition took place in the spiritual realm. After his baptism Jesus is led by the Spirit to the wilderness where he is tempted by the Devil. The Devil had success leading every man to fall into sin from the time Adam and Even fell in the garden. But Jesus resisted Satan, and for the first time Satan meets a man who does not fall for his lies and his deception. Jesus is the strong man who bound stand and plundered his goods.

Not only did Jesus face off with Satan, he often faced off with his minions. Every time a demon saw Jesus, they screamed. Only the demons recognized Jesus for who he was, the Son of God. No man will recognize Jesus' true identity, not even his disciples, until after Jesus is crucified. A Roman centurial would see Jesus die on the cross and say, "Truly this is the Son of God. Jesus never allowed demons to speak or reveal his true identity.

Today, we see Jesus facing a different kind of opposition. This hits closer to home, literally. His family opposes him.

JESUS' NATURAL FAMILY

In verse 31 we meet Jesus' natural family, his mother and his brothers. We had heard of them in verse 21 a couple of months back, but now they're back. Because Mark does not have a birth narrative or any information on Jesus' life before his baptism, this is the first time we meet his family. And the way Mark paints Jesus' natural family is not positive.

Notice the irony. Usually, the house is a place for the family, and crowds stay outside. But here, Jesus' family is standing outside the house while the crowd is inside with Jesus.

Notice also that Jesus' family doesn't even have the ability to enter the house. They have to send someone in to call for Jesus. They have no access to Jesus, and no motivation to try to reach him themselves.

In chapter 2 we met four friends, filled with faith who were willing to remove the roof of Peter's house in order to lower their paralytic friend in order to have Jesus heal him. But Jesus' family stands outside, apart from Jesus.

Notice also that Jesus' family is seeking Jesus. On face value this might seem insignificant, but the word 'to seek' (*zêteó*) is used 10 times in the gospel of Mark. All of them in relationship to Jesus. Nine out of ten times the word is used negatively (1:37, 3:32, 8:11-12, 11:18, 12:12, 13:1, 14:55). With the exception of the women seeking for Jesus in the empty tomb (Mark 16:6), for Mark to seek Jesus is the wrong thing to do.

In the gospels, the emphasis is not that Christ came to be sought, the emphasis is that Christ came to seek. Those who seek Christ out of a desire to build their own kingdom will not find him. But those who seek him, rather, those who are sought by him, may have every assurance that they will find him.

God is seeking those who will worship him in spirit and truth. Christ is the one who came to seek and save the lost. The most important question is not, "Are you seeking Christ," but, "Is Christ seeking you."

I think this interaction between Jesus and his family, or better put, this lack of interaction, is a reminder that even blood is not thicker than faith. The warning here is that we should place no confidence in any natural means to explain our relationship with Christ.

Like Jesus' family, we could believe ourselves to be entitled to Jesus' attention. He has to hear me; he could never reject me. And yet, Christ owes us nothing. Only grace can give us access to Christ.

We could often buy into lies, don't we? Perhaps we can trust in our Christian upbringing, or in the fact that we come from a long family tradition of believers. But friends, these are temporal things. They cannot be the foundation of our confidence that Christ is our

brother. On the contrary, when family becomes ultimate for us, family becomes a hinderance to follow Christ.

In a similar account in the gospel of Luke, Jesus tells those around him,

Luke 14:26—*“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.”*

Jesus knew the difference between that which is eternal and that which is temporal. And as much as our natural families may be precious to us, when our devotion to them rivals our devotion to Christ, our love of family becomes idolatrous.

And what is idolatry? Idolatry is anything that takes the place of Christ in our hearts.

In the book **Pilgrim’s Progress**, after Christian, the main character learns from Evangelist the direction of the Eternal City, here’s what happens.

“At this, Christian begins to run. As he is near his house, he is seen by his wife and children, who run after him, calling out to him to return and not leave them destitute. Christian does not look back, puts his fingers in his ears to keep from hearing the pitiful wails of his family, and runs on crying: ‘Life! Life! Eternal Life!’”

Friends, we are running a race where the goal is the Eternal City, and Satan is trying to distract us. But Satan’s greatest tool is not convincing us to pursue unimportant things. Satan will convince us that we must pursue secondary things are ultimate.

When our family becomes our gospel, we lose Christ. But not only that, when our family becomes our gospel, we lose our ability to point them to Christ. So, we are of no help to them spiritually. This is paradoxical. The more we understand the supremacy of Christ and the secondary role family ought to play in our hearts, the more we can help our families spiritually.

So, how do we do this?

First, we check our hearts. Is the love of Christ sufficient for us? Do we find enough satisfaction in Christ that we can say with the apostle Paul, *“For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ...”*

Second, we check where our hearts are leading us—we check our priorities. If we love Christ, does that reflect in the way we lead our lives? Friends, what your spouses need most, what your children need most, is to see you completely devoted to Christ. They need you to need Christ more than them. They need to see you in the word, they need to see you in prayer, they need to see you in church, they need to see you fighting sin, they need to see you running after Christ because your life depends on it. Talking about Christ

is important, but nothing is more inspiring and compelling than to see someone living a life that is completely devoted to Christ.

JESUS' SUPERNATURAL FAMILY

Jesus turns to the crowd and says, *“Who are my mother and my brothers?”* And after gazing at the crowd, he makes an astonishing statement. You, this crowd are my mother and my brothers. **Jesus redefines the family to be those who walk with him.** My mother and my brothers? *“Here are my mother and my brothers.”*

But not only that, **Jesus also redefines the family to be those who do the will of God.** Not mere proximity, but a proximity that transforms.

I mean, we know exactly who Jesus' family is here, don't we? His mother, Mary and his brothers James and Jude who would become pivotal figures in church history were the ones seeking him. Perhaps there were other brothers as well. So great is their reputation in Christian tradition that some even have come, erroneously, to venerate them as saints.

And yet, at this point they stand outside. Why? Because they doubted Jesus. In Mark 3:21, Jesus' family go as far to say that he, Jesus, is “out of his mind.” John 7:5 tells us that “not even his brothers believed him.

Now, although Jesus highlights here the distinction between his biological family and his spiritual family, this does not mean that Jesus didn't care about his biological family. As he is on the cross, he cares for his mother by commissioning the Apostle John to care for her as he would care for his own mother. When he appears after his resurrection, he appears especially to his brother James, who goes on to become a great leader in the early church. Jesus cared about the wellbeing of his family and so should we.

Don't get me wrong. Honoring our parents is a biding commandment today for us all. A husband who loves his wife and a wife who submits to her husband is a wonderful picture of the gospel and God's faithfulness. It is necessary that we raise our children in the fear and admonition of the Lord. But at the moment we make parents, spouses, or children ultimate, when we make family our gospel, we turn that which is temporal into something eternal.

Friends, we may, or we may not spend eternity with our biological families. But we who are in Christ will spend eternity with Christ and with our spiritual family. And friends, there is no greater family we could belong to than God's eternal family.

Listen to the benefits of God's eternal family.

Friend, **if you are in Christ, he is your brother!**

Hebrews 2:11—*For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers...*

But not only that, if you are in Christ, God is your father!

John 1:12–13—*But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, [13] who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.*

But not only that, if you are in Christ, the Holy Spirit lives in you!

Romans 8:14–15—*For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. [15] For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”*

And friends, this is what makes this family a supernatural family. It takes the love of the Triune God of the universe to turn sons and daughters of rebellion into sons and daughters of redemption.

Often, we greet each other at church with the word brother, or sister. We may not think too much about it. But there is great depth to these words. Jesus does not use them flippantly. It cost him much to be able to truly call his followers his brothers and his sisters.

Hebrews 2:9–10—*But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. [10] For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.*

It was through a perfect suffering that our salvation was made perfect. In other words, we once were separated from God. Without hope in this world. We had no family identity that could assure us eternal hope. We were characterized by our sins, and these sins alienated us from God. The Bible rightly describes us in our natural state not as sons of God, but as enemies of God.

But Jesus made himself man. He humbled himself in order to die. Why? Because he loved those who were his. **John 13:1** says, “...having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.”

Christ loved those who were to become his brothers and sisters all the way to a cross. On the cross he demonstrated his love by taking on the sins of his brothers and his sisters. Enduring the righteous wrath of the Father until every sin was fully paid for. Friends, our adoption was costly, let us not think lightly at the fact that Jesus calls us brothers and sisters. Let us not think lightly of the fact that God is not just our creator, he is our Father.

And friends, the great gift our brother, Jesus Christ, has given us is his Holy Spirit. Jesus didn't remain dead, he rose by the power of the spirit of God. And this very spirit he has given to us! Therefore, we are able to live spirit empowered relationships. This is what makes us a supernatural family! It has taken the gospel, it has taken the Spirit for us to be formed! So, if the Spirit lives in us, our love for one another must have no limit! No boundaries!

Friend, if you are in Christ, we (the church) are your brothers and sisters. The church is a place where singles and widows can find families. This is a place where the lonely can find company. The needy finds help and the strong shares the burdens of the weak. This is a place where our differences don't define us, our differences don't divide us. Here, the common factor that unites us all is the fact that we belong to Christ!

Friend, you have more in common with your fellow believers in this room than you have with any blood relative in this earth. So, love one another deeply. Love the church! Love the people of God! Let us love one another not because of our perfection, but because of Christ.

Church history tells us the story of two women who had nothing in common except their faith in Christ. Their names, Perpetua and Felicity. Perpetua and Felicity lived in the city of Carthage, north Africa, in modern day Tunisia. They both lived in the late 2nd century into the early 3rd century. Perpetua came from a rich aristocratic family, and Felicity was a slave in Perpetua's household. They both heard the gospel and came to believe in Christ.

One day, as these two women worshiped God along with other believers they were seized by the Roman guard and sentenced to death for their faith. At the time of their arrest, Perpetua had a newborn son, and Felicity was eight months pregnant.

Perpetua, whose father was not a believer, wrote down this interaction with him in her diary, as he sought to appeal to her allegiance to her biological family in order to convince her to present sacrifices to the Roman emperor.

“Have pity on my gray 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 be 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 live once you are gone. Give up your pride!”

Her response to her father,

“I cannot be called anything other than what I am, a Christian.”

Perpetua would go on to die in the hands of Roman gladiators. At her side, not her father, nor her mother, nor her brothers, nor her son. At her side, her former slave, but now

sister in Christ, Felicity. They died martyrs. They died together. They died for Christ. They died in Christ.

Friends, today we're going to be reminded of our familial ties by the table that is set before us. Not that we have died for Christ, but that Christ has died for us. We who take of the body and the blood of Christ remember that in him we are one. Today we celebrate the fact that our brother gave himself up for us, so that we could, together, live for him.