

## Reflections on Jesus and Dysfunctional Families

### *Was Jesus' Own Family Dysfunctional in Some Respects?*

We have hints of questions about Jesus' paternity. In his hometown of Nazareth his fellow citizens in the synagogue question: "Is this not the carpenter, the son of Mary?" Referring to a known person as "son of so and so" was a sign of disrespect, and to name the mother rather than the father implied doubts of legitimacy (Mark 6.3a). His opponents ask him, "Where is your father?" (John 8.19), and later they say, "We are not illegitimate children" (John 8.41); "You are a Samaritan and have a demon" (8.48).

Jesus testified of himself, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house" (Mark 6.5). His own brothers did not believe him (John 7.5). Jesus' self-negligent dedication to serving others prompted his family to consider him out of his mind and try to take him in custody. Jesus snubbed his mother and siblings standing outside the circle of disciples, with whom he declared his true family affinity. (Mark 2.19b-21; 31-34.)

### *Jesus as Prophet*

Jesus took for himself the role of prophet (Mark 6.5; Lk 13.33), and the crowds acknowledged him as such (Matt 21.11; Mark 8.27-28 and parallels; Luke 7.16). In the OT prophets regularly took a stand against the contemporary power structure on the side of the oppressed. That set them in conflict with the powers that be and put their own lives at risk. Consider Jeremiah, against whom both civil and religious authorities brought capital charges for predicting the destruction of the temple, which Jesus did quoting Jeremiah's words (Jer. 7.1-16; Jer. 26.1-24) and against whose life also his hometown citizens plotted (Jer. 11.18-23; Luke 4.29). Matthew 16.14 states that some people actually thought of Jesus as Jeremiah.

Jesus' prophetic calling, therefore, brought him in conflict with the powers that be, not only at the highest political and religious levels, but also in his most intimate family relationships. Wink observes that it was the family above all that conditioned people from earliest childhood to conform to the domination system, serving as the very foundation of the patriarchal structure culminating in absolute monarchy (Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers* pp. 118-120).

### *Jesus vs. the Family as Tool of the Power Structure, Domination System*

Luke 14.26: Jesus demands that those who would follow him must *hate* the members of their families; at least, they must love him more than them (Matt 10.37). They must take up their crosses, which implies retaliation from the domination system.

Mark 13.12; Luke 12.51-53. Jesus anticipates that because of him families will suffer conflict and division, and some will even betray others.

Mark 10.28-30. To those who have abandoned family ties and possessions for his sake, Jesus promises the greater family of believers and participation in the shared larger assets of the entire fellowship.

### Questions:

To what extent are we prepared to deal with the Jesus model in our Session 2 on the home and family? How can we critique traditional "family values" so dear to the hearts of most church members without stimulating backlash? How can we be helpful and constructive in our

lesson materials and suggestions in encouraging our people to take up a genuine counter-cultural life style? How can we recommend the church as we know and experience it as the alternate family that welcomes those alienated from their blood kin?

Arch Taylor 12/04/02