

Who is the Family of Jesus?

Whoever Does the Will of the Father in Heaven

Scripture: Matthew 12:46-50

Sermon Series: *Matthew*

Topic: Jesus, Family, Will of God

Matthew 12:46-50 (ESV)

Reader: Alex Cravens

⁴⁶ While he was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him. ⁴⁸ But he replied to the man who told him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" ⁴⁹ And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he 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."

Introduction

We finally reach the end of chapter twelve. It concludes with Jesus being interrupted by his family while teaching the crowds and his disciples. His family is not among those sitting in listening to Jesus teach, but rather we find them "standing on the outside."

The scene provides Jesus with an opportunity to ask the question, **Who is my family?** He then answers his own question by explaining that the members of his family is "whoever does the will of my Father in heaven?"



A Controversial Chapter

Chapter twelve is filled with controversy. It begins with controversy in grain fields and ends with controversy in a crowded house.

- The chapter opens in grain fields with a controversy over the sabbath rules.
- The controversy moves into the synagogue where the controversy continues as Jesus heals a man with wounded hand.
- The controversy intensifies when Jesus heals a man who was both blind and mute because he had been oppressed by a demon.

- The controversy grows as the crowds praised Jesus as the Son of David while the Pharisees condemned him as being a servant of Satan. Jesus responds by warning them that they bordered on blasphemy and that their blasphemous words flowed from a blasphemous heart. Their demand for a sign was evil because they had already been given many signs.
- The controversy became crystal clear as Jesus said, "*Whoever is not with me is against me*,"¹ and if this evil generation finally rejected their Messiah, then it would dreadfully worse for them.

Now, at the end of this chapter, the controversy shifts to a crowded house as Jesus' family appears seeking to stop his teaching. Jesus takes the moment to teach us one controversial truth; the family of Jesus is comprised only of "*whoever does the will of God the Father*."

Pray

Father, in heaven, please hear our prayer. As we consider this teaching of Jesus, bring into your family those who are not. Unsettle those who think they are in your family, but truly are not yet. And may those who are in your family, worship you for all that you have done—by your grace and mercy—to bring us in. Draw in today those who are far off. Draw us up in sweet worship who are already in your family. Enlarge our hearts to love you more deeply. Enlarge your family today. Through Christ Jesus I pray. Amen.

Your Family is Here (v.46)

The scene opens with the arrival of Jesus' family at moment when Jesus is presently engaged in teaching crowds of people. The first observation to make is that *Jesus' family is neither following him nor among those listening to his teaching*.

The Location: Crowded House

As Matthew so often does, he gives us the location of this scene, only in this case he tells us at the end of this scene rather than at the beginning. In the first verse of the next chapter Matthew informs us that this took place inside a crowded house.²

Matthew 13:1-2 (ESV) That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. And great crowds gathered about him...

When the demon-oppressed man had been brought to Jesus (12:22) and he healed him and then responded to the accusations of the Pharisees about the characteristics of "*this evil generation*,"³ he did so from within a house and in front of crowds of people. The scene now

¹ Matthew 12:30.

² Both Mark (3:31-32) and Luke affirm the same (8:19-20).

³ Matthew 12:38-45.

before us (vs.46-50), interrupts Jesus' response to the Pharisees, for Jesus' family appears, "*While he was still speaking to the people...*" (12:46).

Innocuous or Important?

This short scene seems like a rather innocuous event. Jesus' family shows up at one of his many speaking engagements and they want to talk to him. Why is this even recorded? Why should we give this any of our attention? This event is recounted by three of the four gospel authors (Mk 3:31-35; Lk 8:19-21). This fact alone demonstrates the significance of this event. The Holy Spirit led Matthew, Mark, and Luke to write down what happened here, so this must be important. We need to know why this has been included in written record of three gospels.

Matthew 12:46 (ESV) While he was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him.

Behold, his mother and his brothers. Note Matthew's customary use of the word, '*behold.*' He is getting our attention. He is alerting us to the fact that there is something to see here.

One thing to see here is that Jesus has a ***mother and brothers***. The context here clearly points to his biological family. Mary is unquestionably his mother and the most natural understanding of the word 'brothers' in this context is that it refers to the other sons to whom Mary gave birth. Mary and Joseph had four other sons and also daughters after Mary gave birth to Jesus. Matthew even names the brothers for us in the very next chapter.

Matthew 13:55-56 (ESV) Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And are not all his sisters with us?

The Catholic teaching that these "brothers" refer to the children of Joseph from a previous marriage has no basis in Scripture, but rather has been fabricated out of desire to justify the unbiblical tradition of the perpetual virginity of Mary. Mary and Joseph had four sons after Jesus and at least three or more daughters. It should be obvious that Matthew does not believe that Mary was a perpetual virgin for he gives us the names of Jesus' four half-brothers and tells us that there were a number of sisters also. Jesus was not Mary's only child. He had a rather large family of at least six siblings and probably more.

We also ***notice the absence of Joseph***. Joseph was not present when Mary and her four sons (and possibly even some of the sisters⁴) came to talk to Jesus. Joseph most likely had died by this point. Joseph is not mentioned in Jesus' life after the trip to Jerusalem when Jesus was twelve (Lk 2:41-51).

⁴ Note Jesus' use of the word 'sister' in 12:50, which likely points to the fact that some of his sisters were there also. See also the ESV footnote at 12:46, which notes that *adelphoi*, which is translated 'brothers,' can also mean 'brothers and sisters.'

Stood outside. Jesus' family "**stood outside.**" They were "**outside**" the house in which Jesus was speaking. They were not following Jesus. They were not among the crowds of people who were listening to Jesus. Neither were they among the many disciples who were following Jesus. At this point in Jesus' ministry they are "**outside.**" Matthew here implies that his family had doubts about Jesus and his ministry. This is also seen in the fact of the timing of this event.

While he was still speaking to the people," his family came "**asking to speak with him.**" The clear implication is that they were seeking to interrupt Jesus while he was exercising his teaching ministry. The timing of their request reveals the desire of their hearts. They wanted him to *stop teaching and come talk to them.* What Matthew implies, Mark makes abundantly clear. In Mark's account of this event, he lets us in on what the family was thinking about Jesus' teaching and his recent controversy with the Pharisees.

Mark 3:21 (ESV) And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, "He is out of his mind."

Mary and the brothers and sisters of Jesus thought that Jesus had been in the sun too long. This was a family intervention. They banded together because they thought Jesus would stop and listen to them if they all came to him. They did not think that he was in his right mind. They did not understand what he was thinking.

Neglecting Family Duties?

And if Joseph had died, then the responsibility of providing for the family fell to Jesus as the oldest son. Perhaps they were all thinking of the potential difficulty that could come from a direct assault on the Pharisees and the public preaching to the crowds that included words like, "This evil generation." Jesus' priorities were all mixed up. He was supposed to be doing what was good for the family carpentry business and he had abandoned his work and doing this teaching-ministry thing. This was not good. John in his gospel also informs us of the inner family controversy.

John 7:3-5 (ESV) ³ So his brothers said to him, "Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples also may see the works you are doing. ⁴ For no one works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world." ⁵ For not even his brothers believed in him.

His own brothers were mocking him, effectively saying, "Jesus, if you want to be a famous teacher and Israel's Messiah, then go downtown and show'm what you can do. Don't stay here in little Galilee. Go up to the metropolis of Jerusalem and show your mighty words and works to the world." They said this mockingly, because **they did not believe in him.**

Summary. Jesus is at a challenging point in his ministry. He is facing lots of controversy. He has active opponents among the most powerful religious leaders of his day. And now his own family appears trying to get him to stop teaching which reveals their own doubts about him and his ministry. What will Jesus do?

Who is My Family?

Jesus responds by asking a question. Let's look at the next verse.

Matthew 12:48-49 (ESV) ⁴⁸ But he replied to the man who told him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" ⁴⁹ And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers!"

What happened to verse 47?

If you're paying attention to the verse numbers, then you'll note that the numbering jumps from v.46 to v.48. So what happened to v.47? What has happened is that there is doubt about whether or not that verse is to be considered original to Matthew or not. The doubt comes from the fact that the verse is absent from most of the oldest manuscripts, but it is included in the later manuscripts.⁵ Thus, we are left wondering whether this verse is a scribal insertion seeking to explain something.

Note how v.48 begins, "*But he replied to the man who told him...*" If v.47 is a later scribal addition, then its purpose would be to introduce "*the man who told*" Jesus, since nothing has yet been said about the messenger sent by the of family.

Matthew 12:47 (ESV footnote) Someone told him, "Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, asking to speak to you."

This verse essentially repeats the final of clause of v.46. We have seen throughout Matthew's gospel that he frequently abbreviates stories and includes only what is important to him. The fact that a messenger was sent by the family could easily be understood as unimportant to Matthew and thus may have been inserted by a later scribe in order to alleviate potential confusion stemming from the assumption of the messenger mentioned at the beginning of v.48. However, the translators of the ESV have elected to exclude v. 47 since is not found in the oldest, more reliable manuscripts.

Jesus' Question

When Jesus learns that his mother and brothers were asking to speak to him, he asks a rhetorical question, "*Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?*" Matthew then reveals something that only an eyewitness would know,

⁵ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, vol. 33A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1993), 358.

Matthew 12:49 (ESV) And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers!"

Jesus talked with his hands too! (Or at least one of them!) He stretched out his hand toward his disciples and pointed to them as the true members of his family. This is good news for his followers.

The family of Jesus is not limited to biological connection. There is the possibility for more to be added. Jesus is pointing out a reality that is broader and more expansive than the limits of physical connection. Others can be included.

Note that *Jesus' mission takes priority over biological family.* He does not immediately stop teaching and go speak with his family. He continues teaching⁶. He cannot stop his mission in order to appease the doubting members of his family. He is holding out hope for those who want to become members of his family.

How to Become Member of Jesus' Family

This hope of joining the family of Jesus is addressed in the final verse. Jesus explains what defines those who members of his family.

Matthew 12:50 (ESV) "For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

Jesus repeats a phrase he first used at the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 7:21 (ESV) "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who **does the will of my Father** who is in heaven."

How does one become a member of Jesus' family? Jesus' answer is, by "**doing the will of my Father in heaven.**" Thus, what is the will of the Father in heaven? It involves at least three actions of the heart and soul; believing in Jesus, listening to Jesus, and loving Jesus.

1) Believe in Jesus

The first part of the answer comes from Jesus himself. In order to become a member of his family, one must believe in Jesus.

John 6:40 (ESV) "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."

⁶ Even throughout the course of the day. See Matthew 13:1-36, where Jesus kept teaching that day and did so by use of many parables.

Looking to Jesus and believing in him, leads to eternal life. What does it mean to “*look to the Son and believe in him?*” Believe in him for what? Looking to Jesus means believing that,

1) ***Apart from Jesus there is no salvation.*** Look to Jesus as God’s chosen Messiah and believe that apart from him there is no salvation.

John 8:24 (ESV) “I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins.”

There are not many roads that lead to salvation. There is only one and it goes directly through Jesus alone.

Acts 4:12 (ESV) “And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

2) ***You must look away from sin.*** You must *repent* of your sins. Looking to Jesus means looking away from your sin. Jesus began his ministry with a call to repent of sin (Mt 4:17). After hearing Peter preach about Jesus the people asked Peter, “What shall we do,” he responded saying, “Repent...” (Acts 2:38). If you want to be in the family of Jesus, you must look to him for salvation and away from sin. This is not a one-time act, but all-time attitude.

3) ***In Jesus is forgiveness of your sins.*** We all know that we are sinners (Rom 3:23). Looking to Jesus in faith means lookin to him for the *forgiveness* of your sin. Believe in him such that you are convinced that he and *he alone can atone for your sins and pay the price of your sin*—which is death. He died and because he shed his blood, in him forgiveness of sin can be granted.

1 Corinthians 15:3-4 (ESV) ³ For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,

See and hear the words of Paul. This is the gospel, “*Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures.*” Christ did not die for his own sins. Christ died *for our sins*. Not for his, but for ours. He paid the death-price for the the forgiveness of the sins of all who will believe in him, therefore only through him can forgiveness be found.

4) ***Jesus bodily died and was resurrected on the third day.*** The bodily death and bodily resurrection of Jesus are at the heart of the gospel. He actually died “*for our sins*” and he actually “*was buried*” in a tomb and he was actually bodily “*raised*” from death “*on the third day,*” all of which are “*in accordance with the Scriptures.*”

5) *If you call on Jesus, you will be saved.* Joining the family of Jesus is not only believing certain facts, but it is also confessing a trust in those facts.

Romans 10:9-13 (ESV) ...if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.¹⁰ For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.¹¹ For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame."⁷ ¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him.¹³ For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."⁸

Calling on Jesus is the culmination of believing in Jesus.⁹ Calling on him means praying out loud with your own mouth, confessing that you know that you are a sinner, that you believe Jesus died for your sins, that Jesus can forgive you of your sins, that you believe he was raised up from the dead on the third day, that you want him to save you from your sins, and that he is now Lord.

6) *Receiving the Holy Spirit.* Looking to Jesus in faith also means believing that he can give you spiritual life. In other words, that both can and will pour his own Holy Spirit within you so that you will come alive to things of God. Peter once again teaches us,

Acts 2:38 (ESV) And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

The first step to becoming a member of the family of Jesus is *believing in Jesus*, looking to him in faith, 1) knowing that without him you cannot be saved, 2) looking away from sin in repentance, 3) looking to him for forgiveness of sin, 4) believing that he died, was buried, and resurrected on the third day, 5) calling out to him to save you, and then 6) receiving his Holy Spirit.

2) Listen to Jesus

The second part of "doing the will of the father in heaven," is listening to the words and teaching of Jesus. Listening means both, *hearing* and *doing* the words of Jesus. It is God's will that his children both hear and obey the words of Jesus. God told us this on the Mount of Transfiguration.

Matthew 17:5 (ESV) ...a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; *listen to him.*"

⁷ Romans 9:33, quoting Isaiah 28:16.

⁸ Joel 2:32.

⁹ See Romans 10:14.

This seems abundantly clear. God does not very often speak audibly from heaven, but he could not be clearer. *"This is my beloved Son... listen to him!"* It is the will of the Father in heaven that we on earth *listen to and obey his Son, Jesus*. Therefore, we must know all that Jesus said and obey what he said. We must know what Jesus taught and do it. Jesus' own final words to his disciples said the same.

Matthew 28:19-20 (ESV) ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Those who want to be part of the family of Jesus are hear and do all that taught and this begins with baptism. Jesus commands his disciples to *"make disciples of all nations"* by first *baptizing* people and then *teaching* them to *observe*, or 'to keep' *"all that he commanded."*

There are at least two reasons to obey the commands of Jesus.

1) His words are the words of eternal life. Peter was the first to note this fact. After hearing Jesus preach a hard sermon, and watching the majority of his disciples walk away from him, Jesus asked the Twelve disciples if they too wanted to leaven him.

John 6:68 (ESV) Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life..."

Listening to Jesus means finding life. Hearing and doing his words is embracing life.

2) His words are God's words. Listening to the words means listening to the words of God because the teaching of Jesus came from God.

John 7:16 (ESV) "My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me."

John 8:26 (ESV) "He who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him."

John 8:28 (ESV) "I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me."

John 8:40 "...I told you the truth that I heard from God."

John 15:15 (ESV) "...all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you."

The words and teaching of Jesus are the words and the teaching of God the Father in heaven. Therefore, his words must be both known and obeyed.

Doing the will of the Father in heaven, entails hearing and obeying the words of Jesus. Becoming a member of the family of Jesus means listening to and obeying the teaching and commands of Jesus. Throughout the course of history, the outward sign of becoming a member of the family of Jesus has been marked by baptism followed by instruction in and obedience to the teaching of Jesus.

3) Love Jesus

The third dimension of “doing the will of the Father in heaven” involves loving Jesus above every other person and thing on this planet. Becoming a member of the family of Jesus entails loving Jesus more than the members of your own family.

Matthew 10:37-39 (ESV) ³⁷ “Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. ³⁸ And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”

Jesus teaches his people to love him more than the biological members of their own family and even more than their own life. If it is true that the words of Jesus are the words of God—and it is true, then this teaching came from God himself. Loving Jesus more than your own life and family is not in conflict with the OT command to “love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and with all your might” (Dt 6:4). Since Jesus is one¹⁰ with the Father, to love Jesus above all, is to love God above all. Jesus himself teaches us,

John 14:21 (ESV) “He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.”

John 16:27 (ESV) “...for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God.”

Loving Jesus is different from obeying Jesus (Jn 14:15). Loving is the affection of the heart, while obedience is the agreement of the body.

Conclusion

Family life is messy. Jesus’ mother, brothers, and sisters thought he was suffering from mental illness. They thought he was “out of his mind” (Mk 3:21). They attempted a kind of public intervention. They sought to stop Jesus from doing what God had called him to do. No doubt

¹⁰ Matthew 10:30; 12:44; 14:9; 17:21-22.

it was painful for Jesus to endure the mockery of his brothers and the misunderstanding of his his own family.

Sometime we too may find ourselves at place of disagreement with members of our own families. Just as Jesus did not revile his family for their faults, so we too must be careful not to say hurtful things toward each other in moments of disagreement (1 Ptr 2:23). This truth must be applied in the context of our biological families as well as our spiritual family.

Be patient and gracious. Though we find Jesus' family doubting him at this point in his ministry, they did not continue in those doubts. After his resurrection, they had changed their minds and joined with all the disciples in believing in Jesus.

Acts 1:14 (ESV) All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

Jesus did not give up on his family. Among his final words before dying was his expression of care and concern for his mother (Jn 19:27). After his resurrection, we are explicitly told by Paul that Jesus appeared to his brother James (1 Cor 15:7), who went on to become the leader of the church in Jerusalem and the author the book of James. Jesus was patient and gracious with his family. If we are his followers, then we too must be patient and gracious with each other.

Spiritual relationships are more enduring than biological ones. Jesus demonstrates in this passage, as well as teaching the same in others (Mt 10:34-39), that spiritual relationships are more enduring and take priority over biological ones. Jesus never disowned his family, but neither did he allow them to pull him away from God's call on his life. When the call of God conflicts with the demands and expectations of our unbelieving family members, we must obey God first. Our allegiance to the Father must always trump any physical allegiance to the family.

You can be a member of the family of Jesus. We are not by nature members of the family of Jesus. All of humanity is "*by nature children of wrath*" (Eph 2:3). There is no automatic entrance into the family God, even for the Jews who were God's chosen people. Jesus said to his fellow Jews, who claimed to be the children of Abraham¹¹ and children of God¹², "*You are of your father the devil*" (Jn 8:44). Every human being is born into this world a slave of sin¹³ and a member of the kingdom of darkness. Each and every one of us is born under the curse, yet through Jesus we can become a member of the family of Jesus.

Becoming a member of the family of Jesus comes by doing the will of the Father in heaven, which entails:

¹¹ John 8:39.

¹² John 8:41.

¹³ John 8:34.

- 1) Believing in Jesus, which includes,
 - 1) Looking to him alone for salvation,
 - 2) Looking away from sin in repentance,
 - 3) Looking to him for the forgiveness of sins,
 - 4) Accomplished through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus on the third day,
 - 5) Calling out to him for salvation,
 - 6) Receiving His Holy Spirit.
- 2) Listening to word of Jesus by hearing and obeying the teaching of Jesus, beginning with baptism followed by keeping his commandments .
- 3) By loving Jesus above all else. Love him as the supreme treasure of your life.

Discussion Questions

1. What explanation was offered regarding the absence of verse 47?
2. Why do all three gospel writers record this seemingly innocuous event?
3. What does the word "brothers" mean in this passage? To whom does it refer?
4. Why was Jesus' family seeking "to speak with" him?
5. Why might Jesus' father, Joseph, not have been with the rest of the family mentioned?
6. What is the "the will of the Father in heaven?"
7. How does one "do" God's will so as to become a member of Jesus' family?
8. Are you a member of the family of Jesus? If so, how and when did you become a member of his family? If not, do you want to become a member?
9. How would you explain to someone what one must do to become a member of the family of Jesus?