We Are Family: Absolute Devotion

Matthew 12: 46-50

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[I had a moment this week that made me wonder if preaching this series on unity was a case of **“Much Ado about Nothing.”** Was I making a mountain out of a molehill. Then I remembered…]

Quick review: [Jesus prayed that we would be united, **John 17: 21-23**. “…that all of them may be one…” (2x) “…that they may be brought to complete unity…” “Then, the world will know…” (2x)]

This is **serious** business to Jesus.

* He isn’t suggesting unity in the body of Christ, he is praying for unity and then dying to make it possible.

So, we began a quest for unity. Along the way we have discovered the foundation stones of **forgiveness** (Joseph) and **influence** (Jesus’ salt/light).

Today we want to uncover a powerful unifying truth in one of the most **awkward** Jesus stories of all.

Since we are using awkward family moments to discover these truths, here are just a couple of awkward family photos for your viewing pleasure:

3 photos here

**Genesis 1:27** teaches that we are created in the image of God.

* We are formed in the likeness of God from the beginning
* Sometimes we are tempted to imagine that God is like us; he thinks like us, looks like us, reacts like us, wants what we want, etc…
* **We can lose sight of the fact that we are made in God’s image, not the other way around.**

When we fall into this trap, it is really hard for us to read the Gospels because taken seriously, **Jesus challenges** so much of what we hold dear.

Matthew 12: 46-50 blows up our **cozy** conceptions of Jesus.

* No one likes to picture Jesus **ignoring** his mother and brothers
* This may be one of the **most** **awkward** family moments in all of Jesus’ life

Read Matthew 12: 46-50, on screen

**Jesus’ mother** has not been mentioned in Matthew since the birth narrative.

* Now she appears, along with Jesus’ brothers, outside a house where he is teaching
* Mark says that his family had come to **“take charge of him”** because they were afraid he was crazy.
* He was claiming to be the Messiah and casting out demons…
* **Jesus learns that they are waiting outside, but doesn’t go to them, doesn’t send a message to them, he merely poses a question to those who are listening to him, and the messenger gets the message.**

What’s up with that?

**Part cultural situation:**

* Jesus was speaking to the experience of his listeners who had or would have to “go it alone” if they planned to follow him.

* Jesus was also identifying with them in their decision to follow him. Jesus was saying, “Look, my own family doesn’t understand me…yours might not either.”
* It was common later in the first century to have one’s baptism cause a break with society (pluralism), a break with trade (often ostracized for beliefs), and a break with family.

**Part rhetorical device:**

* Jesus wasn’t abandoning his family, but he was demonstrating that absolute devotion to God had to supersede everything else in one’s life.
* This is a huge statement to our ears and theirs.
* This moment gave Jesus opportunity to drive his point home

What does any of this mean to us?

We are in search of unity in the body of Christ. It mattered immensely to Jesus.

Does this passage help us?

I. Family is not only constituted by biological or traditional ties, but by devotion to the heavenly Father

* [**Brothers in Arms]** only a very different kind of battle
* I didn’t have any biological brothers, but I have a handful of **“Brothers in Christ”** that are as close to me as any blood relative
* In the **first century**, the church had to be a **surrogate** family because so many had to endure utter rejection to be included in the Christian faith
* I grew up in the days when we called one **another “brother” and “sister**” at church. I like it.
	+ Reminds me of an **appropriate** relationship to you
	+ Reminds me that we are an **expression** of the family of God and when we aren’t something is wrong.
	+ Reminds us that we share a **Father**
	+ Reminds me that I need to be in right **relationship** with you because I’m going to spend eternity with you [even longer than **Thanksgiving**]
* **Look around** you today. According to Jesus, this is your family

II. Devotion to the heavenly Father is characterized by being obedient to God

* v. 50 – Obeying and **carrying out God’s will** is the basis of the family of God
	+ What is God’s will? Jesus said primarily **“to seek and to save the lost…”**
	+ **Everything** done in the name of the family of God should lead to that end
* When the church gets **sidetracked** by other things, we have **forsaken** our purpose
* This **challenges** me to **embrace** **God’s will** as my life focus
* ]Jesus is not a **Rabbit’s Foot]** kept around just in case
* Jesus saves us to **engage** us in his **cause of redeeming**
* When I discover this, I have an **enormous family** that stretches around the globe
* When I discover Jesus’ mission, I **get plugged in to the life of the church** and the church is able to function as Jesus intends us to function
* When I don’t embrace the gospel as my primary focus, **I am estranged** from the family

III. The church becomes the new family

* **“Blood is thicker than water.”** So, what is thicker than blood?
	+ Still blood, but not our biological family blood
	+ **Jesus’ blood shed** on the cross that reunites us with God and enables us to love each other
	+ **When by faith we accept God’s** offer of grace in Jesus, we are adopted into a new family—the church.
* I’m convinced that whether people know it or not, **everyone needs the church**.
* **Whose life wouldn’t be better** by being affiliated with a place like Central Church?
	+ One confined to a little room surrounded by family pictures and under the care of hospice. Sweetest memories? Her church family across the years.
	+ Sat across the table from one just learning the foundations of the faith. His testimony? It was the church that introduced him to Jesus and a new life
	+ Counseled with the deeply discouraged. Her hope? Her adopted family, the church.
	+ Prayed for and talked with those rejecting God. What is their hope? It is the church who will love them to Jesus…even when they can’t admit that yet.
* It is the church that **comes alongside**
* The church is **support** and **surrogate** family by God’s own design
* **The world needs the unified body of Christ**
* **You need the church**

***Bottom Line of this passage:***

The most important thing for Jesus was/is doing the will of the Father.

* Not even his **family** nor even his own **life** were more important than that.
* **When we come to the same conclusion** as his followers, we have a bond that unites us despite all efforts to divide.
* **Until we arrive at this conclusion**, we are easily divided.
* We must be on mission with Jesus to experience unity in the body of Christ.

**Forgiveness**? Check.

**Stewarding** our **influence**? Check.

Now, how do we live into doing the will of the Father, as Jesus taught us in Matthew 12: 50?

**Close: Four Things**

1. Repent from what has distracted us

2. Refocus on the mission of Christ

3. Embody the good news of Jesus

4. Express his hope in our world

Prayer

Song: “The Servant Song”

Benediction:

**Rom. 15:5-6** - May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. --Amen