

WHO CAN BE JESUS' FAMILY MEMBERS?

Mark 3:20-35

Key Verse: 3:35

“Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.”

As we studied in the previous passage, after confronting the religious leaders and serving many needy people, Jesus appointed the twelve. Jesus decided to raise them as shepherds who could take care of God’s flock. Jesus had a clear purpose in his calling and a long-term plan for them. Jesus’ appointing the twelve was God’s will, God’s wisdom, and God’s hope to accomplish his purpose of salvation. It was the hinge on which Jesus’ entire ministry direction turned. From this time on, he would focus on his disciples more and more. They would form a spiritual family which would precede the Christian church. As soon as Jesus appointed the twelve, Satan attacked in two ways: through the accusation of the religious leaders, and the misunderstanding of his family members. Satan intended to destroy the messianic ministry. It was a crisis, like being bitten by a poisonous snake, or confronting a severe and sudden thunderstorm. Jesus responded immediately and clearly in order to defeat Satan’s work and protect his disciples. And Jesus taught them how to overcome the crisis, by putting first priority in following him as his family members. As we engage in disciple-raising ministry, Satan tries to attack and destroy us in many ways too. Sometimes it is through poisonous slander from outside. Other times it is through family problems from inside. When we are attacked, we can be discouraged; it is easy to lose our direction in raising disciples. We need Jesus’ protection and a clear identity as his disciples. This comes to those who commit themselves to Jesus as his family members. Let’s learn how we can be Jesus’ family members.

First, Jesus tied up Satan (20-30). As we see in 3:1-19, after confronting the Pharisees in the synagogue, Jesus withdrew to the lake and served a crowd, and then went up on a mountainside, where he appointed the twelve. Now Jesus enters a house, perhaps that of Peter and Andrew in Capernaum. The moment Jesus’ presence was known, a crowd gathered. They were wounded in body and spirit; they were desperate for love and care; they were hungry and thirsty for the word of God; they were needy people. Jesus healed their sicknesses, drove out demons, bound up their wounds, and taught the life-giving words of God to them. No one else cared for these people, but Jesus did. Wherever the good shepherd Jesus went, people came to him. Jesus and his disciples were so busy serving people one by one that they had no chance to eat. Usually people regard eating and resting as important matters. So they give a priority to these things. Without eating well, we

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cannot work properly. We like to think that Jesus' disciples' motto was, "eat a lot and work hard." That may be true. Jesus was branded a glutton and a drunkard, the friend of tax collectors and sinners (Lk 7:34). But Jesus also skipped many meals in the course of serving needy people. As they followed Jesus in serving the needy, the disciples fasted unintentionally. What a beautiful scene it is.

However, there were some people who misunderstood Jesus and his disciples. They were Jesus' family members. Jesus never forsook them. But he always pursued the call of God above all else. They heard rumors about Jesus not eating. To their eyes, Jesus was radical and extreme. He had ignored his duty to take care of his parents and siblings, which was expected from the oldest son. He did not earn money from a job. He was also inviting able-bodied men to leave their jobs and follow him around the country. And he did not pay any attention to marriage. Now, he was not even eating. They assumed he was out of his mind. So they traveled 30 miles, from Nazareth to Capernaum, in order to take charge of Jesus. Actually, many people are out of their minds. Some are crazy for money; some are crazy for power; some are crazy for sinful pleasure; some are crazy for games and hobbies. These days many are crazy for the World Cup. In the same way, we are crazy for Jesus. Worldly people tolerate all kinds of craziness, but not those who are crazy for Jesus. Jesus' family members had heard enough of his crazy devotion, and they went to take charge of him (21). In fact, they did not believe in him. Already the religious leaders were plotting to take his life. Now he faced misunderstanding from his family members as well.

In the meantime, another thunderstorm was sweeping upon Jesus. As his ministry was growing rapidly in Galilee, the religious leaders in Jerusalem felt threatened. They decided to destroy Jesus' ministry. They came down from Jerusalem all the way to Galilee and spread a poisonous statement about Jesus: **"He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons"** (22). The religious leaders could not deny that Jesus had driven out demons. But they discredited his work by claiming it was done by the prince of demons. In truth, they were instruments of Satan and doing Satan's work. If Jesus had ignored this, many people would have been deceived and gospel ministry greatly damaged.

Anyone who had been slandered like Jesus could have been very upset. Yet this would make things worse. How did Jesus deal with this issue? Instead of getting upset, Jesus called them over to him and began to speak to them. In parables Jesus explained how their slander was unreasonable. **He said, "How can**

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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” (23b-26). As Jesus' words indicate, enemies on the inside are the most destructive of all. Many political leaders make use of this truth. Recently, I read a political journal which explained how the Soviet Union maintained power over satellite countries. They supported the official government, yet maintained close relations with opposition parties. If the official government became rebellious, the Soviets supported the opposition party. They knew that when a nation was divided from within it could not stand. All politicians and rulers understand this principle. Satan is at least as smart as politicians; he was not stupid enough to attack himself. So the religious leaders' slander was nonsense.

Then Jesus explained that his ministry was the work of the Holy Spirit by telling another parable: **“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”** (27). In this parable, Satan is a strong man. Man's situation is like that of a captive in Satan's dungeon. Man is vulnerable to Satan's temptation. Satan plants doubt in people's hearts, saying, “Does God really exist? If God is living, why do such bad things happen to me? Does God really love me?” When we doubt God's love we cannot trust God. Satan also plants fear in our hearts, saying, “If you commit to God, you will lose your freedom and your fun.” These days summer Satan is going around, saying, “Take life easy. Don't do anything.” Then he takes advantage of people's laziness and prompts them to do evil things. If we become slaves of Satan, he presses us to follow our sinful desires. Though we try to escape from Satan's dungeon, it is impossible because he is stronger than we are.

Here we learn that the real enemy of mankind is Satan. We can see man's problems from many perspectives. Karl Marx saw man as only physical or material, without a spiritual dimension. Adam Smith saw man as primarily motivated by self-interest, especially in terms of economics. Sigmund Freud saw man as a sexual animal. Psychiatry fosters a view of man as chemicals, devoid of spirit. But the Bible tells us clearly that man was created in the image of God with both body and spirit. Man has a capacity for fellowship with God. But if the Spirit of God does not dwell in a man, evil spirits can come into him. Some people abandon God, thinking they will be free to live as they please. But when they abandon God, they are vulnerable to evil spirits, like King Saul (1 Sam 16:14). When people are controlled by evil spirits, they do what the evil spirits demand, even when they don't want to. Many people are tormented by evil spirits. Though

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they have a lot of money, eat gourmet food, wear fine clothes, and indulge in luxurious entertainment, they are not happy. They cannot sleep well. They have no peace in their hearts. They are very anxious all the time. The problem is that they do not understand why they are miserable. Many kinds of self-discipline or education or medical treatment or drugs cannot help them. They need Jesus! Jesus has power to drive out demons! Jesus is more powerful than Satan! Only Jesus can tie up Satan and set us free from his power! That is why Jesus died for our sins on the cross and rose from the dead. Hebrews 2:14-15 says, **“Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.”** The purpose of Jesus' coming into this world was to destroy the devil's work (1 Jn 3:8). Let's accept Jesus as our deliverer, Lord and Savior so that we may have true freedom, peace and victory.

After defending the work of the Holy Spirit, Jesus gave his opponents a very strong 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.”** He said this because they were saying, **“He has an impure spirit”** (28-30). Here we learn that there are sins that can be forgiven, and a sin that can never be forgiven. When we are living in this world, we commit many sins in word, thought, and deed. We forget God's grace, are unthankful and self-glory seeking, and rebel against authority. We lie, cheat, steal, envy, complain, blame, hate, lust, commit adultery and murder. David confessed, **“Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me”** (Ps 51:5). We are drowning in sin; how can we get out of it? Some people say that as time goes by we can forget all these things. But it never works. The more we try to forget these things, the more clearly they appear before our mind's eye. We cannot erase or undo our sins. The only solution is to receive God's forgiveness. Jesus came into the world to forgive our sins. 1 John 1:9 says, **“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”** When we acknowledge and confess our sins and believe in Jesus, then Jesus forgives all our sins. This is the gospel.

However, there is a sin that cannot be forgiven. It is the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. One who recognizes the work of the Holy Spirit, refuses to repent, and instead calls it the work of the devil is guilty of an eternal sin. God is the God of love, but at the same time he is the God of judgment. So we must live before God with a trembling heart.

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Second, Jesus accepted his disciples as family members (31-35). As Jesus had finished responding to the religious leaders, his mother and brothers arrived after a long journey from Nazareth (31a). Standing outside, they sent someone in to call Jesus (31b). A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, **“Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you”** (32). They thought that Jesus would welcome them, cancelling his Bible teaching. They thought their family tie with Jesus should be his first priority. People have many relational ties: business, political, educational, and so on. Among them, family ties are the strongest. So a famous proverb says, “Blood is thicker than water.” Many fathers dream to pass on their business to their son, and they do so, bypassing candidates who are much more qualified. In North Korea, leadership succession is absolutely through bloodline. In western societies, which are generally individualistic, it may be easier to ignore the family tie than in other places. But Jewish culture, shaped from the Bible, places a high priority on family relationships. One who breaks relations with his family becomes a social outcast. In this social milieu, it was not easy to follow Jesus without the consent of one’s family. In this sense, family members can be a hindrance for those who want to follow Jesus. Once, Jesus said, **“For I have come to turn ‘a man against his father, a daughter against her mother...a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household’”** (Mt 10:35-36).

How did Jesus respond to his family members? He said, **“Who are my mother and my brothers?”** (33) 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”** (34-35). Matthew indicates that Jesus pointed to his disciples (Mt 12:49). Jesus’ family was not formed on the basis of DNA; it was formed of those who do God’s will. This begins by accepting Jesus as one’s Savior and Lord and following him as the disciples had done. John 1:12-13 say, **“Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.”** All Christians have one Father, God, and are all brothers and sisters. We all share the blood of Christ, the Son of God. Jesus’ blood is “thicker” than anything and binds us on the most fundamental level.

Here we learn two things. First of all, Jesus’ family is eternal and worldwide. Family ties in this world end naturally by death. Sometimes they end before death when a family member becomes greedy or abusive. However, Jesus’ family bond lasts forever. So we should learn to forgive one another and love one

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another. We should also learn to embrace all kinds of people of all nationalities because Jesus' family includes people from every tribe and language and nation (Rev 5:9).

Secondly, Jesus teaches us to put our first priority in him. Jesus said in Matthew 10:37, **“Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.”** This does not mean that Christians should ignore and neglect their family members. As Jesus was dying on the cross, in the midst of extreme pain, he was concerned about his mother. So he entrusted her to the care of Apostle John. We, too, should take care of our family members. However, here, Jesus' point is that our relationship with him always takes priority over any other relationship. As we practice this truth, our family relationships can become Christ-centered. For example, Jesus' brother James was one of those who came to take charge of Jesus. He did not understand what Jesus was doing (Jn 7:3). But later he became a great servant of Christ, who presided over the assembly in Jerusalem (Ac 15:13). He also wrote the book of James. In our own ministry there are many who left their homes to obey Jesus' world mission command. Though their families misunderstood them, they kept praying without wavering. Then God had mercy on them and most family members of UBF leaders accepted Christ personally before passing on. When we live with a Christ-centered view of family, we can be a blessing. We should not follow unbelieving family members away from Jesus, but bring them to Jesus until they become Jesus' family members.

Jesus wants us to put first priority on our relationship with him so that we may continue to learn from him and grow to be like him. This is the secret to overcoming Satan's work within and without. Being Jesus' family member is a great privilege and blessing. Let's put our first priority in our relationship with Jesus.