

Jesus' Family - Mark 3:31-35

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My brother and I were both students in college. It was Christmas break and we went home to southern Minnesota. Our parents had recently moved from Virginia, which had been home for all our lives. My brother and I both wanted to take some time during our Christmas break to go snow skiing. It certainly was cold enough, but as some of you may know, the land is very flat in Minnesota. However, we did discover a ski resort across the state line in Wisconsin along the Mississippi River. On our way to the ski resort I remember seeing a sign that read six degrees above zero. By the time we reached the bottom of the slopes, our faces were completely numb. I remember waiting in line at the ski lift. There was a couple ahead of us waiting for their bench to swing around, pick them up, and take them to the top of the slope. While we were waiting my brother moved ahead prematurely and got between the approaching bench and the waiting couple, who were facing away from him. The bench got to my brother, picked him up, and plowed him right into the unsuspecting couple ahead of us. I can still see the picture in my mind of him wrapping his arms around both of them as he swept them off their feet. Fortunately, the ski lift attendant quickly stopped the lift. But it amused me greatly when he had my brother sit on the bench with the couple as the lift continued on up the slope. Watching him sit in between this couple made me laugh all the way up the slope, as I was sitting by myself in the bench behind theirs. It was yet another memorable experience with my brother with whom I shared many good times. Our story today highlights an experience between Jesus and His brothers. Before we consider their experience, I invite you to bow your heads with me.

Let's begin with a summary of our story:

Jesus' mother and brothers came to where Jesus was ministering and sent for Him. When Jesus heard that they were looking for Him, He clarified who were His closest family members. He stated that it is whoever does the will of God.

Now let's consider the experience of Jesus' mother and brothers. First of all they experienced coming close to Jesus. This is the first time Mark mentions Jesus' mother, Mary. The gospels don't say much about her after Jesus' childhood. Chronologically the last incident in which she was mentioned is given in John 2. It appears that the wedding celebration mentioned here involved a relative of Jesus and His mother. At this wedding the wine runs out. In verse 3 of John 2 Mary approaches Jesus. Notice what she says: "They have no wine." It seems that Mary expected Jesus to exercise His authority and power to fix the situation. Jesus gives her a gently rebuke in verse 4, and notice how Mary responds in verse 5, speaking to the servants: "Whatever He says to you, do it." She seems to have retained her confidence that Jesus would do something miraculous. And He does. He turns water into wine. So, Mary was certainly a believer. She, like everyone, misunderstood exactly what His mission was, but she believed He was the Son of God.

Jesus' brothers, on the other hand, were of a different mind-set. I invite you to turn with me to John chapter 7. The Jewish leaders were looking for an opportunity to take Jesus out and kill Him. The Feast of Tabernacles was approaching. As a result many Jews were going to Jerusalem. Jesus' brothers noticed that He wasn't making plans to go to Jerusalem, and gave Him a few choice words about how He should place Himself in the spotlight, so everyone could see the miracles He performed. Then John makes a statement concerning Jesus' brothers in verse 5 of John 7. (Read) Unlike Mary, Jesus' brothers were unbelievers. They did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah or the Son of God. So, although Jesus' mother has come with His brothers, they are not really of the same mind. It is likely that Jesus' brothers brought Mary with them, hoping that her influence

would serve their purposes. In our last story Mark gave us an idea as to what their purposes were. In Mark 3:21, he mentions some of Jesus' own people who wanted to take Jesus by force and straighten Him out. This likely includes Jesus' brothers, who in our story today are carrying out their purposes and have come close to Jesus. They don't get too close, though. In Mark 3:31 it says they were "standing outside". Jesus was surrounded by a multitude of people, who were listening to Jesus teach. But Jesus brothers didn't join the multitude. They hadn't come to listen. They had come to sit Jesus down and straighten Him out. So, they come CLOSE to Jesus, but not TO Him.

Next, Jesus' mother and brothers experience sending for Jesus. In Mark 3:31 it says they "sent to Him". This word translated "sent" is the Greek word *apostello*. It means to "send away". The noun form is often translated "apostle". So, Jesus' mother and brothers sent someone to get Jesus for them. Jesus' brothers were acting according to the Jewish culture in the role of older brothers. Mary, being a virgin when Jesus was born, must not have been the actual mother of these brothers. She was probably their step mother, and Jesus would have been their half brother. Nonetheless, they are acting towards Jesus with authority by sending someone to get Him for them. In Mark 3:31 it also says that they were "calling" Jesus. This word translated "calling", is *phoneo*, which means "to make a sound" and from which we get the word "phone". The act of sending for Jesus was very noticeable. Someone came rushing in, calling out for Jesus. At this point the story shifts the spotlight away from Jesus' mother and brothers. They are not mentioned again, but Mark does leave us with a glimpse of their experience.

So, now we will move on to consider what Jesus experienced. First of all, Jesus experienced being summoned. In Mark 3:32 it says, "a multitude was sitting around Him." So, Jesus was most likely teaching and perhaps bringing healing to this large crowd, as Jesus is summoned by His mother and brothers. As we looked at previously, Mark 3:31 says Jesus was summoned with a "call" or "sound". This certainly created a disturbance. It interrupted what Jesus was doing. In verse 32 of Mark 3 it says "they said to Him..." So, by the time the message got to Jesus, it seems that multiple people were carrying the news that His mother and brothers were looking for Him.

Second, Jesus experienced announcing His closest family members. Jesus delayed responding to the summons of His mother and brothers. He asked the multitude a question: "Who is My mother, or My brothers?" Then in Mark 3:34 Jesus answered His own question. He "looked around in a circle" and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers!" In announcing His closest family members, Jesus included everyone around Him. After asking the question, He gestured to all those around Him and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers!" He declared that anyone present was welcome to be one of His closest family members. Then in Mark 3:35 He described His closest family members. He said "whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother." The word translated "will" means "plan" or "purpose". Jesus says, "Whoever lives to fulfill God's plan for their lives is one of the closest members of My family."

In announcing His closest family members, is Jesus being disrespectful to His immediate family members? Is He rejecting His mother and brothers? Certainly not. In John 19:26, 27 Jesus is on the cross. He is in the midst of intense agony and under great humiliation. At this moment of supreme suffering Jesus notices His mother standing not far away. Also not far away is John, one of His closest disciples. Jesus looks at His mother and says, "Woman (a term of respect), behold your son!" And then He looks at John and says, "Behold, your mother!" From that time on John took Mary and cared for her like she was his own mother. If Jesus provided for His mother's needs while hanging on the cross, certainly He did not disrespect or reject His immediate family in our story today. He was simply stating that those who follow God's purpose for them are those who are closest to Him.

How does this story reveal Jesus as our example? How do we know from this story what a healthy and dangerous Christian looks like? First of all, this story reveals Jesus as our example in that He spoke words of affirmation. He looked at those who had responded to His ministry and were now sitting around Him and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers!" (Mark 3:34) Imagine how this must have made them feel. What an honor for Jesus to look at me and say, "You're My brother!" These are great words of affirmation. Jesus takes this difficult situation and uses it as an opportunity to affirm those who have chosen to follow Him. He looks at them and says, "You are the ones I really appreciate and feel close to!" Jesus reveals that a healthy and dangerous Christian is someone who lets people know they are appreciated. It's someone who says, "You mean a lot to me" or "I think a lot of you." It's being specific and saying I really appreciate this about you. I'm so glad you..." and listing the things you are grateful for. Often we have lots of good things to say about someone we appreciate at their funeral. But they are not alive to hear these words of affirmation and receive no benefit. How much we might encourage them by speaking words of appreciation while they are still alive. Thank-you cards are a great way to speak words of affirmation. My wife has modeled this in our home, and I have seen the appreciation of those who receive these notes of thanks.

Second, this story reveals Jesus as our example of a healthy and dangerous Christian in that He connected with godly people. Jesus identified those who were His closest family members as "whoever does the will of God" (Mark 3:35). He didn't say, "Those of you from my hometown of Nazareth are my family." Neither did He single out those who were carpenters like He had been or those who were close to the same age as He was. He said, "Those of you who are actively following God's plan for your lives – you are my family!" Jesus connected with people who were living for the same purpose He was. In John 6:38 He says, "I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me." And everyone who lived for the same purpose was considered His brother, sister, or mother. He wanted to spend His short time on earth with people like this – godly people. And so, Jesus reveals a healthy and dangerous Christian as someone whose closest friends are other Christians. It's someone who connects with people who are living to please God. Their closest friends are not their golfing buddies or their old partying cronies. It's not someone who avoids socializing with other Christians, and stays off to themselves. It's someone who surrounds themselves with a supporting, like-minded group of Christians. When we become healthy and dangerous Christians, we change the people we turn to for support. It's someone who chooses to spend as much time as possible with other believers and feels a strong connection with people who are living to please God.

Jesus' family is a unique family. When you become a member, you find that it's different from being in your immediate family. Your immediate family consists of those who share the same parents as you do. And it certainly can be a source of great relationships. However, Jesus' family is based on a choice of priorities. It consists of those who have decided to make God's plan for them their #1 priority. According to John 7:40 God's plan for you is that you would see His Son, believe in Him, and have eternal life. Anyone who chooses this is a part of Jesus' family. Whoever lives to fulfill God's purpose for them is a part of Jesus' family. It doesn't consist of those who profess a set of beliefs or practice a certain lifestyle. It's those who are willing to do whatever God asks them to do.

According to the words of Jesus His family is the source of the best relationships you could ever experience. I challenge you to get the most out of being a member of Jesus' family. Prioritize building relationships with people in His family. Spend time with other family members outside of church on Sabbath morning. According to Jesus the most meaningful relationships you will have in life will be with these people.