

The Family of God

Matthew 12:46-50

Introduction

Opposing Jesus: The last in our series where we see misunderstandings, willful ignorance, and downright rebellion. The Pharisees (in particular) have done everything they can to **skirt the claims** of Jesus, **deny the identity** of Jesus, and **downplay the authority** of Jesus.

- The challenge to each of us is to submit to Jesus, not to harden our hearts, or lessen our guilt, but come to Jesus in trust and follow him.
- The brokenness of the world, the sin inside of you, will tempt you to harden your heart to the call of the gospel, to the invitation of Jesus. Rather than tenderness, forgiveness, and mercy, you will be tempted toward bitterness, vengeance, and rebellion.
- “My grand point in preaching is to break the hard heart, and to heal the broken one.”
 - Our world, today, is full of **hard hearts** (rebellion) and **broken hearts** (despair). The gospel offers a different way.
 - The gospel offers a new, soft heart to ones calcified by bitterness and rebellion and offers rest and comfort to those broken by the burdens of the world.
- Have you ever tried something hard? I’ve been filling a lot of my quarantine time with a lot of home improvement projects. In some of these projects, there is a moment where something is really difficult and there is the temptation to either **(1) get angry** or **(2) despair**, and the result (in both cases) is to want to give up. Life is like that. Life is difficult and we often want to **harden** (anger) or **despair** (broken). Is there another option? Is there another way?

Another Way: There is another way. You don’t have to live in hard-hearted rebellion or endless grief and despair. You don’t have to be “good enough” for God to love you or worry that you’ve messed up too much. He is offering you complete acceptance into his family.

Main Point: Rather than **ignoring, running from, or fighting against** Jesus’ rule and reign in your life, he offers you and I the gracious opportunity to be welcomed, loved, and adopted into God’s family.

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.”

***Missing Verse:** Where is verse 47? ⁴⁷ [Someone told him, “Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, asking to speak to you.”] It’s missing from some of the earliest manuscripts so

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the ESV doesn't include it. The "numbers" aren't original (or early) so don't get hung up on that. Some versions do include it because it makes sense with v. 48 (fits the context and isn't controversial) and you could see how someone copying the text could skip over accidentally. In any case, it doesn't affect the meaning. *Ask me afterward if you want a deeper explanation.

Scenario: Jesus is teaching, his mother and brothers come, wanting to speak to him. Most assume Joseph, his step-father, is dead by this point (hence why he's not mentioned). It sounds like his response is almost adversarial but it need not be interpreted that way. Mary, the mother of Jesus, is mentioned frequently in the gospels. In John's gospel, we see her present at the Crucifixion and described affectionately. **Nothing** in this description **undermines** Scriptures call to honor your father and mother but, rather, it **elevates** the position of Jesus' disciples

1. Jesus' true family consists of those who are adopted by faith. ⁴⁹ And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers!"

Spiritual vs. Physical Family: "Blood is thicker than water." Meaning, the familial bond is stronger than any bond of friendship or love. Jesus is not undermining that *per se*, he is using that common knowledge to show that the bond of the spiritual family is greater than even that of the earthly family.

Faith Not Lineage: Our participation in the family of God is not a result of our earthly family. We are not Christians because mommy and daddy are Christians or because grandma went to church (though some of us act that way). If you are merely a Christian because of family tradition then I would beg you to reconsider your faith. **You do not get into the family of God by birth, only by rebirth through saving faith in Jesus.** Nepotism has no place in the kingdom of God. You cannot bequeath your salvation to your family. You cannot inherit the faith of your parents as your own. They can teach and train you but *you* have to be born again.

- The Pharisees often missed this point, thinking their religious tradition and ethnicity guaranteed them a place at the table of God. *It did not.*
- "Therefore, let us love one another, that we may all attain to the kingdom of God. While we have an opportunity of being healed, let us give ourselves to God that heals us and give to him a recompense. What kind of recompense? Repentance out of a sincere heart. For he knows all things... and is acquainted with what is in our hearts. Let us give him praise not with the mouth only, but also with the heart, that he might accept us as [children]" (Clement).

Adoption Not Birthright:

- "But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, **he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God**" (Jn 1:12-13).
- "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and **members of the household of God**" (Eph 2:19).

- “He predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will” (Eph 1:5).
- “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him” (Rom 8:14-17).
- The word **adoption** is filled with the ideas of love, grace, compassion, and intimate relationship. My adopted son (Joshua) has all the rights of our biological children (Jackson, Abigail). In spiritual adoption, the moment undeserving sinners are adopted by their heavenly Father as His children, their entire status is eternally changed — they receive a new name, a new family, new rights, new expectations, and a new nature. “It is probably not an overstatement to regard spiritual adoption as the greatest benefit of the gospel.” This is why God’s love is seen as so great because lavishly gives us the privileges of being his children.
- One writer (David Bartlett) recounted the story of his friends explaining adoption to their kids. One of their sons is their biological child and the other children are adopted. They were explaining to the youngest child what it meant for him to be adopted – how he had been chosen, and waited for, and welcomed with joy. As part of the story they also had to explain that his oldest brother was their biological child and was not adopted. When they had finished explaining what it meant, the little boy cried out: ‘Oh, that’s wonderful. Can’t we adopt my older brother too?’
- **"Maci had asked not to be adopted."** Maci lost her father when she was two, and her mother at 11, both to addiction. Growing up, her life was anything but stable. Continuous drug use and domestic violence marred her life for years. A high fever took her hearing as a toddler, leaving her deaf. School was a source of stress because of bullying. Placed in the temporary custody of her aunt, Maci’s life began to unravel. Life with her aunt lacked the love she had known from her mother and she began acting out. The grief from the loss of her mother from a drug overdose created a downward spiral, increasing negative behaviors that her aunt was not willing to work through. Consequently, her aunt released her into the foster system at age 15. At this point, Maci felt completely isolated and hopeless. She was living in a group home. However, according to her adoptive mother, what it didn't have was more important. "Even though she had safety and medical care, she didn't have love." Maci's adoptive father explained, "At an emotional level, [the group home] can't meet the bonding needs of each child." A junior in high school, Maci was nearing "aging out" of the system. She'd given up hope of being adopted, and removed adoption from her placement plan. Gigi Kean worked at Maci's high school office. "I never saw her as a pity case—I always saw her as this fiery, bright, and intelligent girl. I was ignorant about foster children, I never even considered that she might want parents, or to be adopted. I admired her strength, and talked to her whenever I could," she said. As Gigi and Maci became friends, she finally confided about her hopeless yearning for a real family. She said, "I just need to be realistic, no one wants to

adopt me. Who would want me?”. After speaking to her husband Chris, the plan to adopt Maci was officially set in motion, and it was only a matter of time before they became a family of five. The Keans' two biological children, Carolyn and Christopher, were completely on board with gaining a new sister. Initially, Maci was hesitant to trust that her dream of having a family would come true, but, only six weeks before turning 18, she officially took the last name Kean, and was adopted. Maci's mother explains, “A child's need for love, acceptance, and the knowledge they will never be given up is the same at 7 or 17.”

- How would your day-to-day life, your fears, worries, insecurities, etc. change if you understood the truth of your adoption in Christ?

2. Belonging to God's family brings profound benefits.

Blessing of Belonging: Do you understand just how blessed you are to be in the family of God. Jesus is saying that you are more kin to him through faith than his earthly family is by blood. “To his brothers, that is, His kindred after the flesh, who did not believe in Him, what profit was there that they were his kin? Thus [Mary's] nearness as a Mother would have been of no profit, had she not borne Christ in her heart after a more blessed manner than in her flesh... Therefore, Mary is more blessed in receiving the faith of Christ, than in conceiving the flesh of Christ” (Augustine).

God is Our Father: God is a loving and caring father who cares for his children (e.g., Matt 6:25-34).

- As our Father, we can trust God to provide for us.
- As our Father, we can trust God to protect us.
- As our Father, we can trust God to care for us.
- As our Father, we can know that God is pleased with us.
 - Like parents thrilled about the smallest developments in their child, the Father is pleased with the little growths in grace in his children (Heb 13:21).

Jesus Our Brother:

- “For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers” (Heb 2:11).
- “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers” (Rom 8:29).
- “Being Jesus' brother adds weight and wonder and affection to our worship of Christ because it is the combination of the exalted uniqueness of Jesus as the Son of God on the one hand, and his condescension to share our nature as humans and our suffering as mortals, so that we could be included in the divine family, with Christ as the ever-exalted and superior, unique, divine older brother... Our elder brother is one with us and yet infinitely above us” (Piper). +weight +wonder +affection

Access: This call is open to any of us.

- The remedy for the **exhausting legalism** of the Pharisees or the **empty promises of rebellion** is welcome into the family. It is a “relationship” (we throw that word around) with God.
- **You don’t “earn” your spot in the family nor can you ignore it.** It marks you. It is your identity. It is a relationship that is precious but unearned. Your belonging in the family changes who you are, where you are, what you value.

Church as Family: “We are a family before we’re an organization” (i.e., church as family).

- “Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity” (1 Tim 5:1). E.g., “household” and sibling (“brothers”) language.
- One great benefit of salvation is belonging to the family of God, the household of faith, expressed and embodied in the local church.
 - We treat each other as family members (high school boy called to treat girls in youth group as “sisters”).
- The most frequent way God answers the **prayers** of his people is through the **provision** of his people.

Commit to the Family: Double down on church commitment (e.g., membership, service, building community).

- You don’t truly love the Word of God and the people of God (the actual people) if you don’t worship joyfully and consistently with the local church when she gathers.
- How can you say you love a God but don’t love his family?
- “We will only stay in community if we pass from choosing community to knowing that we are chosen for community” (Jean Vanier).
- We are all needy and needed.
- Community isn’t found, it’s built.
- “The chief contribution of the church to the renewing of social order is to be itself a new social order” (Newbigin).

3. As a member of God’s family, I have privileges and responsibilities. ⁵⁰ For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”

Identity: If I’m going to claim the identity of a Christian and expect the benefits of a Christian, then I must live according to my heavenly identity (e.g., surname, “Turner,” want my kids to reflect a “good name”).

- “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called **children of God**; and **so we are**. The reason why **the world does not know us is that it did not know him**. Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is” (1 Jn 3:1-2).
- Your behavior is often determined by your knowledge of **who** (more importantly **whose**) you are.

Gospel Identity: “It’s amazing to me how our most practical problems stem from insecurities wondering if we’re really loved and how the gospel calms those fears” (Bryan Barley).

- Identity Lies (Henri Nouwen)
 - I am what I have.
 - I am what I do.
 - I am what other people say or think of me.
- I am who God says I am, a child, beloved, chosen, sealed, called, sanctified, etc.
- “A friend of mine has an interesting spoon. (Bear with me.) Its slightly larger than a teaspoon and has a large hole in the middle, making it incapable of holding—let alone carrying—the sort of substance that typically requires a spoon. My friend keeps it in his sugar bowl, waiting for unsuspecting guests to attempt productive engagement with it. Some will quietly (but unsuccessfully) persevere with it, not wanting to make a fuss and assuming the fault must somehow lie with them. Others will immediately declare the spoon is ridiculous and insist on something better suited to the task at hand. The spoon, it turns out, is actually an olive spoon. The hole in the middle is to drain the fluid as you lift the olive to your mouth. And so the lesson for us is this: You can’t make sense of the way the spoon is without understanding what it’s for.” You can’t make sense of the way you are until you understand whose you and how God has made you. He’s made you for himself!

Obedience: Does the will of my father *a la*: ²¹ “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. ²² On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, **did we** not prophesy **in your name**, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ ²³ And then will I declare to them, ‘**I never knew you**; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness’” (Matt 7:21-23).

- Notice the connection between “doing” and “being known”, they “did” a lot and “did it” in the name of the Lord” but they didn’t do the will of the Father.
- “There are good people who claim to follow Jesus as ‘Lord’ and who do good works and think they are doing them in Jesus’ name who are nonetheless on” the road to destruction (France).
- Think about it: a lot of people *claim the name* of Jesus but all they’re doing is slapping Jesus’ name onto what they want to do. They’re not in relationship with God. They’re not known by God.
 - Obedience is not following a check list of behaviors, it consists of the actions and attitudes that flow out of a deep intimacy with Christ.

Lived Reality: The beautiful matrix of *law and gospel*, of faith and obedience is important to remember. He is saying that **the fruit of obedience is proof of the root of salvation.**

Obedience doesn’t earn salvation, it displays it.

- The Pharisees continue to get this backwards:
 - On the front page of my dissertation you will find the words “In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy.” That dissertation, together with the classwork and all of the tests, completely fulfilled the

requirements to become "Dr. Turner." Of course, the process had a tremendous impact upon me. I learned so much. I'll never be the same again. But I have also forgotten so much. Here's the sweet deal. I never have to sit for comprehensive exams or a dissertation defense again and I'm still "Dr. Turner." No more tests. No more papers. No more need to prove anything. The requirements for that degree have been fulfilled. Forever! And if dementia comes in my later years and robs me of all that I learned in my PhD, all that I learned in my MDiv—all that I learned all the way back to grammar school!—I will still be "Dr. Turner." It cannot be taken away. And yet, even with all of that being 100% true, I still benefit greatly from knowing what I learned. It comes in handy all the time. Even though I don't have to keep up anything in order to keep my degree, I want to stay sharp for my own good. In the same way, the requirements of the Law have been fulfilled for me in Christ. I will never again be tested (judged) by them. And no matter what, I will always be justified by His blood. But this does not mean that the knowledge of righteousness and sin that I have encountered in the Law is useless to me or that I should deliberately unlearn what I learned. No! The Law has been a tutor to lead me to Christ, I want to benefit daily from what it taught me.

- "We only really believe something when we act like it is true" (Dallas Willard).

Conclusion:

- Hear the invitation to join the family of God. Be reminded of your secure positions as a child of God if you have placed your faith in Jesus.
- This invitation is rest for the weary, healing for the bruised and broken, an offer of relationship for the lonely.
- We live in a crazy broken world (George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery).
 - We live in a broken world, no one escapes unbroken. "Some things are worthless after they are broken. Christians are worthless until they are broken." In our brokenness, God works to display his glory, to make himself shown as strong.
 - I'm not sure I know the way forward when injustice and racism still plague our country. The only thing I know is that Jesus has every ounce of love, compassion, wisdom, etc. that we need.
- In Matthew 12 we've seen so many people opposed to Jesus. And in the midst of the opposition a seed of the gospel is being planted, a family is being gathered, that will blossom into eternity.
 - I believe the tumult of our current world circumstance only tills the ground, making it receptive to the seeds of the gospel.

Where Do We Start?: Where do you start in your battle against sin? Where do you start in your fight for holiness? Where do we start in our pursuit of justice? Where do we start in our struggle with anxiety? You start right where you are, right now. When a baby is born it is unfathomable to think they'll be able to talk or walk, much less run a marathon or become a biologist. But they do! They learn to focus their eyes, they learn to make sounds, they learn to roll over, they learn

to crawl, then walk, then run. Don't allow the fear of where you are to stop you from becoming what God has called you to be. You start with simple obedience, with simple faith, you start at the feet of Jesus.

- If you would like to start in a relationship with Jesus today, or take a step of obedience in your walk of faith today, would you, right now, e-mail me at mark@redemptionheights.com.