

## “JESUS’ REAL FAMILY” MATTHEW 12:46-50

Have you ever wondered what Jesus was like as a kid? Ever wondered what kind of a son he was to Joseph and Mary, or what kind of relationships he had with his younger brothers? Did he like to play? Did he pull any pranks or get into any mischief? Did he like animals? Did he have a favorite food? A favorite toy? A favorite game?

We know next to nothing about Jesus’ childhood. In fact, the only event that is recorded in the Gospels happened when Jesus was twelve years old, and it’s something that leaves us parents scratching our heads. Luke, who is a terrific storyteller, recounts the event early in his Gospel account. **Luke 2:42-51.** *When [Jesus] was twelve years old, [he and his parents] went up to the Feast, according to the custom. <sup>43</sup> After the Feast was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. <sup>44</sup> Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. <sup>45</sup> When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. <sup>46</sup> After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. <sup>47</sup> Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. <sup>48</sup> When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, “Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.”*

*<sup>49</sup> “Why were you searching for me?” he asked. “Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?” <sup>50</sup> But they did not understand what he was saying to them (Luke 2:42-50 NIV).*

For many years I read that story in terms of how Jesus’ decision to stay behind in Jerusalem affected his father and mother. I thought about how panicked they were, and I wondered why Jesus wasn’t more considerate, why he didn’t communicate better, and why he seemed to be dismissive of his parents’ concern. I never really focused on the statement, *“Didn’t you know that I had to be in my Father’s house?”* Which reveals that even as a twelve-year-old boy, Jesus was conscious of his unique relationship with his real Father, and the mission that his real Father had sent him to do. And even at that young age, Jesus understood that loyalty to his heavenly Father trumped loyalty to his earthly father and mother. Attention to his heavenly Father’s business trumped attention to his earthly father and mother’s business.

The story in Matthew’s Gospel that we will look at this morning reveals that this principle was in operation throughout Jesus’ life and ministry. Jesus was concluding a rather intense conversation with several people about some profound spiritual realities, and we read in **Verses 46-47.** *<sup>46</sup> While he was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him. <sup>47</sup> Someone told him, “Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, asking to speak to you.”*

While Scripture is clear that family is an extremely important institution, and while the family was valued very highly by the Jews in Jesus’ day, we find very few references in the Gospels about Jesus’ family. We know that Jesus’ mother was Mary, and that he had four younger half-brothers—James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas—who were the biological children of Joseph and Mary. Why their father is not present on this occasion can only be speculated, but many scholars believe that he had died by this time.

Maybe one of the reasons we don’t hear much about Jesus’ family is because, at this

stage in his ministry, his brothers did not believe that he was the Messiah, the Son of God, for John explicitly says this in his Gospel (7:5). What is more, Mark tells us that at least on one occasion Jesus' entire family was concerned about his mental health, so much so that they attempted an intervention because they thought he was "out of his mind" (Mark 3:20-21).

Matthew does not tell us why Jesus' mother and brothers had come to see him, though it is unlikely that they just happened to be in town. Capernaum, where this event took place, was more than thirty miles from Nazareth where they lived, and they would have had to walk. So, they were there, presumably, to see Jesus and talk to him. Perhaps there was a family emergency. Perhaps they had heard about the growing animosity between him and the religious leaders and were concerned for his safety. Maybe they had come to do another intervention.

Whatever the reason they stood outside the home where Jesus was speaking to the crowds, trying to get his attention. It is important to know that in this day and in this culture, family loyalty and family obligations trumped whatever else someone might be doing. It was universally accepted that a dutiful son and brother, if he found out his family wanted to speak to him or needed him for something, would stop what he was doing, even if it was important, and attend to them.

Incidentally, in some translations verse 47 is omitted because it is not found in two of the earliest manuscripts. This is one of those cases, however, where the scribe who was copying the manuscript probably omitted it by mistake. It would have been an easy mistake to make since both verses 46 and 47 end with the same Greek word spelled exactly the same way (λαλησαι, "to speak").

Let's look at how Jesus responded to his mother and brothers' request, **verses 48-50**.

<sup>48</sup> *But he replied to the man who told him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?"*  
<sup>49</sup> *And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers!"* <sup>50</sup> *For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."*

I would not be surprised if a few gasps could have been heard from his audience after Jesus made this statement, especially by some of the mothers, for this would have been a shocking statement to those who were present. As I said earlier, a son or a sibling was expected to give preferential treatment to family members, and so the crowd fully expected Jesus to excuse himself, find out what his mother and brothers wanted, and then return to his teaching *or not*, depending on the urgency of the matter. What is more, the *eldest* son was expected to be the primary caregiver of his mother after the death of his father, and he was also expected to be the primary leader and provider for the rest of the family.

So, when Jesus responded to the question with a question of his own, "*Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?*" it may well have been interpreted as disrespect, disloyalty, and irresponsibility.

But Jesus, as always, uses the opportunity to communicate a profound spiritual truth. **Verses 49-50**, <sup>49</sup> *And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers!"* <sup>50</sup> *For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."*

If there *had* been a few gasps when Jesus asked the question, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" there would probably have been several more when he pointed to his disciples and said, "*Here are my mother and my brothers.*" Because many would have

interpreted this statement as Jesus not only disrespecting his immediate family but renouncing them—that he was essentially thumbing his nose at them and saying, “I don’t need them anymore!” But of course, such conclusions could not be further from the truth, and I will try to prove it to you later.

Don’t forget that Jesus also said on another occasion, *“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple”* (Luke 14:25-26 ESV).

That is a statement that is even more astonishing than the one we’re looking at in Matthew. It was a statement that went against everything that was good and decent and proper. Not even the most wicked, barbaric society would advocate hating one’s parents or spouse or children or siblings. And it raises the question, *why* would Jesus deliberately use such shocking language that risked alienating at least some of his audience?

Remember, Jesus wasn’t interested in getting people to like him. He wasn’t interested in catering to people who merely wanted to be entertained or astounded. Jesus was interested in doing his Father’s will, which included making disciples. And while the call to discipleship begins with an invitation from him, would-be disciples must exercise their wills to *choose* to become his followers. And Jesus wants would-be disciples to make an *informed* decision. He wants them to consider carefully what they are getting into and how much it will cost. And the cost is extremely high, not the least of which because discipleship impacts every single part of life, including our most intimate relationships.

So, when Jesus says, *“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple,”* he is saying, at a minimum, following him *will* affect one’s relationships with one’s nearest and dearest loved ones. It will change the dynamics of those relationships, and it will change the level of one’s commitment and the degree of one’s loyalty.

When Jesus uses the word “hate” in this passage he was using it as a figure of speech called hyperbole. He wasn’t saying that his disciples must hate their loved ones in the sense that they should dislike them or avoid them or be against them. He was saying that commitment to him takes precedence over all other commitments.

Likewise, when Jesus said in Matthew, *“Here are my mother and my brothers,”* he was not disrespecting his family or downgrading his loyalty to them, he was letting them know that his commitment to his heavenly Father and his attention to his Father’s business took precedence over his earthly family and their business.

Jesus is asking his audience to contemplate the impact of the coming of Messiah and the establishment of the kingdom of God on ordinary family relationships. It has a huge impact! Kingdom kinship trumps biological kinship. This is what Jesus meant when he pointed to his disciples and said, *“Here my mother and my brothers.”*

But notice the bond that proves they are related to Jesus. **Verse 50,** *“For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”* What makes the disciples and, by inference, all other followers of Jesus, his *real* family? They are about their heavenly Father’s business—they are doing their heavenly Father’s will.

And what is the Father’s will? Let me remind you that it cannot possibly be what the Pharisees and Scribes were doing, which is what most people in Jesus’ day *thought* was the will of God. It’s not being a “do-gooder” in the sense of performing acts of righteousness to prove how righteous you are. It’s not being a “theologian” in the sense of having all your doctrinal ducks in a row.

Doing the Father's will means, first of all, believing in the One he sent—believing that Jesus is, indeed, the Messiah, Son of the living God; that he is the fulfillment of all God's promises, and God's provision for one's salvation. Doing the Father's will means embracing Jesus as one's King, one's Lord, and one's Savior. It means getting in sync with what God is now doing through Jesus in terms of reconciling the world to himself. And by getting in sync I don't just mean agreeing with or approving of what God is now doing through Jesus, but actually joining his team, following his leadership, doing what he tells you to do, saying what he tells you to say, and going where he tells you to go.

Doing the Father's will means being about his business, and because of who he is, his business must take precedence over one's own business or one's family business. And that's how you know you are related to Jesus. The disciples had done this and so he pointed to them and said, *"Here are my mother and my brothers."*

And when we do that, we also are his family members, for he says, *"Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."* Whoever means anyone. The way into the heavenly family is open wide and there are no restrictions on who may enter. And the word (in Greek syntax) is also emphatic and exclusive. It means "whoever and no other!" Jesus is actually saying that whoever does the will of his Father in heaven is the whole family, brother and sister and mother *combined*, which is another way of saying that the relationships in his spiritual family are more significant, more precious, more comprehensive than any earthly family.

So, what does this mean for us in terms of application? Keep in mind that Jesus is not giving us a command or telling us something to do in this passage; he is simply making a statement about himself and his priorities. He's telling us that spiritual kinship takes precedence over biological kinship; that loyalty to his spiritual relatives trumps loyalty to his blood relatives.

Those priorities may not have been understood or appreciated by his audience, and I doubt it was understood or appreciated by his mother and his brothers who had walked 30 miles to see him. Although I'm convinced Mary believed in Jesus all throughout his life, she probably still felt slighted, as any mother would. Jesus' brothers, because they didn't yet believe in him, were probably downright offended. But, again, Jesus was never interested getting people to like him or trying to make people feel comfortable. He was about his heavenly Father's business, which meant that his heavenly Father's family took precedence over his earthly family.

By the way, don't leave here thinking that Jesus didn't love his earthly family, or that he didn't think his earthly family was important. If Jesus really was the sinless Son of God as we believe he was, then he honored his father and mother perfectly, even when they were worried sick when they couldn't find him on the way home from Jerusalem, and when they told him how anxious they were he said, *"Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"* That may not seem like a loving, respectful thing to say, unless you remember that Jesus was sent to the earth to do his heavenly Father's will and be about his heavenly Father's business, and so when there was an apparent conflict between the two, he always chose his heavenly Father's business. Joseph and Mary, who both received revelations from angels about who this Person conceived by the Holy Spirit was what he was going to be, should have known. Which is why, even at twelve years-old, Jesus could say, *"Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"*

Yes, Jesus loved his earthly family. He loved his unbelieving brothers, so much so that



he would ultimately die for their sins. And you should know that at least two of Jesus' brothers *did* come to believe in Jesus, and it's possible that all of them did. His brothers, James and Jude, each wrote a New Testament epistle, and were significant leaders in the early church. Did Jesus know, at the time he said these words in Matthew 12, that they would eventually come to faith in him? It's possible.

Nevertheless, if his words offended them at the time, so be it. Jesus wasn't about pleasing people; he was about doing his Father's will and being about his Father's business. And they would eventually understand.

But getting back to the question, how does this passage apply to us? Certainly, there is an inference in the passage, especially in light of Luke 14:25-26, that being a disciple of Jesus means that our loyalty and commitment to him trumps our loyalty and commitment to our earthly loved ones, and that when push comes to shove, we choose him.

But I believe the necessary application of Matthew 12 is that we choose to believe in Jesus as God's Messiah and provision for our salvation even if we don't fully understand or appreciate his words. I'm almost positive that his words alienated some who were present in that crowd. I'm almost positive his words hurt or offended his mother and brothers. I'm pretty sure that some heard him say these words and thought he was out of his mind.

So, can you hear these words and still believe in him? There were other occasions when Jesus said some astonishing things, like when he said, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. <sup>54</sup> Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. <sup>55</sup> For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. <sup>56</sup> Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him"* (John 6:53-56).

And we are told that, *<sup>66</sup> After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. <sup>67</sup> So Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?" <sup>68</sup> Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, <sup>69</sup> and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God."*

Some of the things Jesus said and did while he lived on earth don't make it easier to believe, but harder to believe. The question is, even if we don't fully understand, even if it hits us the wrong way, will we, like Peter, be able to say, *You have the words of eternal life, <sup>69</sup> and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God."*

“Jesus’ Real Family”  
Matthew 12:46-50

Main Idea: Jesus’ real family members are those who do the will of his Father, and his relationship with them trumps all other relationships

Jesus’ Family Wants to Speak with Him (46-47)

Jesus’ mother and brothers

The cultural expectations for sons and siblings

The role of the eldest son when his father has died

Jesus Identifies His Real Family Members (48-50)

He asks his audience to consider his real family (48)

A shocking question

A question that contemplates his ultimate loyalty

He identifies his disciples as his real family members (49-50)

His radical call to discipleship in Luke 14:25-26

The meaning of verse 49

*Jesus’ commitment to his heavenly Father and his attention to his business takes precedence over his earthly family and their business*

His real family are those who do the Father’s will (50)

The meaning of the Father’s will

The reason relationship with Jesus trumps relationships with biological family members