**A relationship with Jesus** 4/6/23 dkm

Read: Deuteronomy 7:1-11, Mark 3:20-35

Text: Mark 3:31-35

Psalms: 23old, 77:13-20, 103:8-189, 116:12-19, 72old

Personal relationships are important, indeed essential, for every human being. Our secular society recognises this, even as it works hard to destroy relationships, especially the marriage relationship, but also the parent-child relationship. It was just seventy years ago that an organisation called ‘Relationships Australia’ began. It began as a marriage guidance centre but now, with government funding, employs hundreds of counsellors. It is a secular, non-religious organisation, promoting the values of our society. The only relationship not pictured on their website is a man and a woman with children! They exist to help the increasing number of lonely people in our society, people often lonely because of marriage and family breakdown.

Many look for deeper relationships in the workplace, in a sports team, or other association. They depend upon the workplace for their only personal interaction- they may have a pet at home but this is not a personal interaction! In an office I once worked in, an employee was always wanting to have drinks after work or a weekend party. There is nothing wrong with this except that I, like others, wanted to go home to my family; I later heard that her family was breaking down.

Where do you find personal relationships? Do you consider Jesus your friend, or as a brother? Jesus had his own biological family of course, but he speaks about personal relationships beyond this family. What was, and is, the nature of his relationship with his followers or disciples? Let us consider this question as we consider the text before us, and other Bible passages. Our subheadings are: ‘Family-biological’, and, ‘Family-spiritual’.

**1. Family-biological**

When God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into him the breath of life, he called that man Adam. God saw that it was not good for man to be alone, so he made woman. He saw no other creature ‘comparable to him’, no animal able to provide a fulfilling relationship for man (Gen 2:20). The man and the woman were joined together as husband and wife, and had children. This is the basic unit of any human society- the nuclear family. Children grow up and marry of course, so we have grandchildren and even great grandchildren- the extended family. We have a cousins, the children of the brothers and sisters of our parents. This is what God ordained for human society.

God created the family as the basis for society but he also ordained the man and the woman to have a relationship with himself. God came to Adam in the garden to talk with him and have communion with him- this was before they disobeyed God and sin entered the world. God planned to restore this communion or relationship with himself through the sacrifice of his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. The coming of sin also played havoc with relationships within the family God created.

But not all human beings accept this gracious act of God through his own beloved Son. They want no relationship with God through repentance and forgiveness of sin. They do not want to follow what God has ordained for his creation with regard to human relationships- or other relationships for that matter (Prov 12:10)! Atheistic societies, as seen in communism, try to destroy the family, and secular societies like ours want to do the same because they hate the good that God has created. It was not long after the Relationships Australia organisation began that no-fault divorce was legislated, and more recently, same-sex marriage. When God made man and put him in the garden everything was good, with one man and one woman joined for life.

God affirmed the family as the basis human society when he sent his only begotten Son into this world, ‘born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons’ (Gal 4:4,5). Jesus did not come from another planet or come as an angel; he came ‘born of a woman’ just like you and me. We are not told a great deal about the family into which Jesus was born, but he did have brothers and sisters, siblings born of Mary and Joseph by natural means. His biological brothers are named in Mark 6:3. Mary’s husband, Joseph, is not mentioned after the birth narratives, probably because he died. The Roman Catholic Church came up with the doctrine of Mary’s perpetual virginity, but not from the Bible.

Jesus grew up in this human family, honouring and obeying his parents. He never sinned so never broke the fifth commandment. In his youth he showed awareness of being the Son of God when in the temple in Jerusalem. He told his parents, ‘I must be about my Father’s business’ (Luke 2:49). But he went home with them, and was obedient to them.

When, at the age of thirty, Jesus left his home in Nazareth to begin his ministry, he called twelve unrelated men to be with him as disciples and apostles, but he didn’t forget about his mother and brothers and sisters. They were not following him as disciples at this time but were in contact. They heard about the crowds following Jesus down in Galilee, and about the Pharisees plotting against him. They thought things were getting out of hand and that Jesus needed to be brought home for a while to rest, or more likely, to be given some family advice regarding his life (3:21). When they found Jesus they could not get near him because of the crowd sitting around him, watching and listening to his every word in wonder and amazement. They managed to get a message through to Jesus; he was told, ‘Your mother and your brothers are outside looking for you’ (3:32 NIV). What did the family expect Jesus to do? What did the crowd expect Jesus to do? Did they expect him to get up and go with his biological family? He did that when he was twelve, but now he was thirty!

Jesus did not rebuke his mother and brothers for coming to find him. He did not brush them off as unimportant. The fifth commandment continued to apply. What Jesus did was use this occasion to teach the crowd, and his family, about relationships in the kingdom of God.

**2. Family -spiritual**

Jesus began his ministry announcing, ‘The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel’ (1:15). While acknowledging his biological family, Jesus made known to everyone sitting around him the existence of another family, a spiritual family, the family of men and women who belong to God. In a sense this was nothing new because under the old covenant the people Moses led out of Egypt were called the children of God. They were ‘a holy people to the Lord’, the people upon whom God set his love (Deut 7:6,7). But these children rebelled against God and he punished them.

Jesus came to these same people, telling them to repent and believe the gospel. He called people to follow him and many did, most notably the twelve apostles. They would have been sitting near Jesus in the crowd that surrounded him when his mother and brothers came. As so often, Jesus saw this interaction as a teaching opportunity, an opportunity to teach his followers about the kingdom of God.

In answer to the call from his mother and brothers, Jesus looked at the people around him and said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers!’ (3:34). He looked beyond his biological family to the family of God, declaring unrelated individuals listening to his words as belonging to this spiritual family. On what basis did Jesus declare these individuals his brothers and sisters? ‘Whoever does the will of God is my brother and my sister and mother’ (3:35).

Let us back up a little as we try to understand what Jesus is saying. He is speaking of a family other than his biological family. His biological brothers did not at this point in time belong to this other family, this spiritual family (John 7:5). Being a ‘flesh-born’ brother of Jesus did not make them his spiritual brothers (John 1:12, 13). To become a brother or sister of Jesus within this spiritual family, this family of God, a person must be born again, or born of God, or born of the Spirit (John 1:13, 3:5). This new birth occurs when you repent of your sin and believe in the gospel (1:15). At this new birth you receive the Holy Spirit as a guide and helper. The Holy Spirit, who dwells in your heart, helps you to understand and obey God’s word. If you do not have the Spirit of Christ you do not belong to Christ (Rom 8:9). You receive the Spirit from Christ when you repent and believe in him.

This brings us back to what Jesus demands of those he calls his brothers and sisters, namely, ‘Whoever does the will of God’ (3:35). To do the will of God is to obey his commands. Jesus always did the will of his Father; it is a requirement of belonging to the family of God. Luke records Jesus as saying, ‘My mother and my brother are those who hear the word of God and do it’ (Luke 8:21). New birth, and the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, will be manifested in listening to and obeying the word of God, the word from which we discover his will for us. Jesus told a parable about two men, one wise and one foolish (Mat 7:24-27). The wise man built his house on the rock, and the foolish man built his house on the sand. Why was the wise man wise- because he listened to the words of the Lord and obeyed them?

If you are born again, and if you do the will of God, Jesus calls you his brother or sister? This is a profound truth, a glorious truth. Do you understand, and do you rejoice in the great honour and privilege associated with being a brother or sister of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. ‘Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us that we should be called children of God’ (1John 3:1). You were chosen by God and adopted into his family. By his grace you became a brother or sister of Christ, and a joint heir with Christ (Rom 8:17).

Your biological family is precious and important, but Jesus says there is something more important, namely your spiritual family. Moralists and nominal Christians cannot understand this, but I trust you do. It is a blessing when these two families overlap, but let us remember what Jesus says here and elsewhere (Mat 10:37); let us not put even our parents or siblings before Jesus and the family of brothers and sisters in Christ.

While Jesus calls us brothers and sisters, he remains as the only begotten Son of God. In this way he is unique. He remains as the head of the family, the head of the church (Col 1:18). We are adopted into the family of God through new birth, through spiritual rebirth, not members of the family because of our mother, or from eternity as Jesus is. Jesus listens to us when we pray and wants to bless us, but he is not obliged to obey us as we are obliged to obey his voice and do his will (John 10:27).

If all who believe are brothers and sisters of Christ, what does this mean regarding relationships within the family of God, which exists on earth as the church? As brothers and sisters of Christ we are brothers and sisters of one another, brothers and sisters in Christ. There is only one Christ and one family of Christ. As believers, we have a relationship with Christ who is the head, and a relationship with one another as different parts of the body or as branches on the vine (Eph 4:15, 16, John 15:1-5).

Just as biological brothers and sisters are bound together through a common parent, so spiritual brothers and sisters are bound together in Christ. When our parents die we feel less bound to one another, but Christ is alive, and binds us together by his Spirit for eternity. Be careful about carrying personal animosities to heaven; be careful full stop, because anyone who hates his brother or sister in Christ is ‘walking in darkness’, walking outside the family of God (1John 2:11). The closer we walk with the Lord, the closer we will be walking with one another in his church. We will always have our DNA, but DNA gives way to the Spirit of God dwelling in our hearts. Even unbelievers cannot use their DNA as an excuse for sin.

A final word regarding our relationship to Jesus, and our relationship to one another. The two commandments given by Jesus deal with these two relationships, namely, ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and all your mind’, and ‘Love your neighbour as yourself’. You must keep both commandments if you belong in the family of God.