

Transformed by knowing Jesus: James, the brother of Jesus

Message for Sunday, April 23, 2017
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Mark 3:20-35 and others

Children's Message: Mark 3:31-35, "Who is my mother?"

I've heard of families where the parents and children fight with one another so much, it's almost unbearable. In fact, for some it *is* unbearable: the children leave home, and vow to never return. They even say, "You are no longer my mother or my father. I will never talk to you again. If I see you on the street, I will just ignore you." Wouldn't it be sad to be part of a family like that?

When Jesus got the message that his mother is outside and wants to see him, he didn't jump up and go outside to be with her. No, he asks, "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" And then he answers his own question:

Mark 3:34-35, Today's English Version:
He looked at the people sitting around him and said, "Look! Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does what God wants is my brother, my sister, my mother."

I think it's important for us to know that Jesus was not mad at his mother and brothers. He wasn't saying, "You're no longer my mother; I'll never talk to you again." No, it was nothing like that!

Rather, Jesus is saying that his family includes everyone who follows God. That means that you and I are part of Jesus' family. Wow, that's amazing! That's *wonderful!*

Message: "Transformed by knowing Jesus: James, the brother of Jesus"

A lot of people have asked me, "What was it like, having Jesus for a brother?" I answer, "It was... different." Let me tell you about it.

We started out as a normal family, at least as far as I was aware of what was happening. When we were growing up, Mom and Dad (you know them as Mary and Joseph) treated us all the same. They never told us about the incredible things that happened when Mom became pregnant with Jesus,

or about the special visitors that came when he was born. I mean, what would it be like as a kid, people whispering all these rumours about you. I'd be embarrassed to be known as his brother. So I'm thankful that we had a more or less normal childhood.

Dad taught us boys from the time we were young how to work with wood: "The grain of the wood is your friend. Don't fight it; work with it," he used to say. I made my first cabinet when I was ten years old: dovetailed corners, mortise and tenon joints — a real professional job. Dad taught us well.

We did things as a family. We went to Jerusalem together for the special festivals. I still remember the panic Jesus caused on one trip, when he was about twelve years old. Most of the people from Nazareth travel together as a group; the journey takes a few days, and it's safer that way. We were a full day's journey on our way home, when we realized he wasn't with our cousins. Dad and Mom had to go all the way back to Jerusalem and hunt all over for him. They finally found him at the Temple, talking with the teachers. Jesus acted like it was no big deal: "What's all the fuss? You knew I'd be in my Father's house." [See Luke 2:41-50.]

We went to special events together as a family, like the wedding of one of our relatives. You know what small towns are like: everyone's related to everyone else, if you go back far enough. So our family got invited.

And that's where it started. Yeah, the funny business. Jesus did this trick where he turned water into wine. I'm not talking about a glass of wine; it was more like 500 litres of wine, and it was the best quality wine. I was puzzled over this. "How did he do that?" I wondered. "Oh well, one of life's little mysteries," and I shrugged it off. [See John 2:1-12.]

But that was just the beginning. Jesus healed a few people who were sick or were possessed by demons. News about that spread faster than a prairie fire. Pretty soon he was doing all kinds of weird things throughout the whole region. He walked from village to village, doing these miracles, and telling people about this thing he called "the kingdom of God."

He even had a band of groupies who travelled with him wherever he went. He called them “disciples.” They hung on his every word, like he was some kind of prophet or something. It was pathetic, seeing them fawn over him like that.

All right, I don’t deny that he had some kind of special power. I don’t where that came from or how he did it, but the proof of it was all around us. Everyone had witnessed at least one of these miracles, and we all wondered where it was leading.

Mom and I and my other brothers could see where it was leading: straight to Jesus’ head. He was a celebrity. By now, there were thousands of people who would drop everything if they heard he was in the area, just for the chance to get a glimpse of him. We could see the effect that it had on him; it was like he was on drugs, and was addicted to it. He was starting to talk about being the “Son of Man” or—get this!—the “Son of God.” It was clear to us that Jesus was going out of his mind. We decided we had to put a stop to it, for his own good.

So when we heard that he was nearby in Capernaum, we went there as a family. We were going to have a heart to heart talk with him, and try to bring him to his senses. We even considered hauling him away by force if he wouldn’t listen to reason; again, it was for his own good.

But when we got to the house where he was staying, we couldn’t even get close to the building, much less get inside to him. His fan club spilled out of the house and were about ten deep all around the outside. We told someone, “Let Jesus know we’re here and we need to see him. It’s important.”

The message got passed through the crowd to Jesus. What did he do? Did he take a break immediately and come out to see us? No. Instead he said, “Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?” Then he pointed at the people sitting around him and said, “Look! Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does what God wants is my brother, my sister, my mother.” [See Mark 3:20-21, 31-35.]

What could we do? We just shook our heads sadly and went back home. Later, during one of his speeches, Jesus said, “Your enemies will be right in your own household.” [See Matthew 10:36.]

Some months later, I did have a chance to speak with Jesus. I said to him, “Jesus, you are embarrassing the whole family! I wish you’d stop this foolishness. You put on a good show, I admit. You do a few miracles, healing the sick — and for the life of me, I have no idea how you do that. But enough is enough. It’s time to come back home and settle down.”

He wasn’t interested in that. In fact, he seemed to think he had some sort of mission that he had to accomplish. So I tried a different strategy. I pushed him, daring him to take it to the next level. I figured that would scare him off. (Little did I know what would happen!) So I told him, “Listen, Jesus, like I said: you put on a good show. But we’re in Galilee; this is hick-town. If you’re the Messiah, the Saviour sent by God, then you need to go where the action in: you need to go to Jerusalem. Hey, the big Feast of Tabernacles is coming up next week; there will be tens of thousands of people going to the Temple all that week. You put on another good show there with all those people to see you, and you’ll make a name for yourself. Come on, Jesus! What’s the matter? Afraid you’ll get stage fright with everyone watching you? Maybe your superpowers only work here in Galilee, huh?” [See John 7:2-5.]

I didn’t know it, but Jesus had already planned on going to Jerusalem. I said that’s where the action is; well, after the commotion Jesus caused that week at the Temple in Jerusalem, there was plenty of action. Up until then, he had ruffled some feathers. But now he had enemies. And I don’t mean people that would spread nasty gossip about him. I mean people who wanted him gone. Dead.

It took them another year or two, but they finally got him. It was back in Jerusalem for another feast, this time the Passover feast. Jesus walked right into their trap. Except that Jesus went there knowing full well what they had planned. I heard that he even talked about it, how he was going to Jerusalem to die. He said that more than once. But whenever he said it, he always said that he would “be raised to life on the third day” — whatever that means. [See Matthew 16:21; 20:17-19.]

Mom was there when they crucified him. It almost killed her, too. I cried when I heard the news. “What a waste!” I said to myself. “Jesus obviously

had something special. Why couldn't he have used that for something good? But instead he just threw it all away on this crazy obsession of his. What a tragedy."

Well, that's what it was like, having Jesus as a brother. It's a sad ending to a sad, sad story... (*Walk away, then suddenly turn back.*)

... Or so I thought. Remember I mentioned that Jesus talked about being killed, but then rising to life again three days later? I know this sounds unbelievable, but that's exactly what happened.

How do I know? After all, I obviously wasn't one of Jesus followers; I wasn't among the group that he appeared to on Easter morning.

I know because I saw Jesus myself. That's right: he showed himself to many others, but he also came to see me. And it wasn't a ghost. Ghosts don't have bodies you can touch. Ghosts don't eat. You don't have long conversations with ghosts, like I did with Jesus. [See 1 Corinthians 15:7.]

My first reaction, when I saw him alive, was regret over all the things I had said and done. I had mourned a wasted life—I *was the one who had wasted my life!* What if all that time I had been one of Jesus' disciples? But Jesus waved his hand, dismissing all that. "That's the past, James. It's over. Don't worry about it. All is forgiven."

I cried, I laughed, and we talked long about what comes next. I became the leader of the church in Jerusalem. The others accepted me as if I had been one of the original apostles. Not because of anything I had done. But out of respect for being the brother of the Lord. [See Acts 1:14, which tell that Jesus' mother and brothers were part of the fellowship immediately after Jesus' resurrection. See Acts 15:13-21 for an example of James' role as a leader in the church. This cannot be about the disciple James, for he was executed in Acts 12:2. Galatians 1:19 suggests that James was even considered an apostle, despite not being one of the Twelve original apostles.]

What was it like being the brother of Jesus? It was the greatest honour a person could ever have!

Next Steps:

- How have you wasted parts of your life? What are things you did, but now regret; or things you could have done, but never did?
- Picture Jesus saying to you, "That's the past. It's over. All is forgiven." Focus instead on what you and Jesus will accomplish together from here on.