

This month, we have begun covering some examples of Jesus's miracles and teachings. Today let's give our attention to Jesus as he teaches his audience about who his real family is. Listen to the account as Mark recorded it in Chapter 3 of his Gospel:

MARK 3:20, 21, 31–35. (EHV)

[Jesus and his apostles] went into a house. A crowd gathered again so that they were not even able to eat a meal. When his family heard this, they went out to take control of him, because they were saying, "He is out of his mind." ... Then his mother and his brothers arrived. While they were standing outside, they sent word to Jesus, calling for him. A crowd was sitting around him. They began to tell him, "Look, your mother and your brothers are outside looking for you." He replied, "**Who are my mother and my brothers?**" He looked at those who sat around him in a circle and he said, "**Look, my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.**"

By this point in time, Jesus had healed many people. He had healed a man with a withered hand. He had healed a leper. He had driven out demons. He had also preached to many people and taught many people. So he had healed many people physically through his miracles and he had healed many people spiritually through his preaching and teaching. So it is little wonder that when he and his apostles went into a house, a crowd gathered around him in that house, so that he and his apostles were not even able to eat a meal.

So word was relayed to his family, and they came to take control of him—specifically his mother and brothers. This gives us the opportunity to talk about Jesus's family. Most people know about Jesus's mother, Mary, and his earthly father, Joseph. Christians who take the Scriptures seriously generally have two views about Mary and Joseph's relationship and family. The first view is that Joseph had already been married and had fathered children before he took Mary as his wife after his first wife died, and since Mary miraculously conceived and gave birth to the Son of God in the flesh, he was not intimate with her during his marriage to her. Matthew 1:25 says that Joseph was not intimate with Mary until she gave birth to Jesus, which makes it sound like they were intimate after Jesus was born. But to be fair to those who hold this position, saying that something did not happen *until* a certain point is not automatically a guarantee that it did happen after that point. Sometimes expressions with "until" in the Bible are simply making clear what happened or did not happen during the time in question. In this case, Matthew could simply be making it clear that Jesus was truly conceived and born of a virgin, and that Joseph also wanted to make sure that was clear. The verse could perhaps be paraphrased: "he was not intimate with her at any point before Jesus was born." Some in this camp also point out that the fact that Jesus's earthly father is not mentioned during Jesus's adulthood, including here in Mark 3, probably indicates that he had already died—which makes more sense if he was already an older man when he took Mary as his wife.

The problem with this first view is not so much Matthew 1:25, and not even so much the problem of, say, a forty-year-old man marrying a thirteen- or fourteen-year-old virgin, though that has its own difficulties too. The problem is that it treats physical intimacy, even within the context of marriage, as a dirty activity, as a staining or tarnishing activity. People with this view

think that neither Joseph nor Mary would want to be intimate or have children together after Jesus, because that would somehow stain or tarnish Mary or the experience of her conceiving and giving birth to the Son of God in the flesh. But physical intimacy, in and of itself, is not a dirty or tarnishing thing at all. It is a beautiful creation of God, a gift given to Adam and Eve, as husband and wife, for their enjoyment even before they fell into sin. The Bible also says that, in a fallen world, one of the purposes of physical intimacy in a marriage is to satisfy sexual desires in both the husband and the wife in a godly way, so that those desires do not burn inside them in an ungodly way (1 Cor. 7:9). So it is difficult to imagine that God would take these two godly people, who were both desirous of marriage even before they were informed of Mary's miracle child, which means that they apparently did not have the gift or desire to remain single, and that God would essentially tell them that one of the consequences of being the parents of his own Son in the flesh would be that they could not enjoy his gift of physical intimacy for the rest of their lives—especially when God expected them to be godly parents and examples for his Son in the flesh.

This, to me, makes the second view much more likely. The second view is that, when Joseph took Mary as his wife, that was Joseph's first marriage (obviously Mary's too). After Mary gave birth to Jesus, they were intimate with each other and had other sons and daughters together—namely, the four brothers of Jesus, James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon, and the sisters of Jesus—all mentioned in Mark 6:3. Since Joseph was a carpenter (Matt. 13:55), the fact that he is not mentioned here or at any point during Jesus's adulthood probably does indicate that he had already died, perhaps from a carpentry accident.

John 7:5 tells us that, at first, Jesus's own brothers did not believe in him. So it is no surprise to hear that they came to take control of him. What is somewhat surprising is that his mother Mary, who did believe in him, also came to take control of him. Mary probably thought he wasn't taking proper care of himself, and his brothers probably also thought he was at least somewhat deranged and that he had caused enough commotion, which was no doubt having an effect on their lives too.

But when Mary and Jesus's brothers arrived and sent word into the house for him to come out to them, and when the crowd passed along the message to Jesus that his mother and brothers were outside looking for him, Jesus replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" He then looked at those who sat around him in a circle and he said, "Look, my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."

Eau Claire North High School in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, drew national attention in 2022 after a staff member put a poster on one of the school's doors, saying, "If your parents aren't accepting of your identity, I'm your mom now." That female staffer was basically saying, "If your parents don't accept who you identify as, they're not your real family. I am, because I will always be accepting of you."

It might seem at first glance like Jesus is doing something similar. "Mary and James and Joseph and Judas and Simon are not my mother and brothers, since they're not accepting of who I am and what I'm doing. All of you are my brothers and sisters and mothers because you are accepting of what I'm doing."

But it's not the same, because what Jesus was claiming to be was not at odds with reality, like when a boy claims to be a girl or a girl claims to be a boy. Jesus had in fact backed up with

claims with the hard proof of his many miracles—miracles that he could only have performed if he were the Son of God. So when Jesus talks about his real family, this has real consequences for our life on earth and for where we spend eternity when we die. Only Jesus's family gets to live in Jesus's house, which is heaven.

And who are the true members of Jesus's family? "Whoever does the will of God." The will of God is first of all to believe in Jesus as our Savior from sin, death, the devil, and hell. Jesus once said, "My Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:40). (Notice how Jesus also indirectly called God his Father here in Mark too. That's why he only said, "brother and sister and mother"; he only had one true father—namely God.) Jesus gives us this saving faith that is his Father's will through baptism and through the good news of what he has done for us.

The will of God, second, is that we bear the fruits of faith and do what he commands, not out of compulsion, but willingly, from the heart. One of the chief fruits of faith that Jesus praises here is the one his audience was showing. They were sitting in a circle around him, listening to his word. Nothing else in their lives was as important as this—even in a warm, stuffy, crowded, smelly room. Jesus's words are spirit and they are life (John 6:63). Yes, we have good earthly vocations and good earthly things to do. We have to provide for our families and ourselves and be contributing members of society. But none of that is as important as setting aside time to sit at Jesus's feet and to listen to his word, the Word that rebukes and condemns us in ourselves, the Word that forgives and saves us in Christ, the Word that guides and strengthens us.

In fact, as Jesus himself makes clear, listening to his word is even more important than what our families want us to do. God wants us to live in harmony with our earthly families, but if they get in between us and believing and doing and listening to God's word, then we need to put our real family first, the family of Jesus, the one who became our ultimate brother in the flesh to pay for our sins and reconcile us with God, so that God would be our true and ultimate Father, and so that one day we could look forward to living in our Brother and Father's house, heaven. As the psalmist said, "Though father and mother forsake me, the Lord will take me in." May Jesus always keep us believers in him, and thus as members of his real family. Amen.