



“A New Family”

- Matthew 12:46-50, 13:53-58

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Matthew 12:46-50 *While He was still talking to the multitudes, behold, His mother and brothers stood outside, seeking to speak with Him. 47 Then one said to Him, "Look,*

Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, seeking to speak with You." 48 *But He answered and said to the one who told Him, "Who is My mother and who are My brothers?" 49 And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers! 50 "For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother."*

Matthew 13:53-58 *Now it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these parables, that He departed from there. 54 And when He had come to His own country, He taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished and said, "Where did this Man get this wisdom and these mighty works? 55 "Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas? 56 "And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this Man get all these things?" 57 So they were offended at Him. But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house." 58 Now He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief.*

“Seek the LORD and His strength; Seek His face evermore!

Remember His marvelous works which He has done,

His wonders, and the judgments of His mouth...” Psalms 105:4-5

Over the years I have said plenty of things that got me into trouble, yet I take comfort ...and maybe even license, in the fact that Jesus often did the same! The fact is not lost that we as a church have been repeatedly praised for teaching the unadulterated Word of God...as it seems many folks at least appreciate the *IDEA* of such, while we have at the same time have been criticized for teaching the *APPLICATION* of those same Bible passages. It seems we still want the truth to be out there and draw some comfort in the fact it exists, but we like it from a distance thank you! Mankind has done some crazy things with truth in recent years. Recently I was reading an article by the award-winning columnist for the Minneapolis Star and Tribune Jon Tevlin. I was struck by a comment he made wherein he had recently been accused by a reader as having “used facts as a crutch.” He went on to comment that “that’s our world now.” Indeed!

We all know that scripture says things like “*seek first the kingdom of God...*” and that Christ is to be our “...*first love,*” and that we are to have “...*no other God’s before me.*” And we are apt to say “amen” to such verses as these and other passages like them but truthfully we see them as rather gray and nebulous as to their real and practical application. No one is willing to say what living those verses out really looks like! I can read them in a service and generally I will garner praise and affirmation for having done so. But move forward to the *application* of those passages, and I enter dangerous ground. And generally it’s not that people would argue my interpretation, but rather they just simply don’t want to hear it at all.

Some principles in scripture are just so radical and so challenging that we want to simply plug our ears and move on to more user friendly and palatable scriptures! Just try teaching Luke 14:26-27! *“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. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.”* Christ went on to clarify and emphasize in verse 33 therein saying: *“So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.”* Certainly the attempt to apply THESE passages will be a problem and will likely cause a ruckus. Why? Because these verses have some ‘mo’ behind them. They hit hard. They very clearly draw a picture of the broader idea of “putting God first.” So again, while often the *principle* is the stuff of wall plaques, the practice of such is shunned at best and at worst condemned as extreme and yes...*here it comes*, “cultish.”

Yet the history of scriptural reading and expounding upon its meaning goes *way* back! Nehemiah 8, verses 6 - 8 *“Then Ezra praised the LORD, the great God, and all the people chanted, “Amen! Amen!” as they lifted their hands. Then they bowed down and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. The Levites (the priests)... then instructed the people in the Law while everyone remained in their places. They read from the Book of the Law of God and clearly explained the meaning of what was being read, helping the people understand each passage.”*

On this scripture specifically, I have found that messing with peoples families...*even the ideas and principles of family*, is dangerous ground for any pastor. I have witnessed some seriously wicked children pass through the doors of this church, but *you* tell their parents! God help you if you address their educational process or the clothes they’re wearing! I have dealt with some disastrous marriages where the only bond that I could ultimately find to tie the couple together was their eventual mutual angst against me! The last time I instructed a dysfunctional marriage to “place God first”, the wife took that as I was telling her to divorce her upright albeit unredeemed husband, and she left the church too. The broad subject of family has in one way or another cost this church a lot of attendees over the years. Which only creates great challenge for me in the passages we have before us today.

Just who...*in the paradigm of Christendom and life in community*, is my family?

Scripture has much to say about the community body life of a church. Again, we in the greater church tend to ignore it as we pass by the same faces in the pews on Sundays. But it’s there, and most of us know it. But it’s easier to embrace religious philosophies invented by men instead of the plain language of scripture. We hear loud and clear the mantra of the religious right’s “Family First” ...which is certainly politically correct but is found nowhere in scripture, while we ignore what IS there...including this one today, that says family *ain’t* first...at least not blood family. Or at least not *because* they are blood! Deuteronomy 29:19 tells about the one who would *“hear the warnings”* but would still *“congratulate themselves, thinking, ‘I am safe, even though I am following the desires of my own stubborn heart.’ This would lead to utter ruin!”* (NLT) Ecclesiastes 7:29 speaks of this state of man and our hearts responses... *“Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.”* So when we read these passages today, what will we do with them?

Jesus was forever one who *lived out* His teaching as well as taught it verbally. That’s important because many of us *say* one thing and *do* another, and eventually that practice takes us out of the church and eventually away from any semblance of faithful living. So while he spoke clearly in more than one place concerning what exactly is “family” in the household of faith, He also lived it out. Here in this passage he makes it clear who has the voice in his life. Such a heart goes back a long way...back to even his preteen years, where when being found missing from the family group, He was eventually found, only to answer mom and step-dad with *“Why did you seek me? Did you not know I must be about my Father’s business?”*

But again, how often we can be guilty of attempting to simply add Jesus to our lives, instead of pursuing the truth that we can’t have both. Certainly we would not be truthful if we didn’t acknowledge that, in the flesh, some of what is being asked of us is *hard*! But such does not change the facts of scripture or its authenticity. I certainly grasp the daunting aspect of this scriptural truth, especially for those of you who are younger...university age perhaps. I know many of you

have struggled with who to listen to and who will take primary rolls in your lives...as counselors, as teachers, and confidants. To complicate things even more, often you have blood family who at least *claim* to be believers.

Make no mistake today. God is far from “anti-family” when it comes to parents and siblings. He has plenty to say about that also, but that’s for another day, and it doesn’t change what’s on the table. What he is driving out is *who is going to have that final word in your life?* You parents? Your siblings? Your life-long best friend? Or God? The church’s roll is to merely operate as an extension of the power and presence of God, not as a ‘replacement’ for your earthly family. But to be in your twenties, calling yourself a Christian, and allowing your parents or extended family members to negatively affect your spiritual walk and development is without excuse. Now I’m not going to get into a battle that places me between you and your earthly family. I’m simply going to give you the criteria that **JESUS** gives you as to who is to be in that seat of your heart: *"For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother."*

Now I am blessed to have had believing parents and I was raised in and more importantly *for* Christ. And my parents gave me a lot of rope...a lot of room to be what I chose to be. My dad was pretty perceptive and more than once I found he knew me better than I knew myself, yet it was made clear that he was proud of me. But all that being said, I am not the person they wanted me to be. I would have a bunch of kids, live in Iowa, and I wouldn’t be a pastor, or live in a log house, or ride a Harley or do missions work. I try to let God have the final word in my life. Certainly I wish He would talk a little louder most of the time and spell it all out with greater clarity! But I know I don’t get to dictate how God works.

Now some of you have no problem with this entire concept because your earthly family is completely out of the picture...either by their doing or by yours. Such is becoming more and more common in our world where we simply don’t do family very well. Parents overbearing or attempting to live vicariously through their children. Or the flip side where family members simply have little or no care for others in the family, and many of you virtually raised yourself and you grew up surviving on your own. And now...here amongst you is the only real family and certainly the best family you have ever had.

But for others, you have “all-american families” with brothers and sisters and parents who are still married and they go to church. But the problem is they are telling you to do and live contrary to your heart, your perceived calling, and the counsel of your church family. If you tell them this, they will undoubtedly pull out the “F-word” of the church world and label your church a cult. But again...what do we do with scripture then? Perhaps some guidelines would be of value here?

- 1) *The voices that are speaking into your life...the “family” affect, what are they basing their counsel to you on?*
- 2) *Who is the final word on your life? Whose wants and needs are primary in that council and what are those wants and needs based upon?*
- 3) *What is the bond between you and these people? Is it God or DNA?*

I wonder if we grasp the length and breathe of our re-birth? The day I was reborn I lost my nationality, my friends, my family, my dreams and aspirations, the control of my life, and my future. Few folks are so willing to accept that description, but according to scripture then they simply are not reborn, not saved, *not Christian*. No matter how much they go to church and how much they give. That doesn’t mean I can’t love the USA, or go home for Christmas or go to my high-school class reunion. But once I have been truly reborn, there are some dramatic changes in my life! And most of all...and this is absolute, **you** are no longer calling the shots and either is your blood family. (unless you are a minor!)

Who is my mother and who are my brothers? For Jesus it was “...*whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother.*” How about for you? This affect...and the response of those around you to your spiritual development, will often depend on just how deep you dive! Jesus you see was “all the way in.” He wasn’t playing around, or ‘dabbling’ in this God stuff. Plenty of folks we find on the pages of scripture sacrificed a lot because they were ‘a lot’ into that life. Paul was no doubt married at one point, but we never read about her or what happened to her. Did she take off when Paul ‘joined the other side?’ What about Jonathan when daddy Saul was pushing off in a different direction than he was when it came to David? And Josephs brothers? Jacob and Esau? Cain and Abel? The prodigal son’s older brother? Moses’ sister Miriam? Not to mention his brother Aaron and his ‘golden cafe’ idol! The list goes on and on.

In John chapter 7, Jesus' brothers tried to push him outside of what He felt He was to do, and He rebuffed their efforts. Then in Mark 3:21 we read, "*But when His own people heard about this, they went out to lay hold of Him, for they said, 'He is out of His mind.'*" Paul understood all this I guess, for he wrote later in 2 Corinthians 5:13 "*For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God....*" The NLT says it clearly, even going on to the next verse (14) also saying "*If it seems we are crazy, it is to bring glory to God...Either way, Christ's love controls us.*"

All of this is by no means saying we should not seek or receive counsel. After all, scripture tells us that "*Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counselors there is safety.*" (Prov 11:14) However, the question is from whom do we receive such counsel? Psalms 33:11 says "*The counsel of the LORD stands forever...*" and Psalms 106:13 "*They soon forgot His works; They did not wait for His counsel...*" And anyone who would attempt to stand alone and disregard those around him stands in great danger! Job was told "*Have you heard the counsel of God? (or) Do you limit wisdom to yourself?*" (Job 15:8) So once again, this concept can be difficult for many of us to accept. But isn't it a fact that much of what Jesus asks of us is difficult to accept? We aren't alone in that thinking either. After all, even when Jesus was on this earth teaching 'in the flesh' *so to speak*, there were those who had a hard time swallowing what they heard. "*When many of his disciples heard it, they said, 'This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?'*" (Matthew 6:60)

And of course, all that I am telling you can tend to seem rather self-serving. A 'power grab' on my part. So I must state for the record that if your church family is telling you stuff that is contrary to the Word of God, then you need to not only not listen to it, but you need to find another community to be a part of! After all, this is not "step three" in the Covenant Agreement to be a member of JFB. No one is mandating that we have some level of control over your life, nor and we are demanding to usurp your blood family. No, like much of what we read in scripture, this is simply the example of Jesus and each of us must decide just how far to take our emulation of the divine. However, let it be said that Jesus IS indeed presenting a lifestyle of kingdom living on this planet, and we are hard-pressed to ignore it!

For Jesus knew that some folks would have a tough time with His decisions and lifestyle. Apparently, even when you are the Son of God and the Savior Redeemer of the world, some of your family, extended family, and friends will see your lifestyle as somewhat radical if not all out crazy! He experienced the reality that "*A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house.*" And He was not alone in this. Peter said, "*Do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you.*" (1 Peter 4:12). And Paul said in 2 Timothy 3:12, "*Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.*"

I must say at the end of this, that like all 'families,' this one here in this community is far from perfect. We are fallen human beings that currently "see ourselves through a glass darkly." We are passionate and invested in one another, and so it is hard for us to remain silent or disengaged. Not everything that comes out of our mouths is righteous, nor do we claim that we have some sort of special phone line to God. But we try hard to truly love each other as God loves and do right by each other, and that in itself is radical, weird, and rare. Such love as this will always get us in trouble, just as Jesus' love got Him in trouble. So much so that they killed Him for it. So the price is high to be a part of this 'family.' It always has been so, but God promises us in John 16:33 - "*These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.*"

Jeremiah 29:11

"For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope."

1 John 2:6

"...the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked."