

Title: Forever Family
Text: Matthew 12.46-50
Theme: Living in the family of Jesus
Series: Matthew #71
Prop Stmtnt: The family of Jesus is the most important family.

Read Text:

“Alexander knew it was going to be a terrible day when he woke up with gum in his hair. And it got worse... His best friend deserted him. There was no dessert in his lunch bag. And on top of all that, there were lima beans for dinner and kissing on TV!” Many of you recognize those lines from Judith Viorst’s classic story of “Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day.” Have you ever had a bad day? Of course you have and that is why we all relate to Alexander.

Matthew 12 is the account of what appears to be a very bad day for Christ. The leaders of the nation of Israel, acting as the representatives of the nation, reject Christ. Listen to that again. The leaders of the nation of Israel, acting as the representatives of the nation, reject Christ. Christ is rejected. Christ is God, but he is also man. Christ is the 2nd Person of the Trinity. Christ is a person. He has an intellect, a will and emotions. When he is rejected, he feels it. And because he is the perfect man, the perfectly complete man, meaning he has the capacity to feel deeper than any of us, he would experience this rejection and the sorrow that comes from it, deeper than any of us. He came to his own and his own received him not, John said.

We know that Jesus is both God and man, but it is tempting to allow the fact that he is God to downplay the realities of his humanity to us. This is very important for you to understand. The fact that Jesus is God does not rob him of being fully engaged in every moment of his life. Even though Jesus knew that he was going to raise Lazarus from the dead (John 11), he still wept over his death. Even though Jesus knew that he would be rejected, and this rejection would be the occasion for his death and his death would be the means for our salvation, Jesus still feels this rejection. Jesus is the epitome of Romans 8.28, isn’t he? And we know that for those who love God all things work together for the good for those who are called according to his purpose. Jesus loved God perfectly and the fulfillment of this promise in his life is the grounding of this promise in our lives. He is the reason why this is true. But, the fact that Jesus believed this perfectly, did not mean that he was unaffected by the rejection. He felt the rejection.

So, here is the scene. Jesus is surrounded by this crowd. We know from 13.1 that Jesus was in a house. I am guessing that the leaders (Pharisees and Scribes) have left the house. The leaders have accused him of being satanic and with that accusation they have essentially warned the crowd that they are in danger because they are choosing to place themselves under the influence of a very dangerous man. At this point, however, the crowd has not left. Jesus knows that for the time being, he is amongst friends. He is welcome here. As God, he does not need us, but he certainly does love us. He does not

have to have our welcome, but he certainly enjoys it. And I believe that he is enjoying this when a man tells him that momma and the brothers have come. They are standing outside and would like a word with him.

Ok, let's step out of the story for a few minutes so I can address some confusion that has arisen about Mary due to some very unhelpful teachings and traditions. It is erroneously taught in the Roman Catholic religion that Mary was a perpetual virgin. It is erroneously believed that the normal, God-given, God-ordained, God-celebrated physical relationship of a husband and wife would somehow defile Mary. This view and teaching has caused some serious problems for the Roman Catholic religion. What does the Bible say about this? In Matthew 1.18-23, we learn that Mary was a virgin when, by means of the Holy Spirit, Mary conceived Christ. We learn from Matthew 1.24 that Joseph married Mary after she conceived Christ but before she delivered him. We also learn from Matthew 1.25 that Mary remained a virgin until after the birth of Christ, but that after his birth she and Joseph enjoyed intimacy. Joseph "*knew her not UNTIL she had given birth to a son.*" The obvious evidence of this is the fact that over and over the Bible speaks of the brothers and sisters of Jesus and names four of the brothers; James, Joseph, Simon and Judas. Look at Matthew 13.55-56. Jesus had four brothers and at least a couple of sisters.

James, the next oldest boy to Jesus, receives more attention in the NT than the rest. After his resurrection, Jesus appears to James personally. It is clear from 1 Corinthians 15.6, that the James he appears to is not the James who is the brother of John. This meeting between Jesus and his (half) brother James is probably the point of James' conversion. In Acts 12, James, the brother of John, is executed by Herod and Peter is imprisoned. Peter is delivered from prison but decides to get out of Dodge (ancient Sumerian word for Jerusalem :-)). But, before he leaves he tells the believers to make certain that James finds out what has happened. Since James, the brother of John is dead, the James that Peter is referring to is James, the brother of Jesus. This James appears again in Acts 15 and in Acts 21 where he is viewed as the leader of the church in Jerusalem and this is the James who wrote the epistle of James. Now, we do not know much about Simon, but Judas is the author of the book of Jude. Jude identifies himself as the brother of James, which fits with the list of the names of Jesus' brothers in Matthew 13.55 and Mark 6.3. Not much is known about Simon and Joseph (named presumably after his father).

There is something else you need to consider. Mary was obviously a good mom, but she was not a perfect mom. There were times when Mary could not figure out what Jesus was doing. The most obvious example of that was when Joseph and Mary took Jesus to Jerusalem for the Passover when Jesus was 12 years old (Luke 2.41-51). This was an incredible experience and a bit terrifying since historians have said that upwards to one million people would gather for this annual event in Jerusalem. Joseph and Mary and a large group from their town travel to Jerusalem for the Passover and when it is done, they head back home. As far as they know, Jesus is in the group. It is like Home Alone in 1st Century Israel. But, after they travel for a day, they discover that he is not in the group. That means they have to travel back (a day) and then they spend 3 days looking for him. Finally, on the 5th day, they find Jesus in the Temple having a Q and A with the leading scholars. Seriously. He is not only asking questions, he is answering questions. When

Joseph and Mary discover this, they are amazed and yet very upset. Certainly they are relieved that he is fine. They are astonished at what is taking place, but when the session is over Mary lets him have it, doesn't she? "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress." She is put out and you can understand why! "Son, do you know what you have put us through? You have never done anything like this in your life, I have always bragged about you that you are like a perfect child and now this!" But, how does Jesus respond? "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" What is the answer to that question? Joseph, Mary, (dad, mom) did you not know that I must be in my Father's house? No. They did not know and Jesus seems a bit surprised that they did not know. Why didn't they know? They didn't know, because they were not perfect. They did not have this whole thing sorted out. How could they? The text says that Jesus said this to them. He said it to both Joseph and Mary that they should have known that he must be in his Father's house. I am convinced that this is a very telling moment and it helps explain why Luke says that they did not understand what he was saying to them. They did not understand then, and I do not think that here in Matthew 12 that Mary understands yet. Jesus was making a point then in the temple that is related to what he says right here.

Now, set that off to the side for a minute and we will come back to it. But, let's go back to our scene in Matthew 12. Mary and the brothers show up. Matthew does not tell us why but Mark does. They thought that Jesus had lost his mind and they went out to seize him. We have four types of people in this story: 1) Those who reject Jesus are represented by the Pharisees. 2) Those who misunderstand Jesus are represented by his mother and brothers. 3) Those who believe in Jesus are represented by his disciples. 4) Those who are curious but undecided. At this point, his own family does not understand him and that includes his mother. Do you realize that Mary had to come to faith in Jesus, just like you? At this time his own family was not believers. John says this explicitly in John 7.5. That is Matthew's point. They were on the outside (46). Matthew is deliberately painting a picture here describing not just their physical location as being on the outside looking in, but the spiritual reality as well. The people on the inside were those who believed on Jesus or were open to it and the people on the outside were those who did not. Matthew describes it this way because that is exactly what Jesus is saying. Ok, now you are ready for the four points.

1. **Jesus practiced what he preached.** (46-50)

Go back with me to Matthew 10.34-39. Christ is the most important relationship that you can ever have. He is more important than the relationship that you have with your dad, mom, brothers, sisters, spouse, children, grand-children or in-laws. Life with Christ is the epitome of life. All of life is to point to that life. All relationships are to be a reflection of our relationship with him. Jesus does not ask anything of you that he does not do himself. Remember when he was in the Temple as a 12-year old boy? Do you remember what he said to his earthly dad? I must be about my Father's business. In other words, my heavenly Father's business is more important than you. Did Jesus love his earthly

parents? Yes. He loved them more than you love yours because he loved them perfectly. But, he loved the Father perfectly as well which means that in loving the Father perfectly, he loved the Father above all. He loved the Father perfectly and he loved his earthly parents perfectly. You cannot love your parents like you should if you do not love God above all. Jesus shows us that he loves the Father over his family. That was tough but good for his parents to face back when he was 12. But, here is a related issue. If Jesus has to choose between his biological family and the family of his Father in heaven, he is going with the family of those who truly love God.

He asks two related questions: Who is my mother and who are my brothers? Stop the movie for a second. This is tense. This is actually, intense. His mother and his brothers are standing right outside the house. They want to speak to him. So he asks, who is my mother and who are my brothers? Imagine that you hear a young man publicly ask that question when his own mother and brothers and standing close by. Would you not cringe? I am guessing that his mother and brothers and sisters were not real happy with him for that one. But they did not get it, just as some of your family members do not get it. Jesus knows what is to be rejected not only by people, but to be misunderstood and rejected by people in your own family. He is asking this because he is not assuming what everyone else is assuming. He is not assuming that his mother and brothers are to him what everyone assumes they are to him. His mother and his brothers are not yet part of his real family. They are part of his biological family but they are not yet part of his eternal family. The second point is clearly related to the first one.

2. **The Community of Jesus is the Real and Forever family.** (49-50)

Jesus stretches out his hand toward his disciples. Did they know what that meant? Did they realize that the King of the universe was welcoming them, including them, embracing them, identifying them, acknowledging them, accepting them and saying to all others, this is my family? Look at these people. These are the real insiders. We do not look like the insiders, do we? No, not as far as this world is concerned, but as far as Christ is concerned, we are the family.

You have more inherently in common with the wrinkled, broken old widow in Nepal who lives on the side of a mountain with one goat and a tiny garden who is a follower of Christ, than you do with your brother or sister who has not come to faith in Jesus. You have more in common with an Iraqi believer who is living in a refugee camp without electricity or running water than you do with your own cousin who is not a follower of Christ. You have more in common with the Christian parents in Nigeria whose daughters have been kidnapped by Boko Haram, than you do with the other parents on your kids soccer team. The community of Jesus, the family of Jesus is the real and eternal family. This is the family who truly has the Father as their Father. When the Father is your Father, then Jesus is your brother and all other believers are your siblings.

Now, let me press this home a little bit. We know about the break-up of the family. We know that when moms and dads split, when children do not talk to one another, or when older children abuse younger children, or when one child or one parent terrorizes

everyone else, or when addictions and other sins characterize daily life that this creates havoc. We have a word for this. It is called, dysfunctional.

What if you lived in a house with your siblings, but you never ever talked with them? I mean, no one really talked with each other? No one ate together, no one played together, no one hung together. In fact, you were not even certain what their names were. You might wave and smile at one another, but no one ever talked with you and you did not talk with them. What would you call that? For some of you, that is church. You do not know other people. You do not reach too much outside of your own family, because you do not realize how much you need to. Your biological family is not the church. Your church is your eternal family, of which, by God's grace your biological family is part of, if they are followers of Christ.

3. **Your biological family is only a mirror of the spiritual family.**

Let's say that for your son's 9th birthday that you bought him a ticket to go see the Tigers play. Now, you are a good dad, so you got one for yourself too. You put those tickets in a little box, wrapped it up and gave it to him to open. When he saw that ticket, he was ecstatic. In fact, he slept with that ticket. The next day, he took with him to breakfast, to school, and kept it with him every day. It just so happened that the ticket you bought had the picture of Miguel Cabrera on it who was his favorite player. Now, your son didn't know that you had arranged for him to meet Miguel before the game, but that was a surprise for later. So, the day came for the game and you and your son went to Comerica Park, but, in order to get into the game, your son had to give his ticket to the attendant for him to scan it. But, your son refused to let go of his ticket. If he doesn't give up his ticket that only has the image, he will never get to experience the real thing.

Now, lest you think that I am downplaying, or minimizing the biological family, listen carefully. Do you know why marriage between a man and a woman is so incredibly important? Marriage is so important because earthly marriage is a picture of the relationship of Christ and his church. Marriage here is portrait of the Marriage to come. The Marriage to come is so all-consuming, so soul-satisfying, so perfect, so beautiful, and so enduring that any marriage on earth that seeks to reflect the Marriage to come is going to be a marriage that is cherished, enjoyed, delightful, beautiful and attractive.

I want you to love Jesus more because I know there is nothing on this earth that is worth your love more than he is. But, I also know that every husband who loves Jesus more will love his wife more. And there is hardly anything that is more attractive, more delightful, more pleasing than a church full of women who are loved and who know they are loved and are willing to accept that love. Men, I want you to love Jesus because I want the wives and moms of our church to be treasured. And, I want you to love the church family; the community of Jesus so much because, in part, I know that it will help you love your biological family even better. Your biological family is very important because it is a mirror of your spiritual family.

Family can be wonderful, but do not forget, the best of families are temporary. They are a temporary reflection of the one that will last forever. Sometimes you lose your family because you trust in Jesus. Your biological family is not forever, Jesus' family is. He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose.

4. **Anyone can be in the Forever family.** (50) "*Whoever*"

- A. Whoever – “does the will of my father” – doing the will of the father does not cause our salvation (no one can do it perfectly) but is the fruit of our salvation.
- B. Invitation - on the part of Christ to be part of his family. It is open to you. It is an invitation to come to Christ. Give up your sin. Give up your self-reliance. Give up your self-rule. Trust in Christ as the only One who can forgive you of your sin because of his death on the cross in your place.

I know that doing so, forces many of you to make choice. If you trust in Jesus that means that you are saying that a family member is wrong. If you trust in Jesus that means that you may be the cause of some uncomfortableness and difficulty in your family. I know that when you follow Christ that it means that in some cases, you will be on the outside of a part of your family, looking in. I know that. But, what is even more important is that Jesus knows it. He experienced it. He leads the way. We keep the pace. His temporary rejection from his biological family became the means by which he forged and formed the forever family.

Do you have family members who do not understand you and complain that you love your church family more than you them? Grieve and be comforted. Jesus knows and commends you.

Do you realize that we are part of a family of believers all over the world and that we have brothers and sisters who are suffering precisely because they are our brothers and sisters? One of the reasons why persecution against Christians has intensified to a level beyond anything in the history of the church is because the gospel has been making inroads and is now seen as an enormous threat. We must stand with our brothers and sisters. Jesus is not ashamed to call them his own. We must be proud to stand with them. This family is forever.

What is your part in the family here? How do you view the family? The heart of a family is simply this: Two or more people who are willing to make and keep promises.