**Jesus is known by His family**

Text: Mark 3:7-35

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**Scriptures:** Proverbs 16:1-6; Mark 3:7-35

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 193, 390, 138, 439, 180

**Series:** The gospel of Mark (#7)

**Theme:** Jesus appoints his twelve disciples, his own family think that He is mad, the scribes accuse Him of being under Satan’s rule and He identifies His true family as being those who do the will of God.

**Proposition:** The true family of Jesus are those who do the will of God

**Introduction**

We are all part of different associations – family, church, workplace colleagues, fellow students or apprentices, classes at school, play groups and clubs. An association is defined as ‘a group of people organised for a joint purpose’ or ‘a connection or relationship between things or people’.

Our text from Mark 3:7-35 is all about associations. There are lots of people and also demons who encountered Jesus in our text. Mark records that a ‘great crowd followed’ Him from all over Israel and her near neighbours. Galilee, Judea and Jerusalem are all part of the territory of Israel, whereas Idumea, Transjordan, and the coastal cities of Tyre and Sidon are the southern, eastern and north-western borders of the promised land. There was clearly widespread interest in Jesus beyond the limits of Israel. Most people were likely drawn mostly by the prospect of being healed from sickness. The demons addressed Jesus by name as the Son of God in order to seek to control him and render him powerless, but it was they who ‘*fell down before him*’ and took orders from Him (v12).

There were twelve men who Jesus appointed as apostles with whom He was closely connected. His own family thought that He was ‘*out of his mind*’ (v21). The scribes who had come down from Jerusalem to investigate Him said that He was in league with Satan.

Out of all the people and spirits who were drawn to Jesus for different reasons, He revealed who His true family are – those who ‘do the will of God.’ This is the association that really matters. The will of God is clearly expressed in the words of Christ, ‘repent and believe the gospel.’ We are going to look at the various relationships of Jesus in our text under three headings:

1. Human associations
2. Satanic associations?
3. God’s family revealed
4. **Human associations**

Like you and me, Jesus had various kinds of association with different people. It is very clear from Scripture that the man Jesus had relationship connection both to His own human family and also to the men He called to be His twelve disciples. Mark has revealed the calling by Jesus of four fishermen – the brothers Simon Peter and Andrew and the two sons of Zebedee James and John (1:16-20). He has also described the calling of the tax collector Levi, otherwise known as Matthew, the writer of the gospel that bears his name.

Now Mark lists the disciples who Jesus appointed to be ‘apostles’. This word means ‘one sent forth from another with a special task and with the authority of the one who sends them’. Today many countries have ambassadors who represent their country overseas. An apostle was an ambassador for Christ, sent out to represent Him and to bear His authority to preach and to cast out demons (v15).

It is incredible that Jesus shares His power with imperfect people. The twelve disciples were most notable, not for any exceptional powers or abilities, but for their ordinariness. They were not special. Jesus is! Many of the disciples had nicknames that described their individual characters or live situations: Simon was called ‘Peter’ – the rock; James and John were called ‘the sons of thunder’; Thomas was called ‘the twin’; The other Simon was called ‘the zealot’ – perhaps with reference to his zeal for the nationalist cause in Israel; Judas had the nickname ‘Iscariot’. This most likely means ‘the man from Karioth’ – a town located south of Jerusalem in Judea. It has also been suggested that ‘Iscariot’ is derived from the Hebrew word meaning ‘falsehood’. Judas is believed by some to have been a sicarius (Latin assassin) – a member of the group of terrorists who were aiming to overthrow the occupying Roman forces.

In adding after Judas Iscariot’s name the words ‘who betrayed him’, Mark foreshadows Judas’ kiss and declaration ‘Rabbi’ by which he would identify Jesus to those who came to seize him with swords and clubs (Mark 14:43-50). Not all of the apostles appointed by Christ were faithful. Not all were truly associated with the gospel of God. In God’s plan of salvation, Judas was predestined to be the betrayer of Christ, but he was also fully responsible for the choice that he freely made to hand Christ over to those who would take Him away to be tried and executed. Luke reveals these twin truths in his gospel: “*For the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!*" (Luke 22:22 cf. Mark 14:21).

Not all of the twelve apostles who followed Jesus and were associated with Him belonged to Him, even though for the years that He walked with them, it appeared so. Jesus knew that being closely associated with Him did not necessarily mean that a person was actually connected to Him in a genuinely loving way. Mark later records the sorrow and self-doubt of the disciples at the first Lord’s Supper when Jesus says to them: "*Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me." They began to be sorrowful and to say to him one after another, "Is it I?" He said to them, "It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the dish with me*” (Mark 14:18-20).

In addition to the association that Jesus had with His twelve disciples, He also had family relationships with His mother Mary and her other children: His brothers and sisters in the flesh. In chapter 6 of his gospel, Mark records the words of the townspeople of Nazareth who asked: "*Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?*" (Mark 6:3).

As the public ministry of Jesus grew in popularity and the crowds followed Him, He needed time to be alone and pray in the early morning (1:35), and He withdrew from the multitudes by going out on the Sea of Galilee (3:7). So great was the crowd pressure, Mark records that Jesus and His disciples ‘*could not even eat*’ (Mark 3:20).

It is understandable that the human family of Jesus were concerned about Him lacking sufficient food or rest, but it is clear that their worries about Him were more than just about the pressures of public ministry. His own family were saying “*He is out of His mind*” (3:21). These words reflect both misunderstanding and unbelief. His zeal – his fervent passion - was mistaken for madness. His family thought that he had lost His grip on reality. They wanted to restrain him and (presumably) bring him forcibly home to Nazareth. (Whilst the Greek words translated ‘family’ (para auto ‘alongside him’) in v21 can mean ‘family’, ‘relatives’ or ‘friends’, the reference to his mother and brothers looking for Jesus in v31 strongly implies that they are the ones who wanted to seize him).

It is clear from the words of Christ ‘*Who are my mother and my brothers?’* (3:33) that mere association with Jesus does not mean that a person is part of God’s family. Mark ‘sandwiches’ the relationship between Jesus and His earthly family in verse 21 and the again in v31-32 with the accusation that Jesus was associated with Satan, which brings us to our second point:

1. **Satanic Associations?**

Does Jesus have a relationship with Satan? If that sounds like a shocking question to be asking – it is. The scribes who travelled from Jerusalem to investigate the ministry of Christ not only asked this shameful question, they answered it by declaring “*He is possessed by Beelzebul*” (Mark 3:22). This name only appears in the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. It is based on the Hebrew word ‘baal’ – meaning Lord and ‘zebub’. The likely meaning is ‘Lord of the flies’, ‘Lord of dung’ or ‘Lord of the dwelling’. It is clear from the words of the scribes (v22) that here it has the sense of ‘*the prince of the demons*’. What these religious leaders were saying was that Jesus is associated with Satan; that He is possessed by an evil Spirit.

The scribes then make the ridiculous, illogical, claim that it is by the ruler of demons that Jesus casts out demons. They attribute the source of Jesus’ power to Satan. Jesus replies to the two charges laid against Him by speaking these truths:

* A kingdom or house divided against itself cannot stand. The family of David in the Old Testament evidences this reality. Therefore ‘*if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end’ (v26)*. So, if Jesus was casting out demons by the power of Satan that would be a good thing because it would mean that Satan was being weakened as he destroyed his own realm.
* In order to plunder the house of a strong man, a stronger person must first render him powerless before taking away what he has. By casting out demons, who are in the possession of Satan, Jesus shows that He is stronger than the Adversary.

The powerful activity of Jesus demonstrated that kingdom of God had come (Matt 12:28). Christ was attacking Satan’s army and winning every battle. He had no association with the Devil but was utterly opposed to him -conquering him as an enemy.

In their day, the scribes were the theologically educated ‘experts’; well-studied in the Old Testament Scriptures and even more so in the Jewish traditions and interpretations that had been built up over many years. The ‘*scribes who came down from Jerusalem*’ were a ‘delegation’ of specialists whose presence in Capernaum indicated that Jesus had attracted the critical attention of the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was the highest Jewish authority in the 1st century AD, composed of 71 members under the leadership of the high priest. The Sanhedrin was composed mainly of Sadducees, but also included Pharisees (e.g. Acts 5:34; 23:1-9). The learned scribes proposed that the source of Jesus’ power was Satan.

In his reply Jesus confirms that the source of His power is His possession of the Spirit of God and that by attributing His work to an association with Satan they are guilty of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Blasphemy is using the name of God with an attitude of disrespect, contempt and lack of reverence. Blasphemy is an expression of defiant hostility toward God. The Old Testament penalty for this offence was death by stoning (Lev 24:14-16).

There is a deep irony in the this. The guilty were accusing the Innocent One. The scribes had already charged Jesus with blasphemy when He forgave the sins of the paralytic (2:7). If there was a media release back then, it might say “*experts confirm that Jesus the Nazarene is guilty of blasphemy*”. Yet Jesus was **not** guilty because He is the Son of God (3:11), whereas it was actually the scribes who were guilty of blasphemy. The scribes were attributing to Satan the work of God’s Spirit. This was a conscious and deliberate rejection of the saving power and grace of God released through the words and works of Jesus. Jesus uses the word ‘amen’ (translated ‘truly, I say to you’ – v28) to confirm that His words are reliable and true because He is totally committed to do and to speak the will of God.

These are the glorious and solemn words of Christ: "*Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin*" (Mark 3:28-29). Christians over the centuries have been deeply troubled by this last verse, but we who in are Christ do not need to be anxious. ‘To blaspheme the Holy Spirit’ is a conscious and deliberate rejection of the saving power and grace of God released through Jesus’s words and acts. The scribes were guilty of saying that Jesus is associated with Satan.

To blaspheme the Holy Spirit is to exhibit an extreme hardness of heart (3:5); like that of the religious leaders who knew the Scriptures so well, but denied the Christ to whom they pointed; despite the evidence before their eyes. As Paul would later write, of other men, to Timothy, they had the ‘*appearance of godliness, but denied its power*’ (2 Tim 3:5).

We tend to focus on the ‘eternal sin’ of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, but give your attention to the words ‘*all sins will be forgiven the children of men, and whatever blasphemies they utter*.’ Think about Saul of Tarsus who tried to force early Jewish Christians to blaspheme (Acts 26:11). He is forgiven in Christ! Think about Peter who cursed and swore that he did not know Jesus (Mark 14:71). He is forgiven in Christ! Think about you and me and the times that we have dishonoured the name of Christ through our words, thoughts and actions. In Christ, who has no association with Satan, brothers and sisters, we are forgiven all our sins! Not just some, but every single one! We are adopted into the heavenly family of Christ as beloved children of God, which brings us to our third point:

1. **God’s family revealed**

As this section of Mark’s gospel, which focusses on the different associations of Jesus with others, comes to a close we read that the mother of Jesus and His brothers came ‘*and standing outside they sent to him and called him*’ (v31). Yet, Christ did not respond to the call of His human family to associate with them. Instead He remained with His disciples and continued with the ministry of the gospel. We know that Jesus had good relationships with His human family as He grew up – ‘*in favour with God and man*’ (Luke 2:52). We know that He cared deeply for His mother Mary, entrusting her into the care of John before He died (John 19:26). Yet there was a stronger association for Him; His connection to others who, like Him, do the will of God. This is the basis of His kinship with human beings like us.

Instead of returning to Nazareth with His human family, He remained obedient to the higher call of His Heavenly Father and looking around said: "*Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.*" (Mark 3:34b-35). Jesus was associated with those in the crowd sitting around Him who were obedient to the will of God. Here is the simple truth: performing the will of God is the determining factor for saving association, authentic relationship, with Jesus Christ.

We know that members of human families who share the same genetic ancestry look similar. We can often identify someone’s whanau by seeing similarities between them and other family members in how they look, talk and behave. We know that Jesus, the natural, eternal, non-adopted son of God bears the family resemblance of His Heavenly Father. He is the ‘*image of the invisible God*’ (Col 1:15), ‘*full of grace and truth*’ (John 1:14). His character, attitudes and behaviour are ‘God-like’ in every way.

So, it makes absolute sense that those who are adopted into the family of God are also those who are ‘God-like’ in that they do the will of God as evidenced in their character, attitudes and behaviour. Now if we stop and think about this, it actually sounds like very bad news because not one of us fully does the will of God. When we fail and sin, we go against His revealed will. So if Jesus is saying that 100% obedience to God’s will is the defining characteristic of those who He associates with in the Heavenly family, then He would be alone as the only Son.

The new family that Jesus calls people into by following him demands a radical obedience to God as evidenced, first and foremost by a willing response to the kingdom call to ‘*repent and believe the gospel*’ and to respond to the call of Jesus to follow Him. The family of God is not an association of people like Jesus who have always perfectly done the will of God. The family of God is an association of people who live repentant lives of faith in Christ alone. This family acknowledges that they have not always done the will of God, but they trust that the obedience of Jesus in living a perfect life and dying in their place confers on them the incomparable privilege of being a child of God. How else could Jesus look around Him at imperfect men and women and say, ‘*he is my brother and sister and mother*’?

That is an incredible statement from the Holy One of God, and it is very good news for people like us. It means that first and foremost, as followers of Christ, our strongest family connections are with others who, like us, follow Him in repentance and faith. This does not mean that we disregard our natural families and have nothing to do with them. Sadly some cults, including some extreme Christian groups, teach the practice of ‘shunning’ those who do not hold to the religious teaching of their association, including ‘unbelieving’ family members.

Notice that Jesus didn’t break off relationships with his human family, even when they, in their unbelief, thought he was mad. It was only later that their unbelief turned to faith. For example we know that James, the human brother of Jesus followed Him and was a leader in the early church (Gal 1:19). So we are **not** called to break off our association with members of our families who, as yet, have not come to Christ. Yet ultimately the family of God must be a higher priority in our lives than our natural family. The Apostle Peter understood this when he wrote ‘*love one another earnestly from a pure heart*’ (1 Pet 1:22). Sometimes I’ve heard people in churches say things like ‘*Sunday is our family day when we get together with our own, that’s why we can’t invite non-family members over and extend hospitality to them*’.

In our text, Jesus is saying to us all, brothers and sisters, that we are part of a very large, multicultural family. In fact the family of God is so huge that it’s not possible for us to have close associations with every one of our siblings in the Lord. So God, in His wisdom has divided His family up into local church congregations so that we can function together as a smaller family unit. The local church is primarily the place where we live out our family life in Christ. The local church is the community of association in Christ where we encourage older men like fathers, treat younger men like brothers, older women like mothers, and younger women like sisters (1 Tim 5:1-2).

Jesus, our ‘older brother’ is no longer on this earth, but He is known to the world around us by the family resemblance we bear to Him as children of God. The human family of Jesus wanted to call Him to go with them so they could care for Him and so He could re-join them in their way of life. Sometimes, brothers and sisters, we want Jesus to come our way and join us in what we are doing. Instead, Jesus calls everyone who will listen to follow Him so that He can care for them, and they can join Him in His way of life. So ask yourself this question “*Do I want to go where Jesus will lead me and to join Him in what He is doing?*”

If you do, then you must be part of God’s family! That’s good news!

AMEN.