

RELATED BY BLOOD OR BY FAITH?

Today's Text: Mark 3: 20-35

Extracts:

Then His brothers and His mother came, and standing outside they sent to Him, calling Him. And a multitude was sitting around Him, and they said to Him, "Look, Your mother and Your brothers are outside seeking You." But He answered them, saying, "Who is My mother, or My brothers?" And He looked around in a circle at those who sat about Him, and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers! For *whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother*" [Mk 3: 31-35]

*Sandra Bullock recently won the 2010 Best Actress Academy Award for her role in the movie, "**The Blind Side**" (2009).¹ The bigger story is not her performance but the woman, Leigh Anne Touhy, whose role she played. In the real life story, Anne and her evangelist husband, Sean, had picked up a black teenager, Michael Oher, from the street and adopted him. Michael was one of thirteen children by a mother who was a drug addict. His adopted family raised him as one of their own children., They sent him to school and encouraged him to play football Today, Michael, a sophomore (second year student) at the University of Mississippi, stands the chance of becoming the first pick in this year's National Football League (NFL) draft.*

Sean and Anne showed love to a helpless outsider by faith. Michael accepted them by faith and they raised him as one of their own children. So, both sides no longer see the colour of their skins but the bond of family. They may not be related by blood but do so now by faith in God. In like manner, God has an only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Yet, God loves us and wants to make us His children. Like Michael, we are orphans thrown out of the Garden of Eden thousands of years ago. Can we trust Jesus Christ to introduce us to His Father for adoption? Let us find out from this week's study.

¹ Based on the following sources: Jason Buchanan, "The Blind Side: Synopsis," <http://movies.msn.com/movies/movie-synopsis/the-blind-side/> ; "The Blind Side/Overview and Synopsis," http://www.fandango.com/theblindside_124539/movieoverview and Michael Lewis, "The Blind Side: Evolution of a Game," Synopses & Reviews, <http://www.powells.com/biblio/039306123x>

1. Introduction: Lessons from the human family

In an ideal nuclear family, we have a father and a mother and their natural-born children, that is, sons and daughters. In a polygamous home (typically of one husband and multiple wives), one father can have children from different women. In this case, some of the siblings will be half-brothers and sisters. In some other cases, where the couple may be unable or unwilling to make their own children, they may adopt.

The average family is a microcosm of the human condition. In other words, that brothers and sisters come from the same parents does not necessarily translate into mutual love among them. After all, none of them had the benefit to choose which parents to bring them forth or which siblings to be part of. We choose our friends but not our siblings. Therefore, it is possible for people to be related by blood and yet be at war! That may in part be why Prophet Micah has said, “A man’s enemies are the men of his own household” and sons can dishonour father and daughters their mother [**Mic. 7: 6**]. At the same time, some of the children may love and respect their parents and their siblings and vice-versa. Therefore, if we study the characteristics of human families, we might have a glimpse of God’s family that we shall discuss presently.

Some of us may be familiar with some or all of the following types of children in human families:

(a) *The Bastard*

A bastard is an illegitimate child, that is, one born out of wedlock. The bastard knows only his/her mother but may not know the father. Even if the child may know him, the father does not accept or treat the child as his. In most cases, the bastard answers his/her mother’s family name.

Some men are mere sperm donors. They perch from one woman to another, distributing babies for which they do not claim or accept responsibility. Some single women may decide to raise their own children whose fathers they never disclose to the said children. Some men engage in extra-marital affairs that may produce babies that they never disclose to their wives. We may only know about them when gossip newspapers divulge the secret or when such men die and “strange families” suddenly surface! In general, bastards cannot be treated as true or legitimate sons and daughters by the rest of the (real father’s) family.

A good example from the Bible comes from the family of Gideon who was also called Jerubbaal. He had seventy sons (besides daughters) from many wives. In addition, he had a concubine who bore him a son called Abimelech [**Judg. 8: 30-31**]. After the death of Jerubbaal, his bastard son, Abimelech went to his mother’s people and said to them, “Please, speak in

the hearing of all the men of Shechem: ‘Which is better for you, that all seventy of the sons of Jerubbaal reign over you, or that one reign over you?’ Remember that I am your own flesh and bone.” With his mother’s people’s support, he went to Jerubbaal’s house and killed all his seventy sons, except the youngest, Jotham, who managed to escape [**Judg. 9: 1-6**].

Some of us have the attitude of a bastard towards God. We refuse to accept that God exists (atheists). Even where we accept that He exists, we do not acknowledge or regard Him *as Father*. We operate outside of His control and refuse His chastening. Scripture is quite clear that “if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons” [**Heb. 12: 8**].

(b) *The Prodigal Son*

Some children are legitimate sons and daughters of their parents. They know their rights and entitlements from their parents. However, they shirk their responsibilities towards their parents at the throw of a hat! They do not care how their misconduct affects or hurts their parents because they are usually very selfish and self-centred. For example, a top Nigerian professor who had been accredited to become Nigeria’s ambassador to the United States was recently rejected by the American government because a 20-year old son of his, without the ambassador’s knowledge, had been arrested in the U.S. for gang-rape offenses.²

We are quite familiar with the Parable of the Prodigal Son [**Lk 15: 11-32**]. The younger of a man’s two sons asked his father to give him his share of his estate, even when it was obvious that his elder brother was the one doing most of the work. His father agreed and let him have his way. A few days later, he took all that he had and travelled abroad where he “wasted his possessions with prodigal living” [v. 14]. We also know the story of King David’s favourite son, Absalom, who rebelled against his father that he drove into exile while he openly defiled some of his concubines [**2 Sam. 15: 1-16; 16: 22**].

Some of us relate to God as prodigal sons and daughters. We are ready to grab His blessings, which is why most of us come to church at all! On Sunday, our hands are held up in adoration and worship. However, for the rest of the week, we are back to our natural elements- wheeling and dealing, without regard to fear of the Lord. During the Lenten season, most of us are very pious- fasting and praying. However, after Good Friday, life returns to normal, that is, one of sin and revelry. Under such circumstances, how can we call God Father? Jesus Christ once told His

² Hakeem Babalola, “The Trials of Ambassador Tunde Adeniran,” <http://www.pointblanknews.com/artopn1858.html> , 10/14/2009.

listeners, “Why do you call Me Lord, Lord, and not do the things which I say?” [Lk 6: 46].

(c) *The beloved Son*

The beloved son or daughter is the one who does what pleases his/her parents. Beloved children make their parents proud. They care about and for their parents. They obey instructions. They take correction and chastening. Consequently, their parents love them. Joseph was that kind of son to his father, Jacob. So, his father made him a coat of many colours [Gen. 37: 3]. When Joseph was presumed dead, after his brothers had sold him into slavery in Egypt, his father wept uncontrollably saying, “I shall go down into the grave to my son in mourning” [v. 35]. He said that even when he still had eleven sons alive.

The relationship between Jesus and His Father typifies this kind of son. At the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan, His Father said from heaven, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” [Matt. 3: 17]. Why was Jesus beloved of His Father? In His own words, Jesus said, “My Father loves Me because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have the power to lay it down, and I have the power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father” [Jn 10: 17-18]. That is a clear definition of total obedience. It is no wonder that Jesus is the only begotten Son of God. Adam was also called “the son of God” [Lk 3: 38] (with a small ‘s’) but he could not have been beloved because he disobeyed God by eating the forbidden fruit and was expelled from the Garden of Eden. It was his action there that turned the rest of mankind into prodigal sons in search of restoration.

(d) *The adopted son*

Like Michael Oher in our opening story, an adopted child is not a member of a family by birth but by adoption. There is no blood relationship but s(he) is a legitimate member of that family because the adoptive parents have consented legally to regard him/her as their child. In most cases, the initiative comes from the parents. It is a leap of faith. When the child then grows up and relates to the parents *as if* they were his/her real parents, then the difference no longer shows. For example, it is almost impossible for people to know that Nicole Richie is an adopted daughter of the famous singer, Lionel Richie.³ She was born Nicole Camille Escovedo in 1981. At the age of 2, Lionel and his wife, Brenda, informally adopted her but formalized it when she was nine years old. Today, daughter and father are quite close.

³ ‘Lionel Richie,’ From Wikipedia, The free encyclopedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lionel_Richie

From the forgoing analysis, we can conclude that the beloved children of their parents are not necessarily those of their blood; they could also be their adopted children. What makes the difference is the degree to which children make their parents proud of them. One key test of that is in obedience. That is why we can conclude that *our relationship to God will be determined by the extent to which we do His will*. That is the point that Jesus has made to us in this week's study.

2. The family of Jesus

Who were the Lord's human family members at the time? His own people from Nazareth knew Him as "the carpenter's son." Throughout His three-year earthly ministry, from His baptism to His crucifixion, there was no mention of His foster-father, Joseph. That suggests that he was already dead at the time. So, Jesus was left with His mother, Mary, unnamed sisters and four younger brothers, namely, James, Joses, Simon and Judas [Matt. 13: 55], none of whom was named among His twelve disciples. It was only after His ascension that James became one of the pillars of the church in Jerusalem (along with Peter and John) [Gal. 2:9]. James and Judas, two of the Lord's brothers, wrote the epistles credited to James and Jude respectively. Finally, Jesus was treated familiarly and without due respect among His people. That was why He said, "A prophet is not without honour, except in his own country and in his own house." As a result, "He did not do many mighty works there because of unbelief" [Matt. 13: 56-58].

The Bible text for this week comes from the Gospel of Mark, Chapter 3. The fame of Jesus had spread rapidly to Jerusalem and Idumea and beyond the Jordan. That was due mainly to the fact that He had healed different afflictions and cast out unclean spirits. He had also appointed twelve disciples. As huge crowds followed Him, envy or cynicism set in. For example, the scribes who came from Jerusalem alleged that He had Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons, and that was the power He was using to cast out demons. His own people from Nazareth said, "He is out of His mind," that is, mad! So they came out to "lay hold of Him" because He was apparently disgracing His family in public [Mk 3: 20-22]! To them, He was behaving like a prodigal son squandering the family's name and prestige! That was the setting when word came to Jesus that His mother and brothers were standing outside, calling Him [v. 31].

At the time that the message was brought to Jesus, He was surrounded by a multitude that was eager to hear from Him about the kingdom of God. Thinking that His human family should have precedence over them in His estimation, they said to Him, "Look, Your mother and Your brothers are outside seeking You" [v. 32]. He answered back rhetorically, "Who is My mother, or My brothers?" Then, looking around the circle of multitudes surrounding Him, He said, "Here are My mother and My brothers! For *whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother*" [vv. 33-35]. In other words, *you are related to Jesus and His Father by faith, not by blood!* If you like, you can trace your family lineage to Him and still not be regarded by Him as a brother or sister! So, how

then can we acquire that desirable relationship? You must begin by first knowing the will of God.

What is the will of God? Jesus has answered it as follows [**Jn 6: 40**]:

And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him, may have everlasting life, and I will raise him up on the last day.

We know that God has only one begotten Son, Jesus Christ [**Jn 3: 16**]. Therefore, the only way that we can become His sons and daughters is by accepting Jesus for “as many as received Him, to them He gave *the right* to become children of God, to those who believe in His name” [**Jn 1: 12**]. No one can call Jesus Lord except by the Holy Spirit [**1 Cor. 12: 3**]. That is why “as many as are led by the Holy Spirit, these are sons of God.” These are the men and women, boys and girls who can call God “Abba! Father!” because they have received the Spirit of adoption. So, as *adopted* children of God, they become “heirs of God and *joint heirs with Christ*” [**Rom. 8: 14-17**].

3. Conclusion: It is God’s will for you to accept Jesus today!

The matter now looks quite clear and simple. You cannot claim to be a child of God *unless and until* you accept Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Saviour. After that, He will introduce you to His Father as His brother or sister and recommend that He adopt you. That is what makes you a son or daughter of God, and a joint heir with Christ. Forget about religion. Accept Jesus today, *right now*, and you will become a prominent member of His family. That is what qualifies you to call a fellow believer “Brother” or “Sister.”

Alleluia!