

Christ Culture: Blood Runs Thicker!

A sermon based on Mark 3:31-35.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Jesus looked around. He took a deep breath. His family already thought he was losing his mind. He was overworking himself. He wasn't getting enough sleep. He was on the sure path to burnout. And, on top of all that, the Pharisees and teachers of the law were getting fed up with Jesus, his popularity, and the fact he was stealing people away from their "truth"...so much so that they started accusing Jesus of being the devil's puppet. They wanted him gone.

And Jesus' mother and brothers knew that. So, they had come calling on Jesus. They wanted him to take a nap, find a place to decompress for a day or two, do something – anything - to get out of preaching for a little bit, to get out of the limelight, to get out of the crosshairs of his enemies.

So, again, Jesus looked around. He was surrounded by his disciples and others – people he had never seen before – but still those eager to hear his words...a message of peace. But his family outside – his mother and brothers – they were family. They were blood. They cared about him. They wanted what they thought was best for him. Surely their concerns would take precedence. Surely, Jesus would listen and leave.

But Jesus looked around, he took a deep breath, and he slowly began to speak, ***“Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother.”***

Wow! Bold! You know, last week, we talked about something holding incredible value to so many today...money. But I would argue that our final Christ Culture topic today - family – holds even more value.

I mean, listen to some of these quotes I read online...***“The most important thing in the world is family and love.” “You don't choose your family. They are God's gift to you.” “Family is not an important thing. It's everything.” “You go through life wondering what is it all about but at the end of the day it's all about family.” “My family is my life, and everything else comes second as far as what's important to me.”***

What do you think? Do you agree? Well, I guess it depends on who you're talking to. We look around our society and our country today and what do we see? A lot of broken families...families affected by divorce, or where only one parent is around, parents treating kids like they're burdens and an inconvenience rather than a gift from God, kids themselves having to step up and parent because Mom and Dad aren't up to the task.

And maybe you've experienced that to an extent yourself or have seen that in people who are close to you. In spite of that, though, our culture today still says, “Your family is what's most important.” You even have that whole axiom, “Blood runs thicker than water.” Our culture's definition of who's blood, though, is fluid, right? For many, it's immediate family. It's your blood relatives. For others, whose family life isn't the greatest, their idea of family would fall in line with what one commenter on a website about family had to say, ***“I believe just being blood related doesn't make family. It's love and trust and joy together that makes a family, and sometimes there is no "biological" relation to those who consider them family.”*** So that would include friends, co-workers, neighbors...family.

And you know what? For once, I don't disagree. As a believer in Christ, I'm telling you right now, I don't disagree with our culture saying, “Family is most important.” Where the divergence comes, though, is who

we're looking at as family. Let me ask you right now, who's your family? Think about that for a couple seconds. Who is your family?

For Jesus, he knew who his true family was. It wasn't that he was disregarding his mom and his brothers. He wasn't shunning them. He wasn't telling them they weren't important. He knew what and who was most important to him... "**whoever does the will of my Father,**" that is, those who believe in me and are interested in obeying me, that's my family.

Could there have been a more vivid illustration of a lesson Jesus had taught only weeks earlier? Do you recall? Jesus was preparing to send out the twelve disciples, so he was giving them some final instructions. A lot of that dealt with what to expect out there...the realities they would face in being his spokesmen. Here's some of what he said, "**Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn "a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.'** "**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. Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me."**

Do you understand his point? It's not that Jesus came to break up families. He has a message, though, that, because of the prevalence of sin in the world, does cause discord in families. It can cause even family members to be at odds when following Christ's will is at stake.

The truth is for you, family, friends, work, health—these all are vying for your time and attention to the point where your faith – being part of God's family and what that entails – is being threatened to be pushed further and further down the list of what's most important to you.

Let's look at a few situations to see if this is true for you or not. We're throwing a block party at church one Saturday, but your cousin is getting married the same day...out of town. Where would you go? I'll say, there's nothing wrong with either choice here, but maybe start to observe where your loyalties tend to lie.

Example #2 - Worship here is every Sunday at 10:30am. You know what God wants and expects in regards to regularly being in his house. But, your son's friend's high school basketball team is in the state championship game, in town, at same time. Where do you go? What about when it's your own child? And it's most weekends with tournaments or practices.

Example #3 - Let's get into something a little more difficult, hitting closer to home. We have/we've had families attending here where only one of the spouses is coming to church and the other either doesn't belong to a church or belongs to another church. And, most of the time, you powered through, had to be self-motivated to get yourself and the kids up for church or Sunday School or whatever church activity you were going to participate in, and for the most part, the spouse was hands-off, maybe disinterested.

But then, suddenly, they weren't. Maybe they started scheduling activities when you have women's group. Maybe they encouraged you to play hooky – just this once – instead of going to church. Maybe the comment even was, "I don't feel comfortable with you going there anymore or being involved with that or being as active as you were. I need you around here more." What would you do? Who would you choose?

Or maybe, example #4 – One of your family members, whom you adore, is caught in a blatant, open sin. I know one that's real prevalent today is a family member living together, sleeping together with their partner outside of marriage. And they want you to be supportive of their decision. You son, daughter, cousin, sister says, "Why can't you be fine with this?" Maybe they're planning on getting married someday, and they want you to stand

up in their wedding as if you're in support of them doing that, as if the sin they were living in up to that point didn't matter. What do you do?

It's not easy, is it?

I'm not telling you to disown any of your relatives who don't believe the same as you do. Jesus was not trying to push his family away. You have to think Jesus struggled at least a little with that, felt the tug to go and be with his family when they came for him.

They were concerned. Mary was concerned about the stress and strain she thought Jesus was under. However, when she and Jesus' brothers tried to take him away, they were asserting a responsibility they didn't have, though their intentions were good. It was interference on their part in his messianic work.

And sometimes, our families can do the same. The comment, "I know you've been stressed at work lately. How about you take this weekend off from church for a family day." Or, "I know you've been really sick lately. I think it might be a good idea if you weren't so involved with that team or if you didn't do that activity at church this year...for the good of your health" I mean, I get it. Being concerned about physical health of family, that's great. Suggesting/encouraging, maybe even demanding/strongly urging you to stop doing what you love and what gives you purpose and what keeps you connected to your church family and what's following Christ's will for your life, that's not great.

Again, I know it's hard. It's why in Matthew 10, Jesus calls it "picking up your cross." It's not easy. It's a struggle, especially when it comes to people you love and cherish who are trying – either intentionally or not – to keep you from being faithful to Jesus.

"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." Jesus calls us to love him above all—more than family or friends, more than personal safety or even life itself. Such total commitment to Christ will not bring peace to your life, but constant conflict with the sinful world around you. And sometimes, that even includes family.

Are you willing to pick up that cross?

Author and Christian theologian C.S. Lewis once said, **"Christianity, if false, is of no importance, and if true, of infinite importance. The only thing it cannot be is moderately important."** It's can't be, "Jesus is important until it comes to family." It's really a 1st Commandment issue. So I ask you, which family is more important to you?

I can tell you Jesus' answer. You heard it earlier, ***"Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."***

It's you! You are so important to Jesus that even his own flesh and blood couldn't tear him away from his work of saving you. Even the fact we don't always do the will of God wasn't enough to push Jesus towards his earthly family and away from his redeeming work.

Remember what he said to Mary and Joseph when he was just a teenager, who stayed behind in Jerusalem and caused them so much grief and stress in looking for him? ***"Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"***

When it came to family members, there was one voice Jesus would listen to, no matter what...his heavenly Father. And you know God's will for Jesus. Scripture makes it clear. In Isaiah 53, we hear, ***"It was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer...he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed."*** We hear,

“The blood of Jesus, God’s Son, purifies us from all sin.” That blood, shed on the cross as the punishment for our sins, it runs thicker than any blood we could ever share with our family members. The blood of Jesus, shed on the cross, has torn us out of Satan’s family. The blood of Jesus, shed on the cross, opened the way for us to be adopted into God’s family through the Holy Spirit working faith in Jesus in our hearts through God’s Word and the waters of baptism.

The blood of Christ, who lived and died and rose for us, that blood unites us in God’s family. It runs thicker than this blood that connects you to your own flesh and blood. And you know what’s so great about that? It’s not just a temporary relationship. It’s a relationship with Jesus and other believers that will last for eternity, even in heaven. That is the most important relationship.

So what do I do when it comes to my earthly family...or at least, how culture defines family today? Again, I’m not telling you to kick them to the curb or shun them when they tempt you to go along with their sin or because they might not be believers themselves.

Family is still family. Even though Jesus was beholden to his Father’s will, remember what he did for Mary at the cross? ***“Dear woman, here is your son...Here is your mother.”*** He was about to die, and he still cared about and wanted to provide for his mother...his family.

God’s Word tells us, ***“If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”*** God still wants us to care for family. Now, can that include my friends, neighbors, co-workers as well? Yeah, definitely!

But at the same time, don’t be afraid to set down boundaries. Let them know Jesus always comes first. I will admit, that can be extremely difficult, to say to a family member something like, “I know you’re only in town for the week, maybe even only the weekend, and you don’t care much for church. But I do. Brunch can wait because I’m going to go to worship.” Or, “You might not want me to help out with VBS, but that’s one of the ways I get to thank Jesus for the abilities he’s given me, so I will.”

Again, that’s hard, but in those times, when you’re struggling to set boundaries, you can do two things. 1) Lean on your family here. We care about you. God wants you to care about them. Galatians 6 encourages, ***“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”***

2) Lean even more on Jesus. 1 Peter reminds us, ***“Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.”*** Take your struggles to the Lord in prayer. And then, don’t ever compromise on your relationship with Jesus or his Word. What did he say again? ***“Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.”***

1 Peter 3 gives this encouragement, ***“Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.”*** And the same could be said for husbands and children who are living as Christ’s lights in the presence of family. Living as God’s child, even to the point of sometimes saying “no” to family for the sake of your most important relationship can be a strong witness for Christ.

You have been transformed...by the blood of Christ shed for your sins...by the work of the Holy Spirit renewing your heart and your mind. That puts you into a different culture...Christ culture. You’re different. You’re different from the rest of culture today. And that’s great. You’re part of God’s family. That’s truly incredible. May God continue to be with you and work through you as you live Christ culture...as you do the will of your heavenly Father. That’s bold! That’s love for God. Amen.