

## **Introduction**

In August of 2010 Ariail and I moved up to Wisconsin. We had to leave Melissa and Philip behind down in Georgia. Our family was split in half. It was a difficult time of separation. After we sold our house in October, Melissa joined us in Wisconsin. Philip was attending college in Georgia and when he finished in 2013 he moved up here for about 6 months before leaving to attend seminary in Louisville. I suppose we thought at that time that we would probably be separated from him by a significant distance for maybe the rest of our lives. But as you know this year he and Ellie and Titus moved to Sheboygan, Wisconsin. The last week of July we were able to see them about 5 times! The Lord has been so kind with us being separated from our extended family by an extended distance to allow us the blessing of having immediate family close. For me like for many of you, family is precious. There are priceless bonds and a rich warmth that God uses to encourage the soul. We celebrate happy times and share the difficult ones.

Not everyone experiences joy and fulfillment in the context of biological family. Many families are marked by dysfunction and conflict. Many are ravaged by selfishness, brokenness, and hostility. This is especially true when some family members follow the Lord while others do not. As we turn to our text this morning, however, Jesus shows us that everyone who follows him is privileged to belong to his family and to be gladly owned by him as brother.

[Read Text; Pray]

We need to recall the context. Jesus enjoyed a great swell of attention and affirmation from the public as he began his ministry. But subsequent encounters uncovered an apoplectic hostility against him. Jesus had warned his disciples that there would be opposition to the gospel, that his coming would mean hostility and division even within families. It was the Pharisees and scribes who were particularly angered with Jesus. They had come together to conspire how to destroy Jesus. The tension in the air had

no doubt reached the ears of Jesus' own mother and her other children. In the immediate context, Jesus had excoriated the evil generation for seeking a sign and had warned that the efforts the people had made to clean things up in their lives would only result in greater wickedness. With all this in mind we notice first in the text...

### **I. The Arrival of Jesus' Biological Family.**

I notice four aspects of this arrival—when they came, who came, where they came, and why they came.

A. First is when they came. Matthew is careful to tell us that they arrived “while Jesus was still speaking to the people.” They came while he was conducting class. They came in the midst of his ministry. You can realistically say that their coming was an interruption to what Jesus was doing.

B. Second, we see who it was that came. It was his mother and his brothers. This was Mary and sons that she had after Jesus was born. We live in the midst of a strong-hold of Catholicism. Roman Catholic doctrine holds the perpetual virginity of Mary as a central tenet of the faith. However, we are told here that she came to Jesus with his brothers.

The Catholic argument in light of these verses is that these brothers were either sons of Joseph from a previous marriage or that they were actually his cousins since the word for brother here is sometimes used in a broader sense. However, if Joseph had a son prior to Jesus, that son would have been the rightful heir to David's throne. Furthermore, Matthew tells us in chapter 1:25 that Joseph took Mary as his wife but knew her not UNTIL she had given birth to Jesus. It is unnatural and unnecessary to think that these were anything other than brothers of Jesus born to Mary after him. Matthew later (13:55) identifies them by name as James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas. Jesus' earthly father, Joseph is probably not present because at this time he had died. So Jesus, while he was still speaking was paid a visit by his immediate, biological family.

C. Third, we note where they came. It is written that they came to the outside of where Jesus was speaking. They stood on the outside of the house. Parallel passages in Mark and Luke make it clear that the house was

so full they could not get in. A graphic picture is presented. Here is the biological family of Jesus standing outside of where he was.

Jesus' brothers were not believing in him. In fact they appear to have disliked Jesus. John tells us in chapter 7 that there came a time at which those brothers taunted him. And that is the way it is for many followers of Christ. You turn to Christ and family turns from you. Jesus knows what that is like. His self-sacrifice included being rejected by family. If that is your experience as well, then realize he is not asking of you anything that he did not experience as well.

D. Moreover, we notice fourth, why Jesus' family came. They were asking to speak with him. They sought to talk to Jesus. They had something to tell him. They are not among Jesus' followers. They have not come to sit at Jesus' feet and learn. They have come and they remain outside. They send a message that they would like to speak to him.

Two weeks ago, we went up to Sheboygan on Sunday to be with Philip and Ellie and to worship with them at Grace Baptist. We went to encourage. We went to be there as family. I did not stop at the door and send a message to Philip. I did not go to speak with Philip. I did not interrupt his preaching. I did not go there in order that I could do the talking but to do the listening.

I get the feeling that when Jesus' family came to him while he was still speaking, they had not come to tell him to keep up the good work. What they had to say was not going to be encouraging. We are not told what they wanted to say. However, what we have to go on is that the people back home in Nazareth had nearly run him off a cliff and were saying he was out of his mind (Mark 3:21; Luke 4:29). And now the Pharisees were out to get him. It could well be that the family had come to reason with Jesus to get him to stop stirring up trouble, to back down and stop agitating people.

It is striking that Jesus did not run out to meet them and find out what it was that they had to say. No, he took the occasion to continue his teaching. Biological family can be a blessing, but they must never be

allowed to become an idol. Followers of Christ must never allow biological family to get between us and doing God's will.

## **II. The Introduction of Jesus' Spiritual Family.**

A. At a well in Samaria, a woman came to draw water. Jesus asked her for a drink, but he then instructed her about water more satisfying than what was in the well. Later that day Jesus' disciples were urging him to eat, and he instructed them of food more critical to life than what you eat. Here at the close of Matthew 12, a man comes to inform Jesus that his family is waiting outside to speak to him, and Jesus takes the opportunity to instruct everyone that there is family of a sort that is more truly family than one's own kin. There is a family in which the relations run deeper, the fellowship is richer, the companionship is more fulfilling, and the connections are eternal. So Jesus replied with a question: "Who is my mother and who are my brothers?"

Jesus never asks questions because he does not know the answer. He is not looking for information from this man. He is wanting this man to think and understand a very important reality. For Jesus family in the truest and deepest sense is not biological. It is not about who the woman is who gave birth to him or who his biological brothers are.

B. Having asked the rhetorical question, "who is my mother and who are my brothers?", Jesus stretches out his hand to indicate who his family is in its truest sense. This is non-verbal communication at its finest. He stretches out his hand. There are two really powerful images in this text. One is the biological family which stands outside where Jesus was. This image portrays separation. The second image is quite in contrast. Jesus, identifying his true family, stretches out his hand to men who are inside the house with him. This act is personal, intimate, enthusiastic, and unashamed.

And then he uses a word that appears four times in this short section. It is the word behold. The ESV translates it "here are my mother and my brothers." But the Greek word is behold. It is an attention-seeking word. It bids the reader or the listener to look or to listen with wonder. Jesus is excited about this introduction.

You know, shortly after moving to Wisconsin, my mother came up for a visit. I was so excited for her to meet the people of Grace Community. I was and am so happy to be connected with you all, and I just wanted her to know you too. I was also excited for you to meet her. She is my mother, a godly woman, a prayer warrior. It is she who taught me about Jesus since I was a child. So I was enthusiastic to say, "this is Grace Community" and "This is my mom." Jesus had that kind of sensation as he talked about his family. He stretched forth his hand and he said, "Behold."

C. And who are these to whom he points? Matthew tells us that Jesus stretched out his hand toward his disciples. Disciples are learners and followers. These are ones who have left everything else to follow Jesus. They belong to him. They are devoted to him. They listen to him. They believe in him. They obey him.

Now these men are not the envy of the Jewish world. Several were mere fisherman and one was a former tax-collector, another a radical zealot. Generally people like to point out family members who are successful and wealthy. Our flesh feels that we look better when the people around us are well-to-do. Lots of times people choose churches this way: which one makes me look better in the eyes of the world? But I am here to tell you that God is not impressed with what looks good to the eyes of the world. Neither is Jesus. He is glad to own his disciples as his family even though they do not impress the world. And that means me and it means you if you belong to Christ.

Not many mighty. Not many noble. Not many wise by the standards of the world. All sinners. All of their righteousness is as filthy rags. All were dead in trespasses and sins. But here is what matters. They are right there with him. They trust him. And they follow him. They have denied themselves and taken up their cross to be with him. They have lost their lives for his sake. And he says, "They are mine!"

D. The family of God so identified by Christ consists of his disciples. It consists of those who love him more than earthly or biological family. They love him enough to give up their attachments to worldly goods and immoral pleasure. They are unashamed to be numbered with him.

These come in to the family not with their deeds and acts of religion to try and earn the favor of God. Rather they come with hearts broken over their sins, over their hostility to God. They come not to direct Jesus and tell him what to do but to be directed by Jesus, to be told by him what to do. They come believing in him, trusting in him, resting in his work, believing in the good news that all we like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way but that the father has laid on him the iniquity of us all and that by his stripes we are healed.

Those who come this way he is not ashamed to call "brothers." He delights to say it. He enthusiastically declares to the world, "Behold my brother! Behold my sister!"

Are you in his family? Have you repented of your sin? Have you trusted in Christ Jesus? Are you unashamed to be numbered with him and to follow him? That is the heart of a disciple. That is the heart of those Jesus owns as his family.

Lastly in the text we see . . .

### **III. The Identification of the Family Trait.**

A. There are various traits that are characteristic within families. Some are physical like height or a certain shape of chin or eyes. Some are personality characteristics. Ever since Titus was born we have been trying to notice the family traits he bears.

Well, Jesus, in the midst of identifying his spiritual family, points out that there is a particular family trait that sets off those who belong to his spiritual and eternal family. He declares, "Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

B. This is what real food is for Jesus—"to do the will of [his] Father . . . and to accomplish his work." It's recorded in John 6 how Jesus was instructing the crowds about what it was he came to do. He said, "I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have

eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.” Of course to accomplish this overall task involves many other tasks as well. Doing the will of God basically comes down to obedience. Jesus lived and lives in constant obedience to the desires of his Father. This is the family trait which marks Jesus off as the true Son of God.

C. And this is the trait he passes along to those who are born of God and belong to the family of God. The brothers and sisters of Jesus are marked by their obedience to the Father as well. They do not simply talk about the will of God. They do not merely wish they did the will of God. They do not merely say they intend to do the will of God. They DO the will of God. They obey.

Back in the sermon on the Mount Jesus had said, “it is not those who SAY to me Lord, Lord who will enter the kingdom of heaven but those who DO the will of my father who is in heaven.”

It is not those who sit around talking about obedience or dreaming about obedience or regretting their disobedience but those who obey who display that they belong to the family.

D. Now it is important to clarify and for each of you to grasp that Jesus is not teaching that anyone gets into the family by their works. No one is reconciled with God by working or trying. But when a person brings his sins to God trusting in Christ and his work, God by grace brings him into the family of the redeemed. He has been born of God. And everyone who has been born of God will reflect the family likeness.

At the same time doing the will of God is something we must pursue. It requires our effort. In Ephesians 5, Paul gives this exhortation. “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.”

Those who do not do the will of God do not belong to the family. If you will not seek to live in obedience, you are not reflecting the family trait. But you can! Now is the time to repent, trust Christ, and obey. There is such an incredible word of hope in what Jesus says here. It’s found in the word “whoever.” It doesn’t matter where you come from, what your track record

is, who your biological mother or father or brother is. Whoever you are, if you do the will of the Father, if you repent of sin and rest in the work of Christ, if you will set your heart to obey, Jesus says you are in the family—the only family that ultimately matters.

## **Conclusion**

I have three exhortations with which to conclude this morning.

1. Recognize that the family of God is the only family that ultimately matters. The point is not that biological family does not matter at all or that we do not have any obligations to our biological families. We certainly do. Jesus clearly upheld the commandment to honor father and mother. He sharply rebuked the Pharisees for trying to sidestep that command. Jesus looked at Mary when he was being crucified and committed her to the care of John.

But he also said that some of those who would follow him would experience hostility within their own households from their own families. He also said, “Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.” So ultimately even when your biological family turns its back, those who belong to Jesus, those who do the will of God, belong to a family that sticks closer than any other.

2. Followers of Christ should enthusiastically rejoice in the spiritual family of which we are a part. We have an elder brother who is not ashamed to own us. And in that elder brother all the sisters and the brothers are joined together. We just need to be blown away by how eagerly Jesus owns his family. Like him we should happily stretch out our hand, point out our brothers and sisters in Christ and say to the world, “Behold, my family.” We should let our lives say to one another, “You are my family!” We are one. We are joined by the blood Jesus shed. We are joined by our common love for the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. We are joined by a common determination to do the will of God. We are joined eternally. When you look around the family, you are gonna see some who aren’t attractive to the world. But if they are precious to Jesus, they ought to be precious to you. We should celebrate the way God works and humbly and gladly join together in the life and work he has for us.



3. We need to acknowledge that we are the household of God. To the believers in Ephesus Paul said, "You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God." A family is a household. And God makes his presence known in this household. This family is a holy temple, a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. As a family we are called to worship God, glorify Christ, and do good especially to those in the household.