

May 12, 2024

“Our Highest Priority”  
Mark 3:20-35

FCF: Misplaced priorities (“family first”)

**PROPOSITION:** (anchor) Jesus is our great King.  
(magnet) He then must be our highest priority.

**SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:**

As a man of Swiss descent, this news story a few years ago was distressing (**READ**):

You can live without your morning coffee, at least according to the government of Switzerland. The nation has for decades required coffee makers and retailers to stockpile coffee in case a national emergency disrupted supplies...The government announced on April 10 that requirements to stockpile coffee will end...The reason, according to a government announcement: “The Federal Office for National Economic Supply has concluded coffee... is not essential for life.”

But my hope was restored as I read that the public outcry was so great the decision was reversed.

Obviously, these Swiss officials had some misplaced priorities. That can happen in a host of other ways as well. Let me suggest one that may surprise you, even take you back a bit. It’s phrased this way, “Family first, do or die.” This Mother’s Day, I’d like for us to question that.

**SCRIPTURE READING:** [Mark 3:20-35](#)

**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION****SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

I’ve been reading Jane Austen as of late - not just books by her but about her. In one of the biographies, I learned the story of how *Emma* came to be dedicated to Prince George (later King George IV). It seems the Prince was a fan of her work. While she was in London, a royal representative was sent to her with word that he was to show her the Prince’s library (**READ**):

During the visit Mr Clarke declared that if she were at work on another novel she might if she chose dedicate it to the Prince himself. Not caring at all for the Prince, Jane decided to ignore this suggestion. When Henry and Cassandra heard of this they explained that it was not so much a request as a royal command. Jane took the hint and sent the dedication of *Emma* to the printer at once.

Apparently, as a subject of the crown, that’s how you responded to royal requests in 1815.

Which is instructive for us as we consider our text. This account takes place early in Jesus’ ministry. All of which is centered on his being the King, come to usher in his kingdom. He has begun to teach and to heal. He has just called the 12 apostles. This is not just any king. He is far greater than any Roman caesar or any ruler in Israel’s long and storied past. Jesus is the great King. And for his followers, he is our great King. He then must be our highest priority.

How is that to be understood? Let’s consider this in three parts. First, the reality of the opposition. Second, the necessity of a warning. And then, third, the hope of encouragement.

**I. THE REALITY OF OPPOSITION**

First, the reality of the opposition. This has to be squarely faced and reckoned with.

*A) From the Scribes*

Clearly, we see opposition coming from the scribes in vv.22-30.

## 1. Who they were

These were teachers and experts in the Old Testament law. They were respected authorities who were regarded as gatekeepers of orthodoxy, guardians of the spiritual well-being of the people.

## 2. Their posture

Their posture towards Jesus? Suspicion and hostility, so hardened in their position - attributing the power and work of Jesus through the Holy Spirit to Satan - that they were beyond repentance and faith. And so outside the reach of forgiveness. "He is possessed by a demon!" they said.

### *B) From His Family*

That's the opposition from the scribes. Then there was his family (**READ Mark 3:20-21**).

#### 1. Who they were

Joseph has likely passed away. The sisters are likely at home. His mother and his brothers are there. Think with me. They have grown up with him. They lived life in the home with him.

#### 2. Their posture

Yet their posture to him? When they heard "it" - likely of his miraculous deeds and his blasphemous words - they went to restrain him, to pull him back. Why? For his safety. Possibly for the sake of their reputation. "He is possessed by a demon!" And, "He is out of his mind."

As we follow our King, we need to reckon with the reality of the opposition.

### *Application:*

And it may come from various quarters. Let me suggest it in two ways. It may come from without. That is, from others. The more Jesus asserts himself, the harsher the response. In some contexts, the clearer we are on our loyalty to Jesus, the harsher the response will be to us.

That's opposition from without. But there is also opposition from within. That is, from within our own hearts. The scribes were moral and religious. To the degree we tell ourselves we are "good people," we will resist the needed grace of the gospel. His family were accustomed to Jesus, seemingly familiar with him, and were ill-prepared for the challenge to their assumptions.

What of us? Jesus is our great King. We need to reckon with the reality of opposition.

## **II. THE NECESSITY OF A WARNING**

Which, flowing from that, brings us to the necessity of a warning (**READ Mark 3:31-35**).

### *A) A Needed Balance*

#### 1. Not severing

What Jesus is calling for here is a needed balance. Following him does not mean an obliteration of all natural bonds. Jesus is God. He created the family. His desire is for it to be redeemed.

#### 2. But assessing

So it's not a severing but an assessing he calls for. With his kingdom, family ties are not nothing. But they are not everything. Jesus and his purposes must always outweigh all other claims.

### *B) An Ongoing Snare*

Why is this worth saying? Because of the ongoing snare we experience here.

1. A good thing

God made marriage and family. So it's a good thing. In fact, when you look at Genesis 3 and consider the promise given to Adam and Eve to send a Savior, it's also a means of mercy.

2. A downward slide

So, rightly understood, marriage and family is a good thing. But, when you take a step back, you can see a downward slide to our understanding. It's set up by all the stories that tell us what a happy ending is supposed to look like. It's deepened by our response to the sexual revolution - a necessary defense often soured by a wrong approach. It's worsened by slogans, "Marriage and child-bearing is our highest calling." That's actually false. The Bible doesn't say that at all.

*C) Our Idolatrous Hearts*

Which brings us to the soil in which these seeds then grow - our idolatrous hearts.

1. Definition

"What is an idol?" Anything we worship, serve, and trust instead of the Lord. Anything at all.

2. Explanation

We are all worshippers. We are all looking for a "deep what" to live by. If it's not our creator, it will be something in creation. Even a good thing from the Creator like marriage and family.

This is what Jesus is pressing against. Put yourself there. Family was the priority. His hearers - both the crowd and his family - would assume he would stop and heed this summons. Jesus flips this, stressing family connection but of a whole other sort. Our identity is to be found in him.

This is a warning we need to hear. We must beware of idolizing marriage and family.

*Application:*

How does this happen? When we assume we have to have a certain thing for any real satisfaction or fulfillment in life. In this case, going without a healthy marriage or flourishing children is beyond our imagining. And God has become a means towards these great desires.

And how do we know when this has taken hold? When our demands are denied and we feel an unraveling within. Our desire has become the foundation of our life, the center of our being, the hope of our future, so we are devastated. But if it was loved but not worshipped, received as a gift but not placed on an altar, then we will hurt and grieve, but we will not be undone. We will not be destroyed. Because we still have our foundation, center, and hope.

Jesus speaks these words in love. He is our great King. We must hear this warning.

### **III. THE HOPE OF ENCOURAGEMENT**

To be forewarned is to be forearmed. But we have more - the hope of encouragement.

*A) Of Our Inclusion*

1. How we are regarded

It begins with the hope of our inclusion into this family of which Jesus speaks. Put yourself there in the house with the crowd. He is speaking to you! You and I can be regarded this way!

2. Who is listed

Who do we see listed there? As we read Acts, we see his family waiting in Jerusalem for the coming of the Holy Spirit (READ Acts 1:14). We later see priests and a Pharisee named Saul.

B) *Of His Endurance*

But how is such inclusion possible? Only through his endurance (READ 1 Peter 3:18).

1. The isolation

Consider the isolation Jesus endured. The betrayal by Judas. The loneliness in Gethsemane. The abandonment upon the cross. His cry, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

2. The persecution

That is hinted at here. As is the persecution to come - beyond just harsh words and accusations. Later it will be a beating, scourging, and the cross. His exclusion is what brought our inclusion.

That is the great hope we have and cause for encouragement.

*Application:*

And the cure for our idolatrous hearts. Hear me. To the degree that our sight is taken up with Jesus - who he is, why he came, and what that now means - the gods of our hearts will be seen for how empty they are. And we will come to know how good and glorious he really is.

Jesus is our great King. And he is our hope of encouragement.

**CONCLUSION:**

But what does loyalty to a king look like? How might we envision Jesus as our highest priority? Let me turn your attention to Andrew Peterson's *Wingfeather Saga*, a brilliant series of fantasy novels. One of the themes of the story is that of the "throne warden." It is the title given to the firstborn child in the Annieran royal family. Usually, the firstborn is High King/Queen, but in Anniera there is a different system. Throne Wardens are charged with the most important duty in the land, which is to protect their younger sibling - a future king or queen of Anniera.

In this era of Annieran days, Janner is the throne warden and his younger brother, Tink, is the rightful king. By this point in the story, he is also part wolf but I can't get into that (READ):

"Put down your weapons!" Artham commanded. "He's no Fang!"...But as soon as Artham turned his back, Tink leapt overboard into the icy sea. That was the moment Janner truly became a Throne Warden. Without a thought, Janner tore off his coat and ran. His heart's deepest instinct drove him forward and over the ship's rail to save his brother. As soon as he hit the water, the world became a frigid, airless black. Too cold to think, he grabbed a handful of fur and pulled it near. Claws raked his skin. He felt Tink's teeth again and again, but he held his brother close. When every desperate gasp filled his lungs with water, he hugged the Fang to himself with all his strength. The sea turned red with Janner's blood. The last thing he knew was Artham's strong taloned hands. He felt himself lifted on mighty wings from blackness to light, from silence to sound. And though his wounds were deep and bled freely, though Tink still fought to escape his embrace, in Janner's heart burned great joy.

Now don't be confused by the rescue of the king and his resistance to the help. Janner's love for and loyalty to his king is the point. And it meant his casting aside all love of safety, all desire for comfort, all hope of control. It meant putting the king and the kingdom first. And diving in.

This is meant for us. Jesus is our great King. He then must be our highest priority.

**PROPOSITION:** (anchor) Jesus is our great King.  
(magnet) He then must be our highest priority.