

“Selected Gospel Sections”

Spring Series 1

Lesson 5

“Jesus’ True Kindred”

Matthew 12:46-50; Mark 3:31-35; Luke 8:19-21; John 15:14-17.

Objective: To understand the message of the Gospel accounts in their context within each work independently and then to compare the accounts to each other to seek understanding of emphasis and focus. The goal is then to apply this message to our time and context in order to understand the message’s call on our lives.

Materials: To use the Greek, Syriac, and other ancient translations in order to help us understand the message of these Gospels. We will also examine the writings about these passages in journal articles, commentaries and other sources.

Procedures

1. To first translate each text from Greek and then compare it to other ancient translations.
2. To identify issues of importance within the texts and to explore possible meanings as they applied to the original audience.
3. To take the meaning for the original audience of the Gospels and to understand it how applies to our modern context and cultural situation.
4. To explore ways that these text call the disciples of Jesus to live their lives as faithful followers.

Matthew 12:46-50 ⁴⁶

While He was still speaking to the crowds, behold, His mother and brothers had been standing outside wanting to speak to Him. ⁴⁷ [And someone told Him, behold your mother and brothers are standing outside wanting to speak to You.] ⁴⁸ But to the one who had told Him this He said to him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" ⁴⁹ And stretching out His hand to His disciples he said, "Behold, my mother and my brothers." ⁵⁰ "For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven he is my brother, my mother and sister."

Mark 3:31-35 ³¹ And His mother and His brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to Him calling Him. ³² And a crowd was sitting around Him, and they said to Him, "Behold, your mother and brothers [and your sisters] are outside seeking you." ³³ And He answered to them saying, "Who is my mother and [my] brothers," ³⁴ and looking around at those who sat encircling him He said, "Behold my mother and my brothers. ³⁵ For whoever does the will of God, this one is my brother and sister and mother."

Luke 8:19-21 ¹⁹ Now His mother and brothers came to Him and were unable to reach him because of the crowd. ²⁰ And it was reported to Him, "Your mother and your brothers are standing outside wishing to see you." ²¹ But He answered and said to them, "My mother and my brothers are those which are hearing and doing the word of God."

John 15:14-17 ¹⁴ "You are my kith and kin if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you kith and kin, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from the Father. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and I appointed you in order to go and bear fruit and that the fruit might last, in order that whatever you ask the Father will give you in my name. ¹⁷ These commands (I give) to you, in order that you love one another."

We come to these words of Jesus regarding his family. For Catholics these words have been seen as a reference to the “clan” of Jesus, but for Protestants these words are seen as a reference to the more immediate family of Jesus (brothers and sisters born to Mary, the mother of Jesus). In truth, this is a very complex matter that is a lot more detailed and intricate than most people realize.¹ Whichever of these understandings one adheres to makes little difference to the interpretation of the words of Jesus here regarding what one is to do. The point Jesus is making is very much the same whichever way one interprets this issue of the exact meaning of “brothers,” (ἀδελφοί) and “sisters” (ἀδελφαί). Irregardless of the definition one uses for defining “brothers,” and “sisters,” the focus here is upon loyalty to God through obedience not based upon specific family, through blood ties. There certainly was within Judaism a focus on family, and clan loyalty, but what Jesus is doing here is not seeking to define loyalty in terms of bloodlines, but to define loyalty in terms of the merit of being obedient to the will of God. Merit that identifies one as a member of the family of Jesus is defined by Him in terms that are “doing” the “will of God.” Loyalty then is defined by Jesus in terms other than just intellectual ideals (beliefs), or ancestry.

¹ Richard Bauckham, “The Brothers and Sisters of Jesus: An Epiphanean Response to John P. Meier,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 56:4 (1994), pp. 686-700.

Within Judaism there were many that believed that almost nothing that a person did would exclude them from the reward of God, because the basis of the rewards anticipated would come because of the merit of the ancestors (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob). It was perceived by some within Judaism that it was on the basis of the ancestor's merit that salvation would come to anyone who was in fact of their seed (their blood relatives). The rabbis attempted to counter the claim of Christians (when the church came into being) that insisted that salvation was granted on the basis of doing the will of God by insisting instead, that the people of Israel was instead saved on the basis of ancestry and not on the basis of something as transient as merit based; on doing the will of God. "In the face of a Christian empire that claimed they were no longer the heirs to God's promises to their ancestors, Jews came to insist that their very birth promised them redemption despite their failings."²

In the *'Amidah*, the central prayer that is to be a part of each and every service, and dates to the rabbinic times (1st century A.D. to 6th century A.D.) and begins:

**Blessed are you, Lord our God and God of our ancestors, God of Abraham,
God of Isaac, God of Jacob, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, God**

² Martha Himmelfarb, *A Kingdom of Priests* (Philadelphia PA: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), pp. 182-185.

most high, who bestows kindness and creates everything, who remembers the good deeds of the ancestors and brings a redeemer to their children's children, with love for the sake of his name.³

The rabbis, even of today, claim to be descended from the Pharisees, even though the truth in this matter is far more complicated than this. Within Judaism there was a tendency for at least some, to claim that their salvation was based in ancestry rather than in the merit of doing. This is despite the fact that in the *Shema*⁴ the indication is that obedience is of crucial importance.

There was also a tremendous push to understand that “clan,” or “family” loyalty was of great importance in being able to take part in the allotment of the merits of the “covenant” with *YHWH* and being considered to be righteous even before the advent of Christianity. This type of understanding is to be found prominently in certain Jewish writings that were written before the time of Christ, such as the Apocryphal

³ Martha Himmelfarb, *A Kingdom of Priests*, p. 177.

⁴ Deuteronomy 6:1 **Now these are the commandments, the regulations, and the case laws that the LORD your God commanded me to teach you to follow in the land you are entering to possess,** ² **so that you will fear the LORD your God by keeping all his regulations and his commandments that I am commanding you—both you and your sons and daughters—all the days of your life and so that you will lengthen your life.** ³ **Listen to them, Israel! Follow them carefully so that things will go well for you and so that you will continue to multiply exactly as the LORD, your ancestors' God, promised you, in a land full of milk and honey. 6:4 Israel, listen! Our God is the LORD! Only the LORD! CEB.**

book of Tobit (2nd Century B.C.). “Tobit highly values family loyalty as a guideline for religious behavior, but establishes the Mosaic Law as the ultimate authority overruling requirements of family allegiance.”⁵ There is this tension that is to be found in the midst of Judaism before the time of Christ. The matter was not settled before His time. This meant that there were special obligations of family members to care for other family members, and for Jews to care for other Jews.

There was also the understanding that failure to adhere to the covenant terms would ultimately lead to punishment and even exile as it had in 722 B.C, and 586 B.C. There was the understanding that the only way that Israel could ultimately take its place as the priesthood, and ruler of the world, was for obedience to the covenant to become the standard, the norm, across all of the community of Israel. A part of this belief then, meant that there was a special level of responsibility for families to insure that the members of their family, or clan were not bringing any disrepute upon the name of their family, or clan. It is perhaps on this basis that the family of Jesus came to take charge of Him as we see it in Mark’s Gospel. Though this understanding is not spelled out in the other Gospel accounts. Of course as usual, John is different from the Synoptic Gospels

⁵ Gabriele Faßbeck, “Tobit’s Religious Universe Between Kinship Loyalty and the Law of Moses,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Period* 36:2 (2005), pp. 173-196.

in his presentation of words that seem similar in some ways to those that are found in the other Gospels and yet significantly different.

The relatives of Jesus, in Mark's Gospel, come to Jesus because they believe He is no longer of sound mind.⁶ In Mark 3:22, Jesus is accused of being in league with the ruler of the demons, Beelzebul, because of His ability to drive demons out.⁷ There is no debate that He is driving out demons, but the accusation is that this unusual ability (something that they are unable to do) is in fact due to dark forces, because clearly "they" (the scribes, Pharisees, and teachers of the Law) saw themselves as being on the side of God; they saw themselves as God's Holy People and experts in His Law, after all. The charges of the "scribes who came down from Jerusalem" are answered first by Jesus in the narrative of Mark. The utterance of the family of Jesus and that of the scribes is similar in form.⁸ We do not know how Jesus' family became aware of all that was going on with Him, but it appears that even they believed he was "confused," or "out of His mind." They came to seize Him, and take control of Him. If indeed the harsh response of Jesus regarding the accusation of

⁶ Mark 3²¹ **When his family heard what was happening, they came to take control of him. They were saying, "He's out of his mind!"** CEB.

⁷ Mark 3²² **The legal experts came down from Jerusalem. Over and over they charged, "He's possessed by Beelzebul. He throws out demons with the authority of the ruler of demons."** CEB.

⁸ J. Lambrecht, "The Relatives of Jesus in Mark," *Novum Testamentum* 16:4 (1974), pp. 241-258.

blaspheming the Holy is intended for both His family and the scribes as some would advocate then it is perhaps because He sees both as failing to acknowledge that the things that He is doing were being done through the power of the Holy Spirit; as indeed Jesus did possess the Spirit, which was noted at His baptism.⁹

It appears to me, however, that Jesus makes a clear distinction between the accusation being made by His family and that being made by the scribes. I believe that the response that Jesus gives to the scribes is given in Mark 3:23-30. I believe that the response in our section (Mark 3:31-35) is the one that Jesus gives to His family, making a clear distinction between the two responses. Though others believe that Jesus wished to include His family in the harsh words that He gave to the scribes¹⁰ despite the fact that Mark 3:30 indicates that what has been said has been given because of the accusation of the scribes.¹¹ It is in this vein that Jesus responds to the accusation of the scribes in Mark 3:23-30. What empowered and possessed Jesus was the Holy Spirit of God. The words of Jesus here should insure a caution in believers of Jesus, even today, as it is the custom among some to disparage Christians that hold beliefs, and do things differently than they

⁹ Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22. Cf. Matthew 12:30-32; Mark 3:28-30; Luke 12:8-10.

¹⁰ J. Lambrecht, "The Relatives of Jesus in Mark," *Novum Testamentum* 16:4 (1974), pp. 241-258.

¹¹ Mark 3:30 **"He said this because the legal experts were saying, "He's possessed by an evil spirit." CEB.**



believe to be correct. All people should take great care lest they proclaim the things of God to be the things of Satan and offend Him in the way that the scribes are in danger of doing, or perhaps they have indeed offended the Holy Spirit of God. There is a line that is beyond the power of the forgiveness of God to reach. We could debate what this means, but at the very least it should cause us to exercise caution in our judgments of the acts of others, their motives, and their source of power.

Recently, one who claimed to be a brother in Christ has proclaimed that the decision made by the Elders to acknowledge the equal standing of women before God, at Broadway, as forgiven and redeemed, with the right to participate in an expanded role, was proclaimed to be the “work of the devil.” I pray that God can forgive such a judgment and that hearts will be softened, eyes will be opened, and love will dominate. Those with whom we disagree doctrinally should be left to the judgment of God as to their eternal destiny and their actual motives. We can disagree without crossing a line that is not ours to cross. Judgment as to where people will spend eternity rests in the hands of a merciful and powerful God who is described in Scripture as Almighty God.¹²

¹² Hebrews 10:30-31 **We know the one who said, Judgment is mine; I will pay people back. And he also said, The Lord will judge his people. 10:31 It's scary to fall into the hands of the living God!** CEB.

The emphasis in our passages is focused upon the teaching of Jesus that obedience to the teachings of God are paramount in being the family of Jesus. Jesus insists that the merit of obedience is more important than ancestry. The merit that Jesus calls His followers to seek is found in obedience to the “will of God.” This merit is not therefore children based on bloodlines, but upon obedience. As we examine the practices and emphasis of the early church there are many clues as to what the practice of the early Christians was regarding the focus of what was critical for salvation.¹³ It is interesting that over and over again the focus of Jesus and the early church will not be the same as the emphasis that is so loudly spewed forth today. Over and over again the issue of orthodoxy today is placed in the arena of “belief.” What a person believes is what is seen as critical in a person’s standing before God. What a person believes is what defines which group of Christians a person feels comfortable worshipping with and being affiliated with today.

This has not always been the case and as we see here in the words of Jesus in these four Gospel accounts that does not seem to be the focus of Jesus either. His focus is not upon centered completely upon believing, but includes doing. Being a follower of Jesus is not simply about belief; there is a focus upon beliefs being seen in actions. When Jesus called someone to follow Him He was calling them into action, not

¹³ Alan Kreider, *The Change of Conversion and the Origin of Christendom* (Eugene OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2006), pp. xvii.

into intellectual ascent to what He was advocating. Jesus was calling for changes in behavior, not just the belief that the behavior that He advocated was indeed correct. “Conversion meant change.” “The persons addressed then had a choice—to submit to the comprehensive change that Jesus’ invitation would bring to their lives, or to ‘go away grieving’ (Mark 10:22).”¹⁴ The focus is so different that what I hear being taught so often in pulpits across our nation today and in writings today. The focus is upon the way a person acts and behaves and not just what they think or believe. Nowhere in Scripture do we have an indication that people will be judged solely by what they believe, apart from the way they behave.¹⁵

For the early disciples conversion was a risky business, ask the Apostles. Even for John, who is said to have died a death due to natural causes, his life was dominated by hardship and even imprisonment on the Island of Patmos because of his faith which was made manifest and visible because of his actions. In the early church there was the understanding, the realization, that changing one’s behavior in order to be a

¹⁴ Alan Kreider, *The Change of Conversion and the Origin of Christendom*, p. 1.

¹⁵ James 2:18-22 - **Someone might claim, “You have faith and I have action.” But how can I see your faith apart from your actions? Instead, I’ll show you my faith by putting it into practice in faithful action.** ¹⁹ It’s good that you believe that God is one. Ha! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble with fear. ²⁰ Are you so slow? **Do you need to be shown that faith without actions has no value at all?** ²¹ What about Abraham, our father? Wasn’t he shown to be righteous through his actions when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? ²² See, his faith was at work along with his actions. In fact, his faith was made complete by his faithful actions. CEB.

follower of Jesus would be difficult and those who made that choice would be locked in a “struggle” with demons who would use every power available to them to seek to deceive and to enslave them with the lures of thinking that such things were a necessity, what we today would set in terms of “compulsion” and “addiction.” “Justin urged the Christians to resist the demons’ power in three areas to which across the centuries pastoral theologians have been attuned—money, sex and power— to which Justin added a fourth, the occult. These perennial areas of addiction were clearly issues of conflict and conversion for Christians in Rome, and they may have been areas of struggle for Justin as well.”¹⁶

Have you ever wondered what it was that made Christianity attractive to those early followers of Jesus? From the outside, certainly from the Roman and Jewish perspective, Christians were seen as plague of insanity to be wiped out and eradicated from the face of the earth. They were persecuted, killed, imprisoned, beaten and ridiculed. Why would anyone choose to join such a group of people? They were not powerful, wealthy, or respected for their beliefs. They lived on the fringes of society, marginalized, powerless to defend themselves against a multitude of false accusations. Despite all of this by the time that Constantine ascended the throne of the Roman empire (A.D. 313) scholars estimate that approximately 10% of the imperial

¹⁶ Alan Kreider, *The Change of Conversion and the Origin of Christendom*, p. 5.



population belonged to the Christian church. That would mean that the church grew at the staggering rate of 40% per decade during those early three centuries.¹⁷ What possibly could account for this tremendous appeal and growth by a marginal group with no physical power, no physical wealth and no standing before the government of the Empire?

They did not practice evangelism as we know it today. If you were not a Christian you were not even permitted to come to the church services and hear the sermon or observe the time of communion, much less possibly hear an invitation to become a Christian. There was no door-knocking, no leafletting, no advertising, no fire and brimstone sermons for unbelievers in these early centuries. There were no explicit programs focused on evangelism, no attractional worship service, no seeker services. What then made being a Christian so attractive? It was the fact that the early Christians lived their lives as true disciples of Jesus, seeking to emulate His life in their own life. They lived as if they were truly the brothers and sisters of Jesus as could be seen by the fact that they were doing the will of God. They lived what they believed, and their belief was more than an intellectual exercise, more than a show on Sunday, and more than a bumper sticker

¹⁷ Alan Kreider, *The Change of Conversion and the Origin of Christendom*, p. 10.



on the back of a car. Their lives were dominated by their love for one another, for their care for the poor, their adopting of children left on the garbage heaps to die. They were known by their love.

One of the great reasons that the church today is not growing is that we have forgotten the importance of what it means to be true disciples of Jesus, true family. The family of God is not defined by the name on the outside of the building the practices inside the walls, but by lives lived in obedience to God. We have been deceived into believing that what God desires for His followers is correct doctrinal belief, when the truth is that Jesus defines it in obedience to God. Those early Christians were understood to be the family of God because they acted and reacted differently than the other people around them. They pursued different goals, different dreams, and were seen to be as set apart not simply by what they believed and what they said, but also because of how they acted. In order to truly be members of the family of God we must do more than believe the words of God we must live in such a way that means we enact them in our lives. It is then that we will truly be identified as brothers and sisters of Jesus. Out calling as Christians is to be like Jesus, to live like Jesus, to act and talk like Jesus and give our lives for others like Jesus.

Synopsis

The words of Jesus in this section have at times become embroiled in a controversy over whether Jesus had other siblings that were born to Mary, His mother. This discussion deflects from the emphasis that Jesus chooses to teach here. The focus here is upon those that will truly be of the family of Jesus: those will be those who do the will of God and merit (salvation) will come because those that are of His family will be identified by what they do, not simply by what they believe, or because of their parentage, or bloodlines. Jesus indicates that true family loyalty is to be defined in terms other than ancestry, or the merit of other great family members.

Certainly there have been some who have sought to advocate, within Judaism, that merit (salvation) is to be based in ancestry and bloodlines. This became especially prominent with the rise of Christianity and their claims to be the true children of God. Certainly there always was a tension between what merited salvation within Judaism; obedience to the commands of God and ancestry. There was at times a focus on the need for the entire community to be obedient to God in order for the blessings of God to be poured out



upon them as a nation. There are also indications that the nations as a whole is punished and taken into captivity because they, as a nation were not obedient to God.

It may be the case that the relatives of Jesus were compelled by their understandings of their obligations to insure family compliance with the accepted norms of Judaism. This would then mean that they sought to intervene with Jesus in order to retain family honor and to promote national obedience. There are at least some that think that Jesus is far more harsh to the members of His family than simply to reject their claims as His family members. They would say that Jesus accuses them, along with the ones that came from Jerusalem of blaspheming the Holy Spirit in their judgments of the source of His actions.

Continually Jesus will draw the focus back to obedience to the will of God and to love of one another as markers of those that are His true family members. It is these markers that proved to be so attractive to outsiders in the first three centuries of Christianity drawing people to seek to follow Jesus. Belief, apart from action, is nowhere advocated as that which marks a person out as a disciple of Jesus Christ, or as a member of His family.

Questions

1. When you think of things that identify your family what things come to mind?
2. How would you define loyalty?
3. Why do you think it is the case that people, most often, feel obligated to be loyal to family?
4. When you think of people that are Christians, what things make you think of them “as Christians?”
5. Which is more important, what a person believes, or what a person does? Why?
6. Why do you think the family of Jesus thought He needed help?
7. Why do you think people would want to be members of the family of God?
8. As you think about conversion, what do you think it means to be converted?
9. Why do you think Christianity is attractive to people?
10. What are some things that makes Christianity unattractive to some people?
11. Today, what are some things that you think identify people as Christians?
12. What do you think it means to be evangelistic?
13. What are some ways that people demonstrate their love for other people?

14.What do you think is the most important reason that some people choose to turn their back upon being a disciple of Jesus?

15.What do you think it means to have the DNA of the family of God?

16.What do you think it means today for a person to offend the Holy Spirit?

To Take Home

What is Important to know?

It is important to know that being a disciple of Jesus means doing the will of God. Especially in Western Christianity the focus has shifted to belief, apart from action, as that which defines a person as a Christian. The words of Jesus in this section seek to put discipleship in the arena of obedience to the will of God and not just in the arena of intellectual ascent. What are some ways that you feel called by the will of God to act differently because of your desire to obey the will of God?

Where is God in these words?

God is in these words challenging people, through Jesus to recognize that he seeks them as His children and the identity of those children can be determined by their obedience to His will. God seeks loyalty, which is something that is a great trait of God Himself. God is loyal in pursuing His children and seeking to draw them to Himself. In what ways do the words of Jesus, in this section, encourage you to live your life differently?

What does any of this mean for how I live my life?

The words of Jesus in this section challenge us to consider our preconceptions and where we place our loyalty. The world teaches us certain standards of behavior and attitudes and Jesus challenges these. He challenges these to such a degree that He was accused of being out of His mind. Despite this perception, by others, He persisted in doing what He knew to be the “will of God.” What are some ways that you seek to understand more fully the will of God for your life?

What is the word of God calling us to do?

The word of God is calling for people to reassess their values and their behavior not in the light of their own needs, their own desires, or their own family, but in light of the will of God. Those that choose to truly follow Christ should expect to be treated in the way that Jesus was treated. They should expect and anticipate persecution, misunderstanding, and ridicule. What are some ways that you see Christians today being persecuted in your community?