**Joining the Right Family**

Mark 3:31-34

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The Bridger Wilderness Area in Wyoming is one of the most pristine areas for hiking in the United States. A number of years ago hikers were asked to fill out comment cards. Here are some of their actual complaints…

* *Please avoid building trails that go uphill; escalators would help on steep sections.*
* *Too many bugs and spiders and spider webs. Please spray the wilderness to rid the area of these pests.*
* *The coyotes made too much noise last night and kept me awake. Please eradicate these annoying animals.*
* *A small deer came into my camp and stole my jar of pickles. Is there a way I can get reimbursed?*
* *A McDonalds would be nice at the trailhead.*
* *There are TOO Many Rocks...*

These comments and complaints reveal that most of us are looking for that which is comfortable and convenient. I wonder how our high schoolers will do when they rough it out in Colorado this summer? In a similar way some of us push back when Christ calls us to radical commitment. As we learned a couple weeks ago, *Jesus doesn’t want fickle fans; He wants faithful followers.*

Last week we reflected on some strong reactions to Jesus. His family thought He was mad and the religious leaders believed he was bad. The scribes thought He was demonized and those closest to Him thought He was deranged. We learned that the unforgivable sin is attributing the mighty miracle working power of Jesus to Satan.

In our text today we return to the natural family of Jesus. We’ll see how Jesus shakes up our sense of comfort in verses 31-35: ***“And his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him. And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, ‘Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you.’ And he answered them, ‘Who are my mother and my brothers?’ And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.’”***

After reflecting on these verses, I wrote down this summary statement: *Family is foundational but following Christ must come first.* There are three things going on in our passage.

* **An urgent request from family** (31-32)
* **A startling rhetorical question about family** (33)
* **A radical redefinition of family** (34-35)

Let’s drill down and follow the flow.

**1. An urgent request from family.** We see in verse 31 that Jesus is in a house teaching to a packed audience: ***“And his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him.”***  The word ***“and”*** has the idea of ***“then,*”**referring to what happens next. There are so many people crowded into the house that his family can’t get close enough to get his attention. This had to be frustrating for them because they had hiked 30 miles from Nazareth to Capernaum through a lot of rocks to do an “intervention” and now they couldn’t even have a conversation with Jesus.

Some of you are wondering how Jesus could have siblings because you’ve been taught that Jesus was Joseph and Mary’s only child. Listen. While his earthly mother Mary was a virgin when she was impregnated by the Holy Spirit, she and Joseph had other children after Jesus was born.

The word ***“brothers”*** literally means, *“from the same womb.”* The word for *“relatives”*was available but the gospel writers use the word for brother. Let’s ponder a few other passages where we see that Jesus not only had four brothers (half-brothers), but sisters as well.

Matthew 13:55-56: ***“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? And are not all his sisters with us?”***

Acts 1:14: ***“All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.”***

Galatians 1:19: ***“But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord’s brother.”***

Let’s go back to verse 31 so we see how urgent this request is from the family. The word for ***“called”*** refers to a summons and has a sense of authority behind it. When I was growing up and would be playing in the backyard and my mom would call me in for supper I might eventually meander into the house. But if my dad whistled, I knew from experience that I better come running. These family members are urging Jesus to stop what He’s doing and to come immediately.

Let me make the obvious point that instead of joining Jesus in what He’s doing, they are trying to get Jesus to do what they want. We often do the same, don’t we? We want Jesus to bless what we’ve got going on instead of lining our lives up with His plans and purposes. Here’s a good prayer to pray: *“God, show me where you’re working so I can partner with you to accomplish your will.”*

We see the nature of this urgent request in verse 32: ***“And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, ‘Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you.’”*** Jesus is told that his family has arrived but Hedoesn’t stop what He’s doing because He’s following His father.Mary should have remembered what Jesus said when He was 12 in Luke 2:29: ***“Why did you seek me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?”***

*The family is foundational but following Christ must come first.*

**2. A startling rhetorical question about family.** Once the message comes to Jesus that his family is asking for Him, He asks a very startling question, a question that must have messed with his mom and shaken up his siblings: ***“And He answered them, ‘Who are my mother and my brothers?’”*** I imagine those sitting in the house looking around at each other. The tension must have been palpable. The crowd would have fully expected Jesus to stop his teaching and go with his mom and siblings because in that culture, there was nothing more important than family.

This response of Jesus seems radical to us but would have been revolutionary to those listening because the family bond in first century Israel was tight and long lasting. It was normal for children to live close to their parents, sometimes in the same house. Loyalty to the family was equated with loyalty to God.

A rhetorical question is a figure of speech used to drive truth into a person rather than to elicit an answer. Jesus skillfully asked these kinds of questions to emphasize a point in a powerful but non-combative manner. In Mark 8 alone, He asks 8 different questions. All of this is designed to get his listeners to slow down, to ponder and to be prepared for what He is about to say.

**3. A radical redefinition of family.** Instead of easing the awkward tension, Jesus dials up the discomfort they’re all feeling. In verse 34, He looks around at those seated in a circle and redefines the family: ***“And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers!”*** The phrase ***“looking about”*** literally means that He *“looked round about.”* Matthew 12:49 provides this detail: ***“And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers!’”***

Don’t miss this. Being a half-brother to Jesus didn’t make any difference to their spiritual condition. In fact, according to John 7:5, his siblings didn’t believe until after the Resurrection. Even Mary saw herself as a sinner in need of the Savior according to Luke 1:46-47: ***“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.”*** You can be in the best family ever but if you’re not in the family of God through the new birth you are lost.

Verse 35 provides some clarification about how to make sure one is in the family of God: ***“For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.”*** We talk a lot about the importance of not having to “do” anything to become a Christian. Works don’t save us. So how can Jesus say doing God’s will is an entrance requirement into his family? The key is found in John 6:28-29: ***“Then they said to him, ‘What must we do, to be doing the works of God?’ Jesus answered them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.’”***

I like how Charles Spurgeon put it: *“I will ever maintain that by grace we are saved, and not by ourselves; but equally must I testify, that where the grace of God is, it will produce fitting deeds.”*

For those who are prone to give Mary more majesty than is due her, Jesus redirects people away from adoring her to the importance of everyday obedience. In Luke 11:27-28, in response to Jesus’ teaching, a woman in the crowd called out to Jesus, ***“Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you.”*** Jesus totally reframes the focus from her womb to His Word: ***“Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it.”***

A commitment to Christ is costly. Hiking with Him through life is hard. Let’s be clear. Jesus is not repudiating family relationships. He’s just saying that one’s relationship to Him through the new birth is more important than a connection one may have through a natural birth.

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**🡪 Interview Rylie and Debbie Shelton.** Rylie and Debbie Shelton are part of our Go Team as they serve in the country of India. I’d like to introduce them to you right now.

1. Debbie, tell us a bit about the ministry God has called you to.

2. Rylie, can you share with us how the family structure in India makes it difficult for people to put their faith in Christ?

I invite you back on Sunday night at 6:00 pm to hear more about how God is using Rylie and Debbie to bring hope to the hopeless in India.

**Family Talk**

It hit me this week that I play a number of roles in the various relationships I have. I’m an adopted son of the Father through the new birth. I’m a husband to Beth, my sister through the new birth. I’m the father of Emily, Lydia, Becca and Megan and also their brother through the new birth. I’m the father-in-law of Jamie and he’s also my brother. I’m one of the pastors of this dear flock and you are my brothers and sisters in Christ. We are family (no, I’m not going to sing that song). And I’d like to have a family talk.

There are times in our home when I’ve called a family huddle. Imagine that we’re all sitting together around the table for a time of realignment, redirection and relationship building.

1. **Spiritual relationships must take precedence over natural relationships.** We tend to categorize people today as single, married, divorced or widowed. While we will always celebrate and promote marriage as a covenant between one man and one woman for life, singleness is not a second-class status. Fellow family members, let’s see each other primarily as brothers and sisters in Christ and as spiritual fathers and mothers. 1 Timothy 5:2: ***“Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity.”***
2. **If you live out your faith, some in your family will think you’ve lost it.** If it happened to Jesus, it will happen to you. Maybe your parents don’t understand your faith or your spouse doesn’t get it or your children think you’re too fanatical. After Peter complained about how much they had left, Jesus said these words in Mark 10:29-30: ***“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, 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.”***

This is a mind-boggling statement. Whatever you have lost on account of Christ you will receive a hundred times ***“in this present age”*** brothers, sisters and mothers. Where do you get this many siblings and parents? Right here in the church. This is your spiritual family. We are brothers and sisters and we need each other. And this spiritual family is your real family, and it’s more substantial than the genetic bonds of a physical family relationship.

1. **Invest time in your family but not at the expense of faith formation.**  If the sin of parents some time ago was to ignore their family, today it’s to make children the very center of everything. We don’t have a patriarchy or a matriarchy; we have a “kindergarchy” where marriage revolves around children. We do our kids no favors if they think they are the center of our life and existence. We must love God more than our kids. Kevin DeYoung gives a great reminder, *“Our children don’t really belong to us. That’s a hard word, but a good word, for there is no better parent than our heavenly Father.”*

The best way to love your family is to love Jesus more than your family. You will never love your family more than when you are totally dedicated to the Lord’s will for your life and for theirs. Psalm 127:1: ***“Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.”***

1. **Don’t let sports or other activities crowd out your commitment to Christ.** I’m deeply troubled about how many families are elevating other activities over the importance of gathering with God’s people. Over the years as a pastor I’ve watched families that at one time were faithful in their commitment to Christ and His church, get so involved in traveling sports leagues and other weekend activities that they are now unplugged.

Let me read a few sentences from a tongue and cheek article called, *“After 12 Years of Quarterly Church Attendance, Parents Shocked by Daughter’s Lack of Faith.”*

*Trevor Michelson was simply stunned at the revelation. “I just don’t understand it. Almost every single time there was a rained-out game, or a break between school and club team seasons, we had Janie in church. It was at least once per quarter…It was obviously a priority in our family—I just don’t get where her spiritual apathy is coming from.”*

*“You know, the more I think about it, the more this illustrates how the church just keeps failing this generation,” lamented Trevor. The Michelsons further noted plans to have a chat with the pastor of their church after their younger son Robert’s soccer season calms down a bit.*

Parents, can you lean in a bit? I know you don’t want to teach your kids that sports trumps spiritual commitment. Let me be quick to add that other activities like camping, fishing and yard work can do the same thing. Let me also say that these are not necessarily bad things in and of themselves. I’m just concerned that these activities can turn into idols and end up replacing that which is most important.

One article I read recently called, *“When Ball Becomes Baal,”* argues that we have deified sports in our society (I posted this on the Sermon Extras tab on our website). Ball can become Baal when it controls your family and you give it devoted worship. Here are two practical ways to put sports in their proper place:

* **Decide beforehand that there will be no contest between the church’s essential activities designed for your family’s spiritual growth and what the team plans for your lives.** This decision has to be made ahead of time so that when sports conflicts with weekend worship or youth camp or a special spiritual activity, the decision has already been made.
* **Determine that your child cannot play every sport.** Be selective in order to protect the rhythm of your family time.

I like how the article ends: *“God himself uses sports language in the New Testament. He’s not against it, unless it steals the devotion belonging to Him. All other gods have to go!”*

It might be good to watch “Chariots of Fire” as a family to see how Olympic athlete Eric Liddell lived out his conviction to not participate in sports on Sunday. A week or so ago, one of the trending stories on Facebook was about how Covenant College refused to play a championship tennis match on a Sunday. They took a lot of heat but I sure respect them.

I wish that all the believers from all the churches in our community that have children that play sports on Sunday mornings would get together and say, *“Not anymore. We’re not going to allow this any longer. Sunday is the Son’s Day and we’re going to church as a family.”* If believers banded together, these leagues would find another day to play. BTW, we also have three service options each weekend so if something does come up on a Sunday, we have a Saturday night service.

1. **Partner with Edgewood to help with faith formation in our families.** God continues to bring young families to Edgewood and we’re in need of more servants to serve in the nursery, especially during the 10:45 service. The Awana Awards Celebration is this Wednesday night. Our children’s ministry is designed to help you reach and disciple your children. I’m thrilled that a number of moms attended the Hearts at Home Conference this weekend. There’s a Ladies Spring Luncheon coming up on May 9th. Entrusted with a Child’s Heart will be offered again in the fall to help equip moms. The Senior blessing night is coming up where parents will have the privilege of giving a verbal blessing over their graduating senior. The next men’s huddle will be held on Thursday, May 5th at 6:00 p.m. And we’re committed to calling a Youth and Young Adults pastor because we want to reach students and singles for Christ. We’re excited to have a candidate coming next weekend. His name is Kyle Parks and his wife’s name is Liesl.
2. **Reach out to the little, the least and the lost.** While giving priority to the faith development of our families, we must never forget the forgotten. Matthew 25:40: ***“Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”*** That’s why we partner with Pregnancy Resources as we together stand up for life in the QCA. What a joy to be able to give over $53,000 toward the purchase of the Mobile Ultrasound Unit (the total cost is $130,000 and the remaining need is now less than $10,000!). Once again, we’ll be participating in the Baby Bottle Project beginning Mother’s Day weekend. We also partner with World Relief in standing for the vulnerable by serving refugees and I’m looking forward to the World Refugee Festival on June 18th.We’re also learning more about the ministry called Safe Families as they stand in the gap in the foster care system.
3. **It’s going to take courage to live out your commitment in a culture that doesn’t value what God values.** 1 Corinthians 16:13: ***“Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.”***  It’s time for all men to man up. Do we have men and women here who are willing to make a commitment like Joshua did in Joshua 24:15? ***“And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”***

Determine right now, that no matter what, that you will serve the Lord. Live out our 4Gs personally…and as a family. Gather. Grow. Give. Go.

Did you notice in our passage that there *is* an “in” and an “out”? Twice we read that the natural family of Jesus was “outside.” This is the scandal of the gospel – those who think they’re insiders are usually outsiders; and those who start as outsiders often end up on the inside. The least likely person can be Jesus’ brother or sister.

The way to enter the family of faith is through receiving what Jesus has done for you on the cross. 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, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”*** The key is not who you are related to but who you have a relationship with. And the only way for that to happen is to be born again.

*Family is foundational but following Christ must come first.*

The Christian life is not easy. It’s not meant to be. Discipleship is difficult. The path is often uphill and the route is rocky. Your commitment to put Christ first will be tested. Will you complain and seek the easy way or will you follow Christ into hard places? It’s worth it because He’s worth it. Obey the Word of God and embrace the will of God.

Closing Song: “I’m Running to You”

*So I’m giving up control*

*Because You are my Lord*

*I’m running to you*

*Embracing surrender*

🡪 Mike and Barb Miller Membership (Ed – 8:00)

🡪 Kaylin Ellis Membership (Brian – 10:45)

🡪 Commissioning Prayer for Camp Forest Springs