

Matthew 12:46-50

I. Verse 46a – While he was still speaking to the people...

What has Jesus been saying? What has He been speaking to the people? Well, for the most part, He has been speaking of judgment and condemnation.

- ✓ Matthew 12:34 – You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil?
- ✓ Matthew 12:39 – An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.
- ✓ Matthew 12:41-42 – The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it... The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it...
- ✓ Matthew 12:45 – Then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there, and the last state of that person is worse than the first. So also will it be with this evil generation.”

Chapter twelve has been full of wrath and judgment, and accusation and condemnation. And yet in the midst of all this doom and gloom, we have to be careful not to miss the constant, underlying call to repent and be saved. For some of the religious leaders, it may be too late, but for the majority of the people, this was not the case. There was still time to repent. Jesus didn't delight in pronouncing judgment just for the sake of pronouncing judgment. Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost. Jesus came to seek and to save some of the very ones upon whom He had just pronounced judgment and condemnation. We *need* to remember this when we read Matthew twelve. But there are many who read of God's wrath and arrogantly decide that they want nothing to do with such a God – and so they actually cut themselves off from His love and salvation. There are others who read of God's judgments, and though they have believed in Him, they struggle with seeing Him primarily as a God of wrath. It is difficult for them to reconcile the words of Jesus in Matthew twelve with the truth that “God is love”. But the Bible's message of wrath and judgment is *always meant to prepare the way* for words of salvation and a response of true saving faith. Martin Luther writes:

“God works by contraries so that a man feels himself to be lost in the very moment when he is on the point of being saved. When God is about to justify a man, he damns him. Whom he would make alive he must first kill. God's favor is so communicated in the form of wrath that [His favor] seems farthest [at the very moment] when it is at hand. Man must first cry out that there is no health in him. He must be consumed with horror... In this disturbance salvation begins. When a man believes himself to be utterly lost, light breaks. Peace comes in the word of Christ through faith.” (Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther; 65-66)

So after His words of doom and gloom and His message of wrath and judgment, we shouldn't be surprised when Jesus turns to offer new words of salvation, and comfort, and hope. The one who has felt the terror of being utterly lost and damned by the words of Jesus can now come to have peace and joy in the words of that very same Jesus.

II. Verse 46b – ...behold, his mother and his brother stood outside, asking to speak to him.

There doesn't seem to be anything special or noteworthy about the fact that Jesus' mother and brothers were standing outside asking to speak with Him. It appears to be just a very trivial and mundane piece of information. Matthew never tells us that Jesus' family believed He was "out of His mind", and so they had actually come out to "seize Him" (Mark 3:21). Matthew doesn't tell us this, because for His purposes, it's not important for us to know. The only thing we need to know is the fact that Jesus' family was standing outside, asking to speak with Him.

But then Matthew introduces this "trivial" bit of information with the word "*behold*"! "*Behold*, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him." Of all the "behold's" in Matthew, this one seems to be the most unnecessary and out of place! But Matthew wants to make sure we're paying attention. He wants us to know that this little insignificant detail is setting us up for something very important and wonderful. It seems to me that in Matthew's "behold", we can see Matthew's own awe and amazement. I believe that this was one of the stories that Matthew most delighted to tell. "While he was still speaking to the people, *behold*, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him."

III. Verses 47-48 – [Someone told him, "Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, asking to speak to you."] But he replied to the man who told him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?"

Of course, Jesus obviously knows who His mother and brothers are. He has not forgotten, and He is not confused! Neither is Jesus rudely ignoring His family in the hopes that they will go away, or insulting and denying His family because for some reason He is unhappy with them. There is absolutely no reason to assume or think any of these things!

"Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" Isn't this just like Jesus? He asks a question with an answer so immediately *obvious* that it forces everyone to assume that they must be missing something. So what is it? What have they overlooked? What have they missed? What have they not yet seen and understood? As far as they know, Jesus' mother and brothers are the people standing outside. Who else is there? Jesus asks this question *not* because He wants to deny His earthly family, but because He sees in this very normal and mundane circumstance an opportunity to reveal something extraordinary and wonderful.

IV. Verse 49 – And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers!"

"And stretching out His hand toward His disciples..." Matthew must have been deeply impacted by this gesture because he remembered it, and wrote it down in his gospel. The only other time Matthew records something like this is when Jesus stretched out His hand to touch the leper (8:3; cf. Mat. 14:31). So what does this simple gesture mean? It's an expression of acceptance, and belonging, and intimacy, and love. Can you see the tenderness? Imagine if you were one of the disciples standing there, and Jesus stretched out His hand toward you.

“Here are my mother and my brothers!” Jesus didn’t just state this as a matter of fact. Can you hear the delight and the joy in His voice? We represent this delight and joy in our English translations with an exclamation point. “Here are my mother and my brothers!” Jesus is not denying His earthly family. He is just confessing that He has another family, and that His bond with the members of this family is *closer and stronger* than even the closest and strongest bond of any other earthly relationship. Imagine if you were one of the disciples standing there, and Jesus stretched out His hand toward you and said, “Here are my mother and my brothers!” But we weren’t there, were we? So is this just an exclusive privilege of that inner circle of the twelve disciples?

V. Verse 50 – “For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”

Can’t you hear the *call*, and the *invitation*? – “For *whoever* does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.” “*Whoever*” is a beautiful word! So Jesus turns now from His disciples to the very people whom He had just condemned as “evil and adulterous” and invites them to be His own brother, and sister, and mother! All those who had been damned by the words of Jesus just a moment ago now hear in the words of that *same* Jesus the offer and the promise of *peace*. What a night and day difference! What complete and total opposites! Remember what Luther said: “When God is about to justify a man, he damns him. Whom he would make alive he must first kill.” When God convinces us of the terrors of His wrath and judgment, *then* His favor is near at hand. “Man must first cry out that there is no health in him. He must be consumed with horror... In this disturbance salvation begins. When a man believes himself to be utterly lost, light breaks. Peace comes in the word of Christ through faith.” After all the words of wrath and judgment, and doom and gloom, and accusation and condemnation, *then*—when we would have *least* expected it and in the very moment that we were *most* consumed with terror—Jesus opens up to us the good news of the promise that we can be counted as an intimate member of His own family – His own brother and sister and mother!

This promise, Jesus says, is for whoever will *do the will of my Father in heaven*. If Jesus were saying that we must earn a spot in His family through our obedience and good deeds, then He would have to be talking about sinless perfection. But Jesus is not talking about the obedience of human effort where the reward is earned. He is talking about the obedience of *faith* where the reward is *freely given*.

“The man who hears the word of God, and does it, is the true Christian. He hears the call of God to repent and be converted, and he obeys it. He ceases to do evil, and learns to do well. He puts off the old man, and puts on the new.—He hears the call of God to believe on Jesus Christ for justification, and he obeys it. He forsakes his own righteousness, and confesses his need of a Savior. He receives Christ crucified as his only hope, and counts all things loss for the knowledge of Him.—He hears the call of God to be holy, and he obeys it. He strives to mortify the deeds of his body, and to walk after the Spirit. He labors to lay aside every weight, and the sin that so easily besets him.—This is true vital Christianity. All men and women who are of this character are true Christians.” (Ryle; Luke 8:16-21)

Conclusion

And so to the evil and adulterous generation of His day—to the very ones who had just been burdened with the message of judgment and condemnation—Jesus says: “Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother. The Bible is full of the message of God’s wrath and judgment. The Bible spends a good deal of time accusing and condemning. Have you ever been consumed with terror at God’s wrath which burns unceasingly against all sin? Has the Bible’s message of condemnation and judgment for sin ever overwhelmed you with a sense of hopelessness and despair? To quote Luther, it is at these times when God’s favor seems farthest away, that it’s actually nearest at hand. Because this is the way that God prepares His *enemies* (cf. Rom. 5:10) to hear and believe the good news that *they* can be the very brother and sister and mother of Jesus. So what should we think of people who read of God’s wrath, and decide that they want nothing to do with such a God? What should we say to those who read of God’s judgments and struggle with the nightmare that He is primarily a stern God of wrath. Martin Luther answers:

“If you have a true *faith* that Christ is your Savior, then at once you have a gracious God, for *faith* leads you in and opens up God’s heart and will, that you should see pure grace and overflowing love. This it is to behold God in *faith* that you should look upon his fatherly, friendly heart, in which there is no anger nor ungraciousness. He who sees God as [an] angry [God] does not see him rightly but looks only on a curtain, as if a dark cloud had been drawn across his face” [and this curtain and cloud is simply unbelief] (p. 48).

Now as Christians, let’s listen one more time to the words of Jesus, and drink in their beauty and comfort. Jesus asked: “‘Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?’ And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.’” Imagine if you were one of the disciples standing there, and Jesus stretched out His hand toward you. Seriously. Let’s close our eyes and try to imagine. Imagine that with His hand stretched out to you, you heard Jesus say: “Here is my mother! Here is my brother! Here is my sister!” I believe that we are meant to imagine how we would have felt. I would have felt such a wonderful feeling of worth, and acceptance, and belonging, and intimacy, and love – such as I know I could never find anywhere else. And I would have been overwhelmed to know that Jesus said this not just because it was so, but with actual delight and joy in His voice. But we don’t just have to be content with imagining. *By faith*, we can know that Jesus stretches out His hand to us as well, and delights to claim *us* as His very own brother and sister and mother. *By faith*, I can know that Jesus stretches out His hand to *me*, and delights to claim *me* as His very own brother. “**Whoever** does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”

Let all true Christians drink comfort out of these words. Let them know that there is One at least, who knows them, loves them, cares for them, and reckons them as His own family. What though they be poor in this world? They have no cause to be ashamed, when they remember that they are the brethren and sisters of the Son of God.—What though they be persecuted and ill-treated in their own homes because of their religion? They may remember the words of David... ‘When my father and mother forsake me,

then the Lord will take me up.’ (Psal. 27:10) ... What gracious words these are! ... Here we see that all [of Jesus’] believing people are counted as His relations. He loves them, feels for them, cares for them, as members of His family, bone of His bone, and flesh of His flesh... They are far more precious in their Lord’s eyes than they are in their own.” (Ryle; Mat. 12:38-50; Mk. 3:31-35)

May we truly *know* this, with hearts that truly believe. By faith, may we see Jesus stretch out His hand to us, and by faith may we hear Him saying to us: My brother, my sister, my mother. A couple hundred years ago, one Christian responded to this truth with these words – may we also be enabled to respond in the same way:

My heart melts at the love of Jesus, my brother, bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh, married to me, dead for me, risen for me; He is mine and I am his, given *to* me as well as *for* me; I am never so much mine as when I am his, or so much lost to myself until lost in him. (The Valley of Vision; The Love of Jesus)

I want to close with these simple and glorious words from the book of Hebrews: “He is not ashamed to call [*us*] *brothers*” (2:11; cf. Mat. 28:10).

Teaching our Children

- Q.** What is the theme of a lot of Jesus’ words in Matthew chapter twelve (what does He talk a lot about)?
- A. Matthew chapter twelve is full of judgment, and condemnation, and God’s wrath against sinners.
- Q.** How do some people respond when they hear about the terrible wrath and judgment of God?
- A. ~ Some people decide that they don’t want anything to do with such a God.
~ Other people have a hard time understanding and believing that “God is love”.
- Q.** How is the message of God’s wrath and judgment actually a sign of God’s loving favor?
- A. The Bible’s message of God’s wrath and judgment is always meant to *prepare the way* for the message of God’s *salvation* (for older children, read the quote from Luther on page 1).
- ✓ Read verses 46-48 (Roman Numerals I.-III.). Comment on Matthew’s use of “behold” and on why Jesus would ask a question with such a seemingly obvious answer (cf. III. par. 2)
- Q.** Jesus asked, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” How did Jesus then answer His own question?
- A. Jesus stretched out His hand toward His disciples, and said, “Here are my mother and my brothers!”
- ✓ With wonderful love and tenderness, Jesus says that He has another kind of family, and that his connection with the members of this family is stronger than any other human relationship.

Q. Was it only Jesus' twelve disciples who could be His "mother and His brothers"? How do you know?

A. No! Jesus went on to say: "For *whoever* does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

Q. Who was Jesus saying this *to*?

A. ~ Jesus was saying this to the very people whom He had just condemned as an evil and adulterous generation destined for God's wrath and judgment! He was inviting *them* to be His own brother and sister and mother!

~ See how Jesus' message of wrath and judgment prepared the way for His message of salvation and peace!

~ When God convinces us of His wrath and judgment against our sin (even if at first we may feel terrified), it is actually a sign of His salvation and love and favor.

~ (For older children, read the quote from Luther on page 4)

Q. Who are the brothers and the sisters and the mothers of Jesus?

A. ~ All those who do the will of God (this is the obedience *of faith*, where the reward is not earned, but freely given).

~ (For older children, read the quote from Ryle on page 3)

✓ Help your children to see that if they will do the will of God (the obedience of faith), they can know that Jesus stretches His hand out *to them* and joyfully says *to them* that they are His own brother or sister – a dear member of His own family. (Take time to imagine this very thing!) Depending on the age of your children, read the quotes from Ryle, the Valley of Vision, and the book of Hebrews – starting on the bottom of page 4.