Alex begins by talking about how initially in Mark chapter three, Jesus’ fame continues to increase, culminating in Jesus appointing the 12 disciples. This scene in Mark where Jesus gathers the 12 disciples is depicted in all of the gospels. Unfortunately, the gospels do not all agree about who the 12 disciples are or even how they were chosen. For instance, Mark and Matthew agree on the names of the disciples, but Luke changes the names of two of the disciples in his version of events. By contrast, in the gospel of John, Jesus does not choose the twelve disciples, but rather, the people following him are so offended by his teachings that when the crowd disperses, there are only 12 people left. This disagreement has caused some scholars to question whether Jesus ever formally designated certain people as being part of his inner circle. This is not to say that Jesus didn’t have close friends on whom he counted to be there for him. More than likely, Jesus’ movement was never so organized that he had a highly defined inner circle. It was much more fluid than that.

Questions
- Do you think it makes a difference whether or not Jesus actually identified the 12 disciples as his inner circle?
- Why do you think this story is in the gospels? What do you think Mark and the other gospels are trying to convey by having Jesus pick 12 primary disciples whom he would later rename as apostles? Explain.

Directly following this moment on the mountain where Jesus names the 12 disciples, something very important happens. For the first time in Mark’s gospel, things begin to turn highly negative for Jesus. The text says that when Jesus goes home, the crowds swell to be so overwhelming that Jesus can’t even eat his meal. Furthermore, the crowds are beginning to spread rumors about Jesus. The rumor has begun to circulate that Jesus is able to perform all of these healings, not because he is good, but because he is evil. In fact, the rumor has gotten back to his family that Jesus has gone crazy. So in the midst of this frenzy of people invading Jesus’ space, Jesus’ family is trying to make their way through the crowd so they can take him away and restrain him. The fact that Jesus’ family is confused and doesn’t understand what’s going on speaks to the fact that, in Mark, Jesus’ family did not grow up knowing he was special or that he would become the messiah. If Jesus’ family is unaware that Jesus is special, it changes how we approach Jesus’ upbringing.

Questions
- Why do you think a person with a good reputation becomes a prime target for negative rumors?
- Why do you think rumors are so corrosive to a person’s credibility?
- Is there an example from your life where rumors compromised a person’s reputation, when they were patently untrue?

There’s a very telling clue in the gospel of Mark about the kind of upbringing Jesus must have endured. In Mark chapter 6, Jesus travels to his hometown of Nazareth and encounters the people with whom he grew up. They call him the son of Mary. In Jewish culture, you are always referred to by your father’s name. But it seems as though Mark has no knowledge of Jesus’ father since he is never once mentioned. That said, the only time they would refer to you by
your mother’s name is if you were born out of wedlock. Being the child of an unwed mother was an enormous struggle in the ancient world. It was not uncommon for illegitimate children to be shunned by the community; denied access to good education, good employment, or good marriages. The world, from the moment Jesus was born, was cut off to him. Many people find it surprising that Jesus spent his days with lepers and prostitutes and tax collectors – the dregs of ancient society. However, those are his people. Jesus was an outcast from the moment he was born and, as a result, the normal ordering of society where you grow up, get married and support a family just didn’t work for him. Jesus came to realize that his real family had nothing to do with blood or lineage, they turned out to be people just like him.

- **Questions**
  - Before learning about how illegitimate children were treated in ancient society, how did you imagine Jesus grew up as a child?
  - If Jesus didn’t have access to normal social rituals like education or marriage, how do you think that affected his perspective on the world?

- This brings us back to the scene from the gospel of Mark. For the first two and a half chapters, Jesus had experienced nothing but respect from the people around him. Probably for the first time in his life, Jesus felt legitimate, something he probably never experienced when he was growing up. And then, in this brief moment, that respect is stripped from him and, once again, he’s being treated as an outcast. So Jesus does something shocking: he disowns his biological family and says that anyone who does God’s will is his mother and brother and sister. This moment is so very important because it signals to us that in the church, family is not about bloodline or lineage or DNA, but rather, about a shared belief. Indeed, this moment signals to us that in the church, where you come from matters far less than where you are going. It tells us that no matter who you are, you can have a fresh start with people who will love you and accept you just as you are so that you can become the person that God intended you to be.

- **Questions**
  - Do you think that Jesus was too harsh in outright disowning his biological family? Explain your answer.
  - What does family mean to you? Is family more about bloodline or is it more about relationships and connectivity?
  - Can you relate to the church being a family? Explain your feelings of the church as a family.
  - At what point do you draw a line in the sand about who is in your family and who is out? Jesus says that any person who does God’s will is part of his family. Is there a point for you when the beliefs of the community matter more than the community itself?