

THE TRUE FAMILY OF CHRIST
Mark 3:31-35

November 19, 2006 – Grace Covenant Baptist Church

In our text last Sunday Mark reminded us of three groups of people that served as hindrances to Jesus' ministry. The first was the crowds that smothered Jesus wherever He went. There was no freedom for Jesus to do the work that He was sent to do, which was to usher in the kingdom of God through the preaching of the Word. The crowds were often more interested in Jesus' miracles, His healing and casting out demons, than they were with His message.

A second group was rather self-evident, the religious scribes and Pharisees that were smitten with envy and jealousy because of the popularity of Jesus with the crowds. In their prideful deceived minds, Jesus was an imposter, performing the works of the devil in the name of God. Their goal was to put Jesus out of commission and in doing so regain the allegiance of the crowds. It is interesting that the very thing they accuse Jesus of is the very thing that they themselves were guilty of and, if they did not repent of their sin, would be judged for in the end. They were dangerously close to blaspheming the Holy Spirit of God, an eternal sin for which there is no forgiveness.

Mark returns to the third group in our text this morning - the earthly family of Jesus. As we noted, His family was also opposed to the ministry of Jesus and they sought "to take custody of Him" (3:21). They, like the crowds and the religious leaders, misunderstood the person and work of Jesus. They thought He was mad, insane with religious fervor and a zealot. We see more of Jesus' family this morning and the proclamation of Christ that *the eternal value of the spiritual family of God is superior one's family on this earth.*

We note three things in our text: 1) Jesus had a family, 2) Jesus created a new family, and 3) Jesus defined His family.¹

1. Jesus had a family (v. 31)

This might seem rather obvious given Mark's words here, "**Then His mother and His brothers arrived.**" However, the simple truth that Jesus had an earthly family is an issue of dispute even today in Christendom.

We are entering into the time of year that we celebrate Jesus' birth. We will read from the gospels each week from texts that relate the virginal conception and birth of Jesus through God's servant Mary. We will be reminded of the truth that Joseph, who was betrothed to be wed to Mary, would serve as Jesus' earthly father on this earth, rearing Him as a carpenter. We read earlier that Jesus' "parents" went to Jerusalem for the time of Passover (Lk. 2:41). Later in Mark 6:3, the listeners of Jesus' teaching in the synagogue acknowledge His family, "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?" The Scriptures acknowledge the truth, as did the crowds, that Jesus had an earthly family. Mary His mother, Joseph His father, and brothers and sisters. Mark mentions four brothers and at the very least two sisters. This means that He had at the least six siblings.

And yet this straightforward teaching of Scripture that Jesus had an earthly family is denied today by Roman Catholicism. They argue that when the Scriptures speak of Jesus' brothers and sisters that these are either cousins of Jesus or stepbrothers and stepsisters which Joseph brought to His marriage with Mary after he was widowed. However, that is not what these texts say.

¹ I am indebted to Derek Thomas for this simple outline,
<http://www.fpcjackson.org/resources/sermons/Derek's%20SERMONS/Mark/05bmark.htm>

And Mark is clear, **“Then His mother and His brothers arrived.”** With so much at stake concerning truth and the real identity of Jesus’ family, it is more than a theological stretch to come up with the idea that these were not really Jesus’ brothers and sisters. So how did the Roman Catholics form their unsanctified opinion on this matter?

It all begins with Mary. They note that Joseph is not mentioned here or in any of the other texts we mentioned after Jesus’ childhood. Therefore, Mary must be more important than Joseph because she, as His mother, is mentioned as late as Jesus’ crucifixion. However, the fact that Joseph is not mentioned here is in all likelihood because he died before Jesus began His public ministry, though we cannot be certain of this. And the truth that Mary carries more importance than Joseph should not be denied. The angel Gabriel called her “favored one” (Lk. 1:38). However, it is the *place* that Roman Catholicism has given Mary’s importance that is, in the nutshell, theological heresy. The exaltation of Mary, known doctrinally as “Mariology,” serves as a basic tenet of Roman Catholic faith. I want to take a few moments to point out these errant teachings so that we might better understand the traditions of Catholicism.

The first plank in Mariology is *the immaculate conception of Mary*. Many Protestants today believe that this refers to Jesus’ immaculate conception by the Holy Spirit through Mary, or the virgin birth. However, in this doctrine Catholicism teaches that *Mary* was immaculately conceived. On December 8, 1854, Pope Pius IX issued a Papal Bull, which stated, “The Most Holy Virgin Mary was, in the first moment of her conception, by a unique gift of grace and privilege of Almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of mankind, *preserved free from all stain of original sin.*”² She was conceived as other human beings, but at the moment of conception, by an act of God’s grace, she was preserved from the stain and guilt of original sin. While the basis of this conviction is to protect the sinless nature of the Son of God by preserving Mary as the Mother of God, it is without biblical warrant. Mary was the daughter of Adam and Eve just as the entire human race.

The second plank in Mariology is *Mary’s perpetual virginity*. This teaches that Mary was a virgin before, during, and *after* the birth of Christ. In other words, she remained a virgin all of her days. It is to satisfy this notion that Roman Catholics believe that these brothers and sisters were cousins or stepsiblings. While Mary’s virginity before and during Jesus’ birth is not to be denied, it is difficult to assert with biblical conviction that Mary remained a virgin all of her life when we read in Matthew 1:25 that Joseph, “kept her a virgin *until* she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus.” This seems to indicate rather strongly that at some point Joseph consummated his marriage with Mary.

A third plank in Mariology is what is known as the co-redemptrix. This signifies that Mary actively participated in and cooperated with Jesus in His work of redemption for His people. She accomplished this, according to Catholicism, in her offering her Son Jesus Christ as a meritorious gift at Calvary. While this is not the written dogma of Roman Catholicism stated at Vatican II, it is practiced nonetheless. It is apparent in the Roman Catholic Church today that Mary plays a supplementary role in redemption. She is literally worshipped by millions today.

This practice was made very clear to me on a trip to central Mexico five years ago. Lori and I were there with an IMB couple and happened upon the Festival of Mary of Guadalupe in the city of Guanajuato. We witnessed a parade through the city, led by a group of seven costumed individuals representing the seven deadly sins. Immediately following them was a statue of Mary of Guadalupe, sitting on a bed of beautiful roses and carnations, hoisted upon the shoulders of ten or twelve men. The parade portrayed that the forgiveness of these seven deadly sins was

² S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., *Roman Catholicism: Evangelical Protestants Analyze What Divides and Unites Us*, 121.

through Mary. We followed the procession through the city and watched as they carried the statue into the basilica and placed it in a prominent place in front of the priest. As I listened, I heard repeated, “Hail, Mary’s.” It was evident to me that Mary was the most exalted in the place that day. As I glanced around the basilica, I noticed a glass encasement that had a life size figure of Jesus laying prostrate in a tomb, and above the priest, high above the altar, was Mary holding the baby Jesus. Everywhere we went Jesus was either dead or a baby.

A final plank in Mariology is known as the Mediatrix, or Mary as mediator. In the middle ages Jesus was perceived to be stern, forbidding, and unapproachable judge. Believers were therefore instructed to approach the Son through Mary, a much more compassionate mediator than He and the only one who Christ would listen to in obedience to His mother. This became the common practice, and in 1891 Pope Leo XIII decreed, “Nothing is bestowed on us except through Mary, as God himself wills. Therefore as no one can draw near to the supreme Father except through the Son, so also one can scarcely draw near to the Son except through his mother.”³ Vatican II reaffirmed Mary’s role as Mediatrix, though offering a warning about taking this too far and somehow limiting the efficacy of Christ. The error of this teaching is exposed in 1 Timothy 2:5-6, “For there is one God, *and* one mediator also between God and men, *the* man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony *given* at the proper time.”

Why have I taken the time to expose these heretical teachings? Because we see in this how easy it is to allow tradition to usurp the authority of God’s Word and the absolute sufficiency of Christ. Mark says, “**Then His mother and His brothers arrived.**” While we cannot be certain that these brothers and sisters were sons and daughters of Mary and Joseph, we have no reason to believe otherwise. Those that believe otherwise do so based upon their wrong beliefs concerning Mary as we have just described. Even if these were not Jesus’ full brothers and sisters, the place that Mary has in the Roman Catholic Church has far exceeded what the angel Gabriel meant when he told her, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord *is* with you” (Lk. 1:28).

2. Jesus created a new family (vv. 32-34)

Returning to our text, we notice that Mary and the brothers of Jesus arrive at the house where Jesus was teaching. Mark says that the crowd in the house was sitting at Jesus’ feet, which seems to indicate that the crowd had somewhat diminished following Jesus’ announcement concerning blasphemy and His silencing the scribes. But there were still enough remaining that Mary and Jesus’ brothers could not get to Him, or perhaps out of courtesy they stopped and knocked at the door. Regardless of the reason, we see that they did not freely approach Jesus and sent word to Him that they were there. Mark records, “**A crowd was sitting around Him, and they said to Him, ‘Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are outside looking for You.’**” Evidently someone at the door was given the message and they interrupt Jesus’ teaching to make the announcement.

At this point it is important for us to recognize the importance of family ties in Jesus’ day. Tom Wright notes,

The family bond was tight and long-lasting. As with many non-Western cultures today, it was normal for children to live close to their parents, maybe even in the same house. The family unit would often be a business unit as well, sharing everything in common.

³ Ibid., 127.

What's more, for Jews the close family bond was part of the God-given fabric of thinking and living. Loyalty to the family was the local and specific outworking of loyalty to Israel as the people of God. Break the link, and you've undermined a major pillar in the way Jews in the first century (and in the twentieth, come to that) think and feel about the world and themselves.⁴

These social patterns were rightly born out of Exodus 20:12, "Honor your father and your mother." So the expected response of Jesus in this situation would have been for Him to acknowledge His family's presence, especially in light of Mary's presence. But as we have seen, Jesus' actions did not always fit the cultural context in which they were set. It is impossible for us to know if Jesus knew the reason they were there. We are let in on the reason in v. 21 but we are not certain that their escapades had been revealed to Jesus. And even the crowds had seen that Jesus often acted differently than they would assume and may have thought that Jesus would somehow put them off.

But regardless of Jesus' knowledge of the situation or the thoughts of the crowd, no one would have anticipated Jesus' response, "**But answering them, He said, 'Who are My mother and My brothers?'**" Then, looking at those sitting at His feet, which some limit particularly to the Twelve, "**He said, 'Behold My mother and My brothers!'**" His response was shocking – to His family, to the crowd, and even perhaps to us. In fact, it almost seems harsh given the circumstances. He appears to show no regard for His family, and in particular His mother, Mary. Kent Hughes captures the astonishment in Jesus' words,

These would be startling words in any culture, but in Hebrew culture, where the family was so sacred, they were *shocking!* A murmur of amazement swept the multitude. Mary, who had nursed and dressed Jesus and loved him all the way into his magnificent manhood, and now come for him in loving concern, was crushed. His brothers were likewise shocked, and perhaps angered. Though we have the advantage of Biblical perspective, we still, as parents and brothers and sisters, find his words difficult. This is one of Jesus' hard sayings, and Renan, the famous skeptic, used it to accuse Jesus of "trampling under foot everything that is human – love and blood and country."⁵

But what did Jesus mean by His response? First, Jesus was not disrespecting His mother or His brothers. No one ever loved His mother more than Jesus. In His final hours on the Cross, in all of His agony, Jesus uttered only seven sayings. One of those sayings is directed at His family. He speaks to His mother, "Behold, your son!" referring to John, and to John, "Behold, your mother!" (Jn. 19:26-27). Why would Jesus do that? Because of His deep love for His family. Jesus' response was not a suggestion to break family ties.

What He did mean is that there is a deeper kinship than flesh and blood, one that is spiritual. While He loved His mother, there was a deeper relationship that had to be heeded first. His response served to show the superiority of this spiritual relationship to both His family and to those who were sitting at His feet. The Father's will was more important than anything on this earth, the gift of God's earthly family included. Jesus began to reveal this important truth to His parents at an early age. In the text we read earlier in Luke 2 we saw that Jesus had been accidentally been left behind at the temple. The story is all too real to us who have children. Have you ever lost your child? Have you ever had the conversation like Mary and Joseph,

⁴ Tom Wright, *Mark for Everyone*, 39; in Geoff Thomas, <http://www.alfredplacechurch.org.uk/sermons/mark19.htm>

⁵ R. Kent Hughes, *Preaching the Word: Mark*, 98.

“Where is our boy? I thought you had him.” After three days Mary and Joseph come back to the temple, and there Jesus was, right where they left Him. And what does He say to them? “Why is it that you were looking for Me? **Did you not know that I had to be in My Father’s house?**” *But they did not understand the statement which He had made to them.* And He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and He continued in subjection to them; and His mother treasured all these things in her heart” (Lk. 2:49-51).

Jesus’ response in our text is a similar statement. Jesus is trying to get His family to understand the truth of who He was in His person and His work. Geoff Thomas states,

Christ had to say those words to them at this time for them to know that he couldn’t be their dear older brother or Mary’s little boy any longer. He had to become their Saviour and their God and Lord or they would be lost... The Lord is testing them, “Is your relationship to me ‘natural’ or ‘spiritual’? Does it depend on the fact that the same womb gave birth to us, and the same breasts nourished us, or does it depend on the fact that you know who I am, and worship and follow me?” In these words Christ is tearing down the whole old covenant family structure as the grounds for our hope in God.⁶

So Jesus is saying that there is a new family which is far superior to any human family. Its ties are *stronger*. It is far more *satisfying*. It is at times far more *demanding*. But those in the spiritual family are far *more dear* to Jesus than those in His human family.⁷ He then defines those who are truly in this spiritual family.

3. Jesus defined His family (v. 35)

As we said earlier, Jesus’ response was as much for the crowd at His feet as it was for His family. He looks straight at them and says, “**For whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother.**” Only those who live in obedience to God are truly brothers and sisters of Christ. It is more than a mere profession of discipleship but active obedience that establishes this relationship.⁸

What does this active obedience to Christ entail? It begins with faith in Jesus Christ for forgiveness of sins by grace. It is the realization that there is nothing you can do to atone for sin. It is in the finished work of Christ alone as your sufficient substitutionary sacrifice for sin that can atone for you. Do you believe that this morning? Have you recognized that the only thing you can bring to Christ is your sin and have you repented of your sins? “Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling.” “Just as I am without one plea but that Thy blood was shed for me, and that Thou bidst me come to Thee. O Lamb of God, I come.” Have you done that this morning?

But it is even more than that. Jesus says that those who are truly in this spiritual family are marked by a conscious attempt to obey the Father in all things just as He did. It is marked by understanding that Jesus is the Vine and we are but branches, dependent upon and drawing from His spiritual nourishment alone to sustain us. In John 15, what does Jesus say marks the life of a child of God? Keeping His commandments (Jn. 15:10, 14). We seek to do His will. Derek Thomas pointedly brings this truth home,

⁶ <http://www.alfredplacechurch.org.uk/sermons/mark19.htm>

⁷ Hughes, 98.

⁸ D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Gospel of Mark*, 104.

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.⁹

Conclusion

- 1. It is possible to make your earthly family your religion.**
- 2. Are you on the outside looking in? Sheep and goats.** Do you belong to Jesus’ family this morning? Have you been adopted into His family through real justifying faith?

⁹ <http://www.fpcjackson.org/resources/sermons/Derek's%20SERMONS/Mark/05bmark.htm>.