

JESUS' TRUE FAMILY

Mark 3:20-35

Key verse: 34-35, "Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother.'"

Jesus' ministry was gaining popularity. At the same time, opposition was also growing. Jesus appointed his Twelve apostles to be with him and in time to be sent out to preach and to heal in his name. In the passage we're now looking at, opposition continues, both from those close to him and from those who felt threatened by him. Jesus addresses the opposition with wisdom, grace and truth. Today, we will consider 3 things: (1) well-intentioned but misplaced opposition, (2) mean-spirited opposition, and (3) Jesus' true family.

First, well-intentioned opposition (20-21). As we have read, hundreds, even thousands of people were coming to Jesus. Some came with serious life problems, such as disease or demons. Others came out of curiosity to see and hear this so-called country preacher and prophet. Still others came to spy on and critique Jesus' teaching and ministry. Needless to say, Jesus was swamped by these crowds. Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat.

Probably we've all been so busy with a task or assignment that we had no time to eat. One example of this is during the time of a Bible conference. If you have ever served a big conference, you probably had to skip some meals since you were simply too busy to leave your post to get a bite to eat. And then someone, hopefully, brought you food, for which you were grateful. As another example, I've heard accounts of medical clinics in Africa filled with hundreds of people who walked many hours to get medical attention, with only a small medical team to help them. The need is often so great, with very limited resources or people to help.

When those close to Jesus heard about all that he was doing, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind." They thought Jesus was going a bit overboard in his preaching and ministering to others. I believe their concern was well-intentioned. They were looking out for Jesus' health and well-being—physically, mentally and socially. They didn't want Jesus to get exhausted. Humanly, they had a good point. People can indeed get burned out when their service goes so far that they neglect their own diet and rest.

But sometimes well-intentioned opposition can be against God's will. We all know the story of Jesus' first prediction of his suffering and death. Simon Peter rebuked Jesus saying, "Never Lord! This shall never happen to you!" Of course, Peter's intention was good; he loved Jesus, and never wanted any harm to come to Jesus. But Peter didn't understand God's will that Jesus had to die for us. In that moment, Peter wasn't speaking

the things of God but the things of man. Jesus even called Peter "Satan," since it was Satan tried to deter Jesus from his divine mission.

I have a less dramatic personal example while I was a college student. Once I told my mother that I couldn't travel to visit her one summer since I was too busy preparing a Bible conference. A few minutes after we hung up the phone, my second of three sisters called me to rebuke me. She said, "Do you know you made mom cry?" I said, "No, why?" She said, "Because you told her you couldn't visit her." I said, "You just don't understand what Jesus means to me." Actually, I felt bad when my sister told me that my mom cried, since my mom had not cried while I was on the phone with her. When my pastor heard this story, he said to me, "Go home to your mother and give her a hug." It was good advice. As a footnote, that sister, who was also a teacher of young children, respected my faith so much, that I received many cards from her students saying they admired me. And I wrote back to her class encouraging them to love God. This sister also had a born-again Christian experience about 20 years later. Thank you, Jesus!

Second, mean-spirited opposition (22-30). While Jesus experienced mild opposition from those near to him, the opposition was much more severe from those who felt threatened by his teaching and ministry and growing popularity. Teachers of the law from Jerusalem came and said, "He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons." In a word, they charged Jesus with doing the devil's work. It was a mean-spirited attack on Jesus to discredit him.

Now, let me ask you: what is your normal response when someone insults you or calls you a name? Of course, it is only natural to get angry and to call them a name in return. But look at what Jesus did. Jesus called them over to him, not to pick a fight, but to speak to them in parables. Parables are spoken to get people to think more deeply. Jesus said: "How can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come."

Jesus first asked a question: "How can Satan drive out Satan?" Why would Satan fight himself, or shoot himself in the foot? That makes no sense. Jesus then made three if-then statements about division and destruction. If a kingdom or a house or an evil spirit is divided against itself, then, it cannot stand; its end has come. Hateful division leads to destruction. One military strategy is "Divide and conquer." Apostle Paul once employed this strategy to get the Sanhedrin to fight against each other since some were Pharisees and some were Sadducees, who had differing beliefs on resurrection (Ac 23:6).

In the household of God, however, we should not cause hateful division. Those who do so are causing civil war in God's house. God's people must be united to fight against the devil and to destroy the devil's work. We need spiritual eyes and discernment to fight this spiritual warfare, not get sidetracked into political matters. Paul wrote in Romans 16:7, "I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from

them.” Instead, we must work for unity and peace. Paul wrote to a very divided Corinthian church: “I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought” (1Cor 1:10).

Jesus continued, “In fact, no one can enter a strong man’s house without first tying him up. Then he can plunder the strong man’s house.” In this analogy, Satan represents the strong man who has possessions that he doesn’t want to give up. But if one stronger than he ties him up, his house can be plundered. Here, the stronger one is Jesus, for he was taking back the devil’s captives by commanding demons out of people. Satan could not keep his captives when Jesus came. Jesus is our Hero who came and rescued us from the devil’s oppression, harassment and stronghold. Jesus is the Chain-breaker who set us free. Jesus came to our Rescue. Jesus’ victory over the devil came through his perfect, Spirit-empowered life. Jesus’ victory to us came through his atoning death and triumphant resurrection, given to all who trust in him as Lord. Jesus is our Champion, Rescuer and Defender, who saves us from the devil’s stronghold.

Jesus concluded his speech to his critics giving a great promise and a severe warning: “Truly I tell you, people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin.” The great promise here is that people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter. This is good news for sinners. Of course, what we need to do for forgiveness is to confess our sins, renounce them, turn from them in repentance, and accept Jesus as our Savior. The severe warning is that whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven, but are guilty of an eternal sin. Scholars have debated the meaning of these difficult words.

We get help in verse 30 to understand why Jesus said this: “He said this because they were saying, ‘He has an impure spirit.’” Jesus’ mean-spirited critics accused him of doing devil’s work. Clearly, Jesus was doing God’s work, and they should rejoice with him and stand with him for that. But they were opposing Jesus. In doing so, they were siding with the devil. If they remained in that position, they could not be forgiven of their sins, for Jesus is our Savior and our way to forgiveness, salvation and eternal life in his kingdom. If they persisted in their unbelief and rejection of Jesus, they would be eternally guilty of their sin.

Third, Jesus’ true family (31-35). At that moment, Jesus’ mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call Jesus. A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, “Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.” People expected Jesus to stop what he was doing to go and welcome his family or to invite them in. That would’ve been normal behavior in that tightly-knit patriarchal society. The society put top priority in family relationships. In all cultures, the family is the basic building-block of society.

Jesus again responded first with a question: “Who are my mother and my brothers?” he asked. That’s an easy question to answer for those who knew Jesus personally. They would simply mention the names of his mother and brothers. They were those he grew up with under the same roof, in the same household. But Jesus asked the question not to hear names. Jesus asked the question for them to think more deeply.

Jesus looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.”

Was Jesus encouraging us to ignore or not love our family members? Certainly not. That would contradict Jesus’ character and spirit. It would also be disobedient to the teachings of God’s word. For example, it is written in the Ten Commandments, “Honor your father and your mother.” Jesus dearly loved his mother. We could see this in his interaction with his mother and a disciple as Jesus hung dying on the cross.

Then what was Jesus saying? I believe, Jesus was expanding our definition of family. Our family is not only those we naturally love and would do anything for. We would fully expect a parent to give their life for their child, or a brother for his brother. But we often draw the line there.

Consider this example: “You’re driving down the road, and some other driver in your judgment makes a foolish driving mistake. What is your usual response?” Probably, you will get angry and might even call them a name (under your breath of course, because you are a Christian!). But what if you realized that the person was your own mother or brother driving the other car? Would your response be the same? Or, would you be more forgiving and merciful and maybe even joke about it later to them? My point is our relationship with our family members is naturally different than it is with those outside our family. Why is that? Is it because we know and trust each other more fully? Or, we embrace each others’ weaknesses more readily?

Sometimes we don’t love someone like family because we just don’t like someone or we’ve been hurt by them. I came across a quote from Abraham Lincoln that caught my attention this week. Abraham Lincoln said, “I don’t like that man. I must get to know him better.” Often times what separates us from others is that we don’t know them well enough, or we simply haven’t spent enough time to get to know them—their good points, their struggles, their history.

Whom did Jesus say was his family? Jesus said that those who were seated around him—those investing their time and life to be with him, to listen to him, to learn of him, to love him and obey him—they were his family members. They were those who were serious about doing God’s will. What is God’s will? We know that God’s will is to love him with our whole being and to love others as we love ourselves. God’s will is for us to hear Jesus’ teachings and put them into practice. God’s will is for us to repent of our sins and invite Jesus Christ to reign in our hearts and lives as Lord and Savior. John 1:12 says that those

who receive Jesus and believe in his name have the right to become children of God, that is, members of his family.

So who is your mother and sister and brother? Is it those who love God and do his will? During a Bible study with others on this passage, I had a confession to make: It was that I pray for my children every day; but I could not say that I prayed for everyone in that Bible study group every day. Why not? Of course, I could excuse that I don't have time to pray for everyone every day. But I must admit honestly, that I hold my wife and children naturally more dear to my heart than anyone else. To love my wife and children is not wrong. In fact it is commanded in the Bible. It's a good thing. My problem is my heart is too narrow to embrace others with this same love.

But look at Jesus! Jesus was so full of love for all people: strangers and very needy people like a paralytic, a man with leprosy, a man with a shriveled hand, the demon-possessed, fishermen, tax collectors, sinners. What prevents me from loving people as Jesus did?

In a word it is sin: selfishness, fear, self-centeredness, pride, lust, busyness. In chapter 16 of *The Purpose Driven Life*, pastor and author Rick Warren proposes the idea that perhaps the best expression of love is giving our time, since time is something that we can never get back. Dr. Gary Chapman might not agree since he has a book called, "The Five Love Languages," and each person has a different primary love language. But Quality Time is definitely one of them. Where we spend our time shows what we love most.

In conclusion (key verses), Jesus lived and died to invite more people into God's family. Jesus lived and died to expand our definition of love and of family. Jesus is our Elder Brother and our Everlasting Father. Other Christians are brothers and sisters in God's household. Many churches rightly call each other, "Brother," and, "Sister," among their congregants. Brothers and sisters are those we love, respect, protect, provide for, care for, and help out. Christians are many things in relationship to God; we are creatures created by him; we are soldiers in God's army, fighting on the same side in the spiritual war; we are servants, which shows the correct humble attitude toward God. But we are also family, which means we love one another deeply and dearly. This is God's truth and, at the same time, God's consistent command to those in Christ Jesus: to love one another, deeply from the heart. We do God's will together, encouraging and helping one another to do so in the name of Jesus. May God help us to do so.