

## PROTECT YOUR COMMUNITY PRESENCE

Expand Your Loyalties (who is my mother?): Matthew 12:46-50

Intro: The Gospel writers record three or four significant moments between Jesus and his mother. One of those happened when he was 12. Another resulted in his first miracle. A final moment happened at the cross where he said to his disciple, John, “Here is your mother” and to his mother “Dear woman, here is your son.”

And then we have this event (read the text).

This Mother’s Day we think together about the question of Jesus, “Who is my mother?” in Matthew 12:48. Jesus loves his mother as we can see at the cross when he cares for her. Yet here he says the person who does the Father’s will “is my brother and sister and mother.” Jesus is instituting a new social organism among people—his church.

Relationships between people in the church are to be patterned after family relationships. This is our model, and it opens a wonderful new era of living life together as followers of Jesus.

**I. Family Members Have Preferred Status:** *Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to see you* (Matthew 12:47)

A. This entire scene is recorded because it is surprising how Jesus responds to this news about his family. Everyone thinks that he will—and should—drop everything that he is doing in this moment to go out and talk to his mother. She is the real issue here. The brothers are not so special. But when your mother comes to see you, you need to drop everything and talk with her.

B. Family members have preferred status because that is how life works among humans. Blood runs thicker than water. You are loyal to your family. You do not leave your estate to strangers. You leave what you have left to your family.

C. Jesus is not questioning the preferred status of blood relatives in this encounter. He will care for his mother at the cross. He takes care of her, not the other women gathered there. That is true because he feels a special responsibility for Mary in contrast to the other women at the cross who have others to look after her.

D. But the encounter at the cross also highlights what Jesus is saying here. We know that James is still alive, and Jude, the brothers of Jesus. Yet he gives custody of his aged mother to John, the beloved disciple. John states that he took Mary “into his home” (John 19:27). Yes, Jesus shows favored status to Mary at the cross. But he surprises us by also building a bridge from blood relatives to our family of faith, from Mary to John.

E. Jesus is taking this moment to teach his disciples—and us—something about life in the Kingdom of heaven. It is a teachable moment. We need to hear and receive his teaching.

1. Sometimes we cannot connect to our blood relatives. They may be far away or deceased. Our mothers may be gone. I would not encourage you to abandon your physical brothers or parents. I am simply acknowledging that sometimes they are not there for us for a wide variety of reasons.

2. Even when we do have strong relationships with blood relatives, this teaching still applies. We are a mobile generation. We need to put down roots where we live. We do so by nurturing relationships with those who share with us a passion for Christ.

**II. Jesus Points to His Family:** *Pointing to his disciples, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers...’* (Matthew 12:49).

A. Jesus is indicating that his disciples are his family. He is pointing to these men who have joined him in his itinerant ministry, and he is conferring upon them this amazing status of family.

1. Think what it has already cost these disciples to follow Jesus. They left their nets. Matthew left the tax collector’s booth. They have left everything to follow him. Jesus knows this. He knows that they have not seen their blood relatives much since they joined his band. He knows that Zebedee, the father of James and John, had always intended to hand down the family business to his boys. Now that would never happen.

2. Think of what it is going to cost them in the future. James the brother of John will die at the hand of Herod. John will be exiled in his old age. Peter, tradition says, will be crucified upside-down. Thomas will go to India with the gospel, according to tradition. Most of these men will die violent deaths for the sake of Christ.

3. Think of how Peter and John and James feel as they hear these words from Jesus: “Here are my brothers.” They feel this powerful connecting to Jesus—and to one another.

4. Think how Jesus feels as he looks at them, this stranger from Galilee, this teacher with no place to lay his head. He is a single man who will never marry, who will have no children. And yet he has brothers who are precious to him. He loves them.

B. The phrase here is “stretched forth his hands.” It’s a verb: 1. Also used in Matthew 12:13 with the healing of the man with the withered hand. Jesus challenged this crippled man to do what he could not do for so many years—stretch out that withered hand. When he did so, he was healed.

2. Again in Matthew 14:31 when Jesus caught Peter as he was sinking. Jesus reached out to his unbelieving disciples, caught him, and lifted him out of the water.

C. I want to use these two incidents with the outstretched hand as a metaphor for this teaching of Jesus.

1. Sometimes we are crippled socially. We have great difficulty connecting to people. Jesus heals this social malady just as he healed the withered hand. You must stretch out your hand. As you do so you will find family among fellow believers. You yourself must be filled with love as you do this. Love is the glue that binds us together as family in the church—love for Christ and love for one another.

2. Sometimes we fall into the sea socially. We attempt a relationship that fails. We are wounded and full of self-doubt. Jesus rescues us from this by stretching out his hands to us and receiving us into his family. He draws us out of the failed relationship and sets us back upon the path of love. He does so through his family, the people who believe in him and follow him.

**III. We Adopt the Language of Family in the Church:** *Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity* (1 Timothy 5:1-2).

A. This language is used throughout Scripture. “Brothers” are commonly the men in the church. We call each other brothers and sisters. This is a language that we inherit from Jesus and the apostles.

B. This language reflects how we relate to one another “with absolute purity.” We are male and female, and Jesus quoted in the passage on divorce. We have sexual desires. But in the church we are to maintain purity in our sexual relations. We do so in part by affirming and adopting the language of family: brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers.

C. This language reflects our true and eternal relationship with one another. We are the children of the Father in heaven. We have one Father. We will live in his house all together one day. We will eat at his table all together one day. This is how the future life is described by Jesus who knew the Father well and knew heaven well.

D. This language instills deep love and respect for one another. Many of us do not have physical brothers or sisters. But we can have these rich and wonderful relationships with people who love Christ and share our deepest longings and desires, our beliefs and our values.

E. This must be INTENTIONAL. It does not happen by chance. Jesus is being intentional with this relationship as he stops everything and identifies his disciples publicly as his family. It is a powerful moment.

F. It will be a powerful moment in your life also when you seal your relationship with brothers and sisters that you love by using the language of family and committing yourself to that deep loyalty and abiding love that makes family what it is intended to be when it is at its best.

G. This is NOT SIMPLY TALK, however. This language reflects a reality that is one of life’s great blessings and the true goal and gift of the Father in heaven.

**Conclusion: The Will of My Father**

A. Who wants to be related to Jesus? I can tell you how to be his mother or brother or sister: do the will of the Father.”

B. He gestured at his disciples before he spoke this word. That means that the disciples are related to Jesus in the way that he is indicating. What is unique about them? They have left everything to follow Jesus as the passion of their lives.

C. You will be in the family of Jesus when you lay down your life to follow him completely. That is HOW you enter his family.