

This morning we continue a sermon series

That we began last week

Called “For Good”

Too often, the world knows everything that Xians are *against*

But they have no clue what we’re *for*

So, throughout this series we are making some clear statements

About what we’re *for*, things we’re passionate about, things we love

As people who follow the Lord Jesus

Last week we affirmed that we are FOR the “least of these”

Jesus said in Matthew 25

That when you feed the hungry, clothe the naked, give water to the thirsty

When you’ve looked after the widow and the orphan and the stranger

It’s as if you’ve done it for Jesus himself

And so, in the face of the greatest humanitarian crisis of our lifetime

The displacement of 12-15 million people

We said that we are for the care of refugees

And I want to say ‘thank you’ to all who have prayed and who have given

As a result of our Refugee Weekend

That’s a great start to our long-term strategy in reaching Syrians for JX

This morning we affirm that we are FOR the family

This is MY family **[Pic1]** (expecting #3)

When I think family, I tend to think of these people first (my parents/siblings)

But in **Mark 3**, Jesus offers a different picture of what constitutes family:

“Jesus entered a house and a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, ‘He is out of his mind...’ When Jesus’ mother and brothers arrived, they sent someone in to call him outside. A crowd was sitting around him and they told him, ‘Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.’ ‘Who are my mother and my brothers?’ he asked.’ Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.’”

According to Mark 3, our first family is the company of Jesus-followers, the church
This was a revolutionary concept in the first centuries
When slave and free, Jew and Gentile, rich and poor gathered in Jesus' name
And called each other by the familial title of 'brother' and 'sister'
They believed their true identity and their true family came from Jesus
This superseded national or ethnic identity
So, I have more of a sense of belonging with my Iranian friends who love JX
Than with American friends who don't
The church is our 1st family—& we're going to talk about it in a few weeks

But this morning we are focusing on God's design for the biological family
Which was integral to his plan to save the world from the very beginning
God called Abram: "Through your family I'll bless ALL families of earth..."
And it was through Abraham's family that the Savior of all families was born
God's design for the rescue of the world always involved the family.

Why is family so strategic to God?

First, family matters b/c God is inherently relational (Father, Son, Spirit)
Second, for good/bad, our families are primary training ground for living
SO much—but not all—of who we become is shaped by our family of origin
Our families instill in us 2 critical building blocks for our lives: **Story + Law**
Story (This is WHO we are) + Law (This is HOW we operate)

Ex. 1 – Are you an OU/OSU fan? Why? Chances are your folks liked one or other

Ex. 2 – Which way does toilet paper go? Over or under? (Only 1 correct answer)

Ex. 3 – How do you process conflict? Anger? Suppress it? Avoidance? Earn peace?

Families shape us & instill in us a sense of story (Who we are) & Law (how we live)

In Deuteronomy 6, God is speaking through Moses to Israel

Before they enter the Promised Land

This is the family that God has been creating since Abram/Sarah had Isaac

And God, the father of the family, is reminding them

Who they are (he's retelling their family STORY)

And how they're called to operate as a family (reminding them of their LAW)

Deuteronomy 6:1-12 (Pew Bible, p. _____)

These are the commands, decrees and laws the Lord your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. Hear, Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, promised you. Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. When the Lord your God brings you into the land he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you—a land with large, flourishing cities you did not build, houses filled with all kinds of good things you did not provide, wells you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant—then when you eat and are satisfied, be careful that you do not forget the Lord, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

In Moses' speech to Israel, we see clearly both elements of Story + Law

Where's the STORY? "We were slaves in Egypt & the Lord brought us out."

You ever notice that whenever the 10 Commandments are recorded

They begin with "I am the Lord your God who delivered you..."

Before a LAW is uttered, it begins with grace – w/God's rescue of them

Their family story / family identity / flows out of God's mercy toward them

Who are we? "We're ones God loved so much he rescued us from slavery."

Their family story tells them who THEY are & also tells them who GOD is.

But we also see the LAW (instruction on how they operate)

The law is spelled out in chapter 5 w/the 10 commandments

But it's also summarized here w/the great "love command"

To love God w/all your heart/soul/mind/strength

And it's capped off w/the instruction to "impress these things" (ie. Law)

On the children, to build into the rhythm of family life

Reminders & instruction and teaching about the way the family is to operate

These two dynamics of Story + Law coalesce in v. 20

"In the future, when your child asks you, "What is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees and laws the Lord our God has commanded you?" tell them: "We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand."

The joint forces of Story + Law were intended to shape a family

That maintained a powerful balance—not erring on either extreme

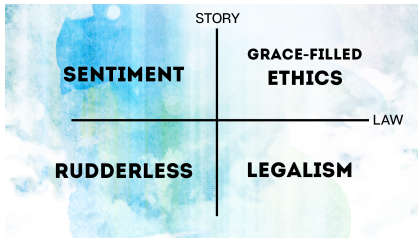
God’s vision for the family of Israel

Is that they would be people who knew their story (they were loved by God)

And then were people who embraced law (how God invited them to live)

And that’s God’s hope for our families as well

We could illustrate this with a lovely 2 x 2 chart (x- law, y- story)



Upper right: If we know our story (our identity as ones loved/saved by God)

And if we embrace God’s Law (his instruction for how to live)

Scriptures paints a picture we’ll be individuals/families that are **THRIVING**

Practicing a beautiful balance of grace/truth in this world

Lower right: If, on other hand, we forgot our story –forgot we were loved/rescued

And instead clung tightly to the LAW (the rules)

Thinking the way we earn our identity (or control outcomes) is rule-following

We could be characterized by the word **LEGALISTIC**

People who forget their story, but who obsess over law are often MEAN

[Story of pastor raised by gay parents, being w/parents & Westboro Baptist

People showed up – ‘Mom, why are they doing that?’ ‘Because their Xians.’

Lower left: But if an individual/family has NO sense of story and NO sense of Law

If life is a “choose your own adventure,” that’s a terribly scary way to live

I was sermon writing this week, overlooking a fast-moving river

As the river rushed quickly, I thought a person/family w/no law/story

Would be like one crossing the river in a canoe w/no paddles **RUDDERLESS**

Carried along by the stream of life, subject to its twists/turns, no control

This option of raising children with no story and no law is on the rise

Parents in a post-modern, post-truth, post-Christian, post-everything world

Would label as scandalous the Christian approach to parenting

That insists that our identity comes from outside us (who God says we are)
Not from some mystical voice on the inside telling us who we are
Many modern parents have drunk the cultural Kool-Aid
Thinking it's up to the child to look within & be whomever they feel like
This hands-off, law-free, figure it out for yourself approach to parenting
Is not only wrong, it's cruel.
It's pushing your child out into the rushing river of competing ideologies
Without an engine, without a paddle and without traveling companions

Upper-left: The final option is the most deceptive for church people
Wanting to AVOID being legalistic
Many parents err toward being all-accepting of everything
They may embrace the STORY of grace (it's often an incomplete version of it)
But reject (often quietly or passively) a strong sense of LAW
A framework for daily living; we could say this family is **SENTIMENTAL**
(Here's an article from a satirical website called the Babylon Bee)

Headline: *After 12 yrs of Quarterly Church Attendance, Parents Shocked By Daughter's Lack Of Faith*

Local father Trevor Michelson and his wife Kerri are reeling after discovering that after 12 years of steadily taking their daughter Janie to church every Sunday they didn't have a more pressing sporting commitment—which was at least once every three months—she no longer demonstrates the strong quarterly commitment to the faith they raised her with, now that she is college-aged.

Trevor Michelson was simply stunned at the revelation. “I just don't understand it. Almost every single time there was a rained-out game, or a break between school and club team seasons, we had Janie in church. It was at least once per quarter. And aside from the one tournament in 2011, we never missed an Easter. It was obviously a priority in our family—I just don't get where her spiritual apathy is coming from.”

“I can't tell you how often we prayed the prayer of Jabez on the way to a game,” added Janie's mother.

“You know, the more I think about it, the more this illustrates how the church just keeps failing this generation,” lamented Trevor, citing a recently-googled study by Barna or someone.

The Michelsons further noted plans to have a chat with the pastor of their church after their younger son Robert's soccer season calms down a bit.

It may be a sincere WISH for the family to be people of faith
But because it hasn't changed how the family behaves (LAW)
It's highly unlikely to deliver on results or real life-change

Of course, we know that it isn't LAW that saves or guarantees a child's faith
But we also know that in parenting, more is CAUGHT than TAUGHT
If a family's life is not being shaped/changed by their faith
It's unlikely that faith will be vibrant/active in the next generation
Why would our children hold on to something we aren't holding on to?
Even if the desire is sincere, if it doesn't have practical affect in their life
It's not more than mere sentiment.

The reality is that we ALL need both a clear sense of identity (story)
And a framework for how to live wisely (law)
And unless we are growing into both, we'll miss God's best for us

A parent was talking to his young daughter and made a comment
To which his daughter replied, "Whatever"
He asked, "Where did you learn to say that?"
She replied, 'Everywhere.'

That same EVERYWHERE is shaping us, too.
Subtly and sometimes not so subtly
Offering us alternative and competing ideas of who we are
And how we can and should operate

As followers of Jesus, what does it take to hold on to our story (identity)
And the peculiar way that God has called us to live
In the high-pressure world of competing narratives and rival ideologies?

In his book, *The Tech-Wise Family*, author Andy Crouch
Argues that what we most need in this age is COURAGE and WISDOM
And FAMILY is the primary arena that God has built to equip us with both

Family is where we learn that as followers of Jesus, we are different:
Andy said: "We need to say and say again: '*But our family is different.*'"
B/C we have a different STORY, we operate according to a different LAW
This is what it really means to offer encouragement.
We often confuse encouragement with affirmation
Real encouragement means instilling in another strength to do hard things

We can do hard things when we find ourselves in a bigger STORY
When we've been trained to live according to a different LAW
And we can do hard things when we know we're not alone
So the individual needs *the family* to grow in wisdom/courage

Crouch says: [If you want to raise children that are wise and courageous]
"We will have to teach our children, from early on, that we are not here as parents to make their lives easier but to make them better. We will tell them—and show them—that nothing matters more to our family than creating a home where all of us can be known, loved and called to grow. And then we'll have to make hard choices—sometimes radical choices—to live [and Crouch says, to use technology] in a very different way from the people around us. Making those choices will require wisdom and courage. But the results will be amazing."

But just as the individual needs the family, so the family needs Church. Crouch:
"So here's the complicated, wonderful truth. If our families are to be all that they are meant to be—schools of wisdom and courage—they will have to become MORE like the church, households where we are actively formed into something more than our culture would ask us to be. And if our churches are to be all they are meant to be, they will have to become more like a family—household-like contexts of daily life where we are all nurtured and developed into the persons we are meant to be and can become."

It takes a church to raise a family – and it takes families

Immersing themselves in story & behavior of way of Jesus to raise a church

Theologian Stanley Hauerwas said Jesus' Sermon on the Mount
Was meant to crush the individual, but give life to the church
In other words, Jesus never thought it possible for one person on their own
To rid themselves of lust, give to anyone who asked, turn the other cheek
But a whole community of people, living together in the *story* of Jesus
And dedicating themselves to living in way of Jesus, might be able to do it
And a community like that would stand out like a city on a hill
They'd be salt in the earth, they'd be the light of the world
Those people would shine like stars in the universe
And draw attention and awe and glory to their Father in heaven

And that's—at least in part—why we gather on Sundays

But also why we must be part of each other's lives on Monday-Saturday;
To grow into who called us to be as individuals we need our families...
And for our families to grow into our potential, we need our church...
And we all need our church to be a community
Where we remind each other, again and again, of our STORY (who we are)
& where we encourage one another to live according to LAW/likeness of JX
So that when children/others ask, "Why do you live in such a peculiar way?"
We can give an answer like this:

Titus 3:3-6, 8

"At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior... so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good."

Church, let's embrace that "our family is different"

Why? Because we are living according to a different story & law
God rescued us from dominion of darkness; we can't live in dark anymore
We are learning to live in the light.

But to do that, we need wisdom (because life is so complex/complicated)
And we need courage (because it can be scary to go against the flow)
And so we need our families, and our families need our church
And our church needs to be renewed and reshaped by the risen Christ.

Fearless of the world's despising
We, the ancient path, pursue
Dying with our Lord and rising
To a life divinely new

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.