

## ***The True Family of God-Mark 3:31-35***

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*[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions, please get in touch with Pastor Derek at [dberry@calvarybaptistsc.church](mailto:dberry@calvarybaptistsc.church).]*

Take your copy of God's Word and meet me in Mark 3:31-35...

The year was 1979, and the Pittsburgh Pirates, a baseball team, had an anthem. The song was performed by Sister Sledge and was entitled "We Are Family." This song defined their team and their season. And many large families began to view this song as their anthem, with sweet and warm memories attached to it. As much as the 1979 Pirates family, God's church is meant to be family even more so.

Unfortunately, because of the fall, many may be unable to rejoice when thinking of family. Consider what Pastor Thabiti said, "Family is complex because it's hard to maintain. It's the most basic building block in society, and yet, it's a block that sometimes crumbles in our hands." And again, this is due to sin entering into the world. For some of you, when you think of family, you're reminded of sweet mentoring moments with your mother or the warm embrace of your father. You can't wait until Thanksgiving when you visit your folks and eat the cornbread that no one else can make quite like them. You recall your cousins staying at your house to play video games and watch movies. The idea of family comes with a positive connotation due to your experience.

But for others of you, it's the opposite end of the spectrum. You haven't spoken to Mom in how long. Your father may have either been absentee or downright abusive. And whenever you do talk with your parents, it leads to the same argument that has persisted for over twenty years. Or perhaps a grudge still exists between you and your siblings.

So, I realize that when I speak of the church as a family, we don't all intuitively understand it in the same way. Some of you may not even be attracted to the idea of family due to your past experiences. But that's the beauty of God's Word. It provides a lens through which you may look down on your experiences to make judgments instead

of looking up at Scripture through the lens of your experiences. So, we'll take this morning to consider the true family of God in two points:

1. **The Natural Family of Jesus**
2. **The Family Jesus is Forming**

We're informed in verse 31 that Jesus did, in fact, have siblings. According to Matthew's gospel, he had at least four brothers and an unknown amount of sisters.

*<sup>55</sup> Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? <sup>56</sup> And are not all his sisters with us?*

*-Matthew 13:55-56*

Now this text disproves a couple of traditions passed down over the centuries. Firstly, the idea that Mary held perpetual virginity is clearly disproven. Although some would interpret Jesus' brothers as either his cousins or sons of Joseph from a marriage before Mary, these two interpretations are unconvincing. There is a Greek word for cousins that Mark could have used in this passage, but he chooses not to. And the only reason someone would come under the impression that these are Joseph's children with another woman is the faulty presupposition that Mary remained a virgin. Remove that presupposition that Scripture doesn't support, and the clearest reading is that Jesus is an older brother of several siblings born unto Mary. And the fact that Joseph isn't mentioned is a reasonable indication that he's already passed away.

Secondly, this Scripture invalidates any notion that Mary should be elevated to the status to which the Roman Catholic Church has elevated her. If there were any Scripture that would either prove or disprove this teaching of Rome, it would be this text. One would suspect that Jesus would drop all he was doing to run to his mother in the flesh. However, consider his response in verse 35. He literally places her on par with any other believing woman in his day. So this is one of the most explicit texts that dispels the false teaching we find in the Catholic Church. We must ensure that our beliefs and practices are rooted in Scripture, not the tradition we've belonged to for our entire lives.

This family Jesus is forming is not based on biological relations. As a matter of fact, at this time, Jesus' siblings were not a part of this family. This text should call to mind what we read last week in verse 21. His siblings didn't believe he was who he claimed to be. We find his brothers throwing shade in John 7.

*<sup>3</sup> So his brothers said to him, "Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples also may see the works you are doing. <sup>4</sup> For no one works in secret if he seeks to be known*

*openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world.”<sup>5</sup> For not even his brothers believed in him. -John 7:3-5*

We discover in Acts 1:14 that his brothers eventually understood that Jesus was not only their older brother but also their lord! And James, the brother of Jesus, became a leader in the Jerusalem church. But at this moment in our narrative, his siblings think he's crazy.

So here we have the natural family of Jesus, looking to pull the family card to get the attention of Jesus. However, Jesus responds by reframing the idea of family, which takes us to our second point. **The Family Jesus is Forming.**

Now to be clear, Jesus did hold parenthood in high regard. In Mark 7, we'll find Jesus castigating those who fail to honor their parents to keep to human tradition. Nevertheless, Jesus' words here would've been outlandish and radical in the family-oriented culture that he found himself in. Many Americans raised in an individualistic society may not feel the full weight of this passage. Still, those of you with different backgrounds may indeed embrace the gravity of Jesus' statement. In this dyadic middle eastern culture, everything was about family! They were, by nature, group-oriented people. Respect and loyalty for family and clan were among the highest of values. And yet, consider Jesus' response in verses 33-35.

Jesus is creating something new, and with this new community, which will come to be known as the church, he provides his people with a new definition of family. Mark employs a literary device that comes back up in Mark 3:10-11. He contrasts those "outside" with those "around" him. There's a clear indication of who's in and who's out. And this new family isn't a respecter of biological family. It isn't defined by natural relations, it isn't defined by ethnic relations (not just Israel), and it isn't defined by creational relations (universalism disproven). Again, this isn't meant to belittle our biological family but rather to highlight the superiority of our spiritual family. I like what Kent Hughes says,

“Jesus was saying there is a new family that is far superior to the human family, for it is eternal. Its ties are far *stronger*. It is far more *satisfying*. It is far more *demanding*. Those who are in his spiritual family are *far more dear* to him than his human family, with whom he lived for thirty years! What Jesus said here has massive importance.”

Do you believe that this morning beloved? That you have received a new family through the people of God. I like what Dhati Lewis says, “The church is not *like* a family; the church *is* a family.”

The doctrine of adoption further explains this phenomenon. You see, there was already a familial relationship that existed in eternity past between God the Father and God the Son, with God the Spirit present. This Father loved his Son, and this Son loved his Father. And as Hebrews 2:10 states, the eternal idea was to bring many sons and daughters unto glory. But there's an impediment called sin. It's our sinful nature that rejects God as Father. We reject Jesus as our eldest brother and king. And the evidence of that is how we rebel against our parents and their authority over us. Ultimately, we reject parental authority, and our animosity between our siblings is rooted in our rejection of God the Father and God the Son. Therefore, we're all born as spiritual orphans. However, God the Father's plan was in full action when his unique Son, the Lord Jesus, came on the earth, created a new people, died for those people, and rose to new life. This is the glorious gospel. Apart from God's goodness, our only spiritual father was the devil, with whom we would spend plenty of time in hell. But for all those who respond to the gospel by faith and repentance, God adopts us as sons.

*<sup>15</sup> 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!" <sup>16</sup> The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, <sup>17</sup> and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. -Romans 8:15-17*

Hear how Timothy Keller sums this all up...

"Jesus...is the true elder brother. He willingly brings us into the Father's family at his expense. He died for us, he was plundered for us. We sat at the Father's table dressed in Jesus' clothes, with his ring on our finger. All through him. We must celebrate and live out the fact that we are members of a kingdom family, and it is all at the expense of our big brother, Jesus Christ. Do you live every day as if you are a member of God's family, accepted and loved? Remember, a child in a family obeys not in order to be loved and accepted, but because he already is loved and accepted." -Tim Keller

This is good news! For all those who may not have the best earthly family, you get a new one! In 2009 "The Blind Side" was released. This told the story of professional football player Michael Oher. Michael doesn't know who his father is, and his mother is a drug addict. Leigh Anne took notice of young Michael and decided to adopt him into their family. For the first time, Michael had a bed, clean clothes and shoes, and, most importantly, a family who loved him.

Well, God the Father adopts us into his family through the Spirit, where we gain Jesus as our eldest brother and many brothers and sisters across the globe as well. The result of Michael being adopted by the Annes was his gaining a brother and a sister. And so, too, the people of God. And for those with unbelieving good parents, you too have gained a new family. Believer, do you understand that if your biological family is composed of unbelievers, no matter how good they are to you, you have an even deeper tie with your family in Christ? Again, this isn't a call to repudiate the idea of family; we aren't a cult. Rather, it's a call to recognize just how unique and deep-seated the community of God is. Your unbelieving family should get confused about why you treat fellow church members like they're your blood relatives.

Here's another reason God gives us a new family, our decisions to follow Christ will often isolate us from our biological ones. Following the Lord Jesus is costly. Don't believe the cheap grace easy believism message of the gospel that avoids mentioning the cross carrying life as being tethered to a proper response to the gospel. This faulty presentation of the gospel has led many to hell. It perniciously teaches that as long as you have a mental assent to the facts of the gospel, you're eternally good. But that's not the way Jesus taught, and it's not the way his apostles preached.

*<sup>37</sup> 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.<sup>38</sup> And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.<sup>39</sup> Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. -Matthew 10:37-39*

Saint, be not deceived; repentance is a necessary component of salvation. And then a life of repentance is what marks the true believer. In our zeal to see people make decisions for Jesus, we do people no good by failing to warn them that following Jesus is costly. This is why Jesus instructs people to count the cost of becoming a disciple. This may cost you your family, as it has for so many saints throughout church history. The good news is, when you lose one family, you gain another.

*<sup>29</sup> Jesus said, "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, <sup>30</sup> 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. -Mark 10:29-30*

Beloved, this new family fulfills the promise Jesus made to his disciples. This new community, called the church, was created by the inauguration of the kingdom by the Lord Jesus. The Old Testament speaks of a time when God will set up shop on earth

and reign as King for eternity with a people from every nation. The Israelites thought the Messiah was coming to consummate his kingdom through his first advent. However, in his wisdom, God decided that his kingdom would be fully realized in two phases. In the first, he would incarnate, provide people a trailer of the coming consummated kingdom by expressing authority over unclean spirits, sickness, etc., die for the sins of his people, and then create a new covenant community that consists of both Jew and Gentile as “One new man,” as Paul would say.

*18 And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. -Matthew 16:18*

In the second phase, the kingdom will be consummated or fully realized, which will basically be a family reunion in heaven with new bodies immune to sin. What a mighty God we serve! One who's wise in his dealings. One who's gracious in his judgments. One who's careful in his planning. One who's precise in his executions. How else would you explain a God who saves a people from every nation, tribe, people, and tongue and brings them together as a family? He joins them by the blood of his only and only unique Son so that they may have eternal fellowship with one another. The book of Acts is profitable for many reasons, primarily because it's the Word of God. It also functions as a picture frame of the early church so we may admire and even find things to imitate. It provides us with a historical account of what happens when believers meet the new family.

That's an interesting category of social dynamics; what happens when someone meets the family? Many romantic comedies have been written surrounding the awkwardness of meeting the family of the person you love. I'm sure there are many stories in here. No doubt some of them are sad, and others heavy. But I'm also willing to bet there's a humorous story or two here. Entire movies have been established on those moments, such as “Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?” There have been several renditions of this movie. The formula goes: boy meets girl, falls in love, and understands they must meet the family for this to work. They're often comedies because things rarely go well. Well, saints, that kind of confusion and lack of affection should never apply to a Christian in a local church. There's no question about what happens when they meet the family. The same thing is supposed to happen in every family for every believer that joins that family. God supplies believers with everything they need in local churches to function as a family. This new family of God, believers across time and space united with one another, is made tangible in the local church.

A unique love for the family of God is what marks the Christian community. That was one of the primary points in the Apostle John's epistle.

*<sup>14</sup> We know that we have passed out of death into life....*

Before I finish reading this text, how do you guess it will end? I'm sure you would expect him to make some kind of statement about justification by faith alone.

*<sup>14</sup> We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. -1 John 3:14*

So this is what salvation coming to a soul looks like. Read the New Testament. You'll discover that we're not authorized to proclaim that people who do not submit themselves to a local family of believers are in the kingdom of God. If someone were to respond faithfully to the gospel presentation momentarily and yet there's no demonstration of affection for or accountability to the family, or the church, when one is available, we must ask further questions. Typically, salvation in the Bible looked like people getting saved into a family (into a church). New life was made evident in a new community. I like what Brian Davis says, "The salvation appeal isn't 'go, follow Jesus on your own.' No. It's 'come, follow Jesus with us.'" Jesus would instruct his disciples that this was a main passport that disciples should be checking for when considering the confessions of others.

*<sup>34</sup> A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.<sup>35</sup> By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." -John 13:35*

This should bring your mind to our text this morning. Jesus doesn't say "The world will know your, my disciples, based on how you obey your parents and love your siblings," although we should do both. He says, "The world will know your, my disciples, by the way you love the new family I've given you!" (paraphrase). Even the world can display some functionality within their families, at least on the surface. However, our love for one another is a supernatural display because it only exists for supernatural reasons. This is why local churches should fight to avoid becoming social clubs that only attract people like them. The church is not the place where we share in the stuff that we can share in the world. Our solidarity is found as those who "Do the will of God." This is why I find more solidarity with an older saint from a completely different background and culture than a 30-year-old African-American man who would get all my cultural references and have similar tastes. There are brothers and sisters whom I share nothing within the flesh, nothing at all...like really nothing, and yet everything that we share trumps anything in the flesh. This is what it means to be the family of God.

So we see Jesus reframing what it means to be mothers, brothers, and sisters. And the Apostle Paul picks up on this teaching, as his normal custom is to address the churches with this familial language.

*Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, <sup>2</sup> older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity. -1 Timothy 5:1-2*

Paul wants Timothy to interact with the church members at Ephesus as family members. Why? Because they are. And it's the role of the local family (church) to identify and affirm new family members. There's an organization called "Search Angels," perhaps you've heard of it. This organization aims to help people find their biological family roots. Here's what their website states, "While our organization was primarily started to assist adoptees, we have evolved far beyond requests that revolve around adoption alone. We help many people, both foreign and domestic, with their search and circumstances that lead them away from their knowledge of their biological roots." So they're all about affirming whether or not brothers and sisters belong to certain families. You know, the local church has a similar job in its usage of the keys of the kingdom. In affirming gospel citizens, the local church has been authorized and instructed to consider whether or not someone confessing Christ is an actual brother or sister because brothers and sisters in this family possess the correct *who* and *what* of the gospel. This is why local churches must know the gospel well! Local churches must understand that repentance is a necessary component of salvation. Local churches must be able to differentiate between a cheap grace presentation of the gospel and a biblical presentation. What does Jesus say characterizes those who are in his family? Once again, he could have simply said, "It is those who believe." And although that's true, he says something different.

<sup>35</sup> *For whoever **does** the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother." -Mark 3:35*

So we must determine whether or not an individual confessing Christ is characterized by doing the will of God. Doing works does not save you; however, consistently performing God's will is evidence that God has adopted you and placed you in his family.

<sup>21</sup> *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. -Matthew 7:21*

So we as a family have worked to do, studying the gospel, knowing the gospel, evangelizing, and then affirming gospel siblings.



As I land the plane, do you honestly believe the church is family? More importantly, do the rhythm of our households reveal that? Here are just a few ways to ensure our lives proclaim what our hearts believe.

1. Fold others into your life.

We should be in each other's homes and each other's lives throughout the week. That's what we see in the Book of Acts—a church devoted to one another who loved the fellowship. We should be accused of being around one another so much that the world believes we really are family. People should understand that we process family differently. I'm hoping that one day our girls will draw many of your faces when drawing family pictures, which leads to people asking, "Who's that?" "Oh, that's Aunt Rachel and such and such."

1. Expressly enjoy Christ when with other Christians.

It shouldn't be awkward when with other believers to have spiritual conversations. Discussing what you've been reading in the Word, how your soul has been, and any other explicitly Christian-edifying subjects shouldn't be awkward. It's what builds us up and fuels our Christian walk. This is Christian fellowship. I know that word has been greatly watered down; however, I think we should return to its biblical usage. The word means sharing or communing with something. And in our case, our fellowship is founded in Christ. Two Christians standing next to each other eating chips is not fellowship. Two Christians standing next to each other discussing the Word of God while eating chips is fellowship.

This third point can simply be summarized as "disciple one another saints." Older saints should be inviting younger saints over for times of discipleship. Younger saints should look to older saints for guidance and discipleship; because in Jesus, everything is better together.

2. Share your things.

Again, we see this so often in the Book of Acts. And I'm thankful that this church is so good at sharing possessions. My wife and I were blessed with more items than we can count before even moving into the parsonage. This is a consistent witness with Scripture. Continue to share, and this includes your time. You should plan your week on how you'll spend time with other saints. Let's allow our homes to be where we know we can drop in on each other as family does.

Ultimately, we share because Christ has shared with us. And he shared it all with us. His life, he shared with us. His Father's teachings, he shared with us. His righteousness, he shared that with us. His sacrifice for sin on the cross, he shared with us. His Father, he shared Him with us. His Spirit, He shared Him with us. His rule and reign, he shares with us. His head stomping defeat of Satan, he shares with us. His kingdom, he shared with us. His character, he shared with us. His joy, he shared with us. His resurrection, he shared with us. His home, he shares with us. His Word, he shares with us. His love, he shares with us. And his people, he shares with us. Therefore, let's share with one another.

Let's pray.