

Introduction

We are continuing our series on the Life and Teaching of Jesus.

At this stage of Jesus' ministry, he was almost constantly being thronged by **crowds** of people who wanted to get close to him for **healing**, to see if he would do any **miracles** and to **hear** what he had to say. They knew that Jesus was quite unlike the religious leaders in the Jewish society of the day. We're told in the gospels that he **'taught with authority'** – a complete contrast to Jewish religious law who wanted to lay their dry, legalistic interpretation of how to please God.

Amongst the sincere, the curious and the desperate in the crowds were the **Pharisees**, watching, listening, criticizing. From time to time they would ask Jesus awkward questions with the aim of trying to discredit his very different approach to pleasing God to theirs.

Jesus' responses reveal that what truly pleases God is not legalistic observance but **heart response** to his goodness and love.

2 weeks ago, Phil R spoke on a confrontation between Jesus and the Pharisees where, after Jesus had healed a blind/mute man by casting out a demon, the Pharisees tried to discredit him by attributing Jesus' power over evil spirits to the devil (or Beelzebub). Jesus responded by exposing the illogicality and deceitfulness of their argument as well as giving some interesting insights into the spiritual world.

Today we're going to look at the accounts in each of the synoptic gospels (i.e. those written from the same point-of-view i.e. Matthew, Mark and Luke) where Jesus' family arrive on the scene immediately after this.

Structure:-

- The gospel passages
- More about Jesus' family
- Jesus' true family
- Doing God's will
- Becoming part of Jesus' family

The gospel passages

Visualise the scene as we read:-

Composite version of Matt 12:46-50/Mark 3:31-35/Luke 8:19-21:-

While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers arrived wanting to see and speak to him. They stood outside because they were not able to get near him because of the crowd. They sent someone in to call him and, with a crowd sitting around him, someone told him "Your mother and brothers are standing outside looking for you and want to see and speak to you."

"Who are my mother and my brothers?" Jesus asked in reply. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and, pointing to his disciples said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of God my Father in heaven, hearing God's word and putting it into practice, is my brother and sister and mother."

(Expand with a description of the scene, pointing out which gospel is the source of each statement).

Marks' account sets the scene for today's Bible passages. From Mark 3:20, we read that Jesus was in a house, possibly that of Simon Peter and Andrew in Capernaum.

Mark 3:²⁰ :- Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. ²¹ When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind."

Jesus was so preoccupied with meeting the needs of others and with his mission of bringing the kingdom of God into reality on the earth that meeting his own needs fell well down his list of priorities.

The fact that Jesus' family come on the scene in force seems to show that they were **concerned** and serious about dealing with the situation in relation to Jesus. You can imagine them getting word in Nazareth from Capernaum about 30 miles away about the hectic pace of Jesus work, chewing it over together, feeling an increasing level of disquiet and then coming to a conclusion that they had to do something about it, to **'take charge'** of Jesus – physically if necessary, for the sake of Jesus' health and for their own family reputation.

Perhaps they anticipated some resistance from Jesus or his disciples so decided they would need to go **in force**. However, their approach would have been from a purely worldly perspective with no real appreciation of the spiritual significance of what Jesus was doing.

Standing outside – not actually in the situation, going on hearsay; on the periphery of Jesus' true calling and priorities.

More about Jesus' family

Other scripture references give us a bit more background to Jesus' family.

John 2:12 (NIV)

¹² *After this (the wedding at Cana) he went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples. There they stayed for a few days.*

It appears that at the very start of Jesus' ministry that his family and those who had started following him came into close contact. Jewish culture put great value on blood relationships. Family identity was very important. They did things together.

Mark 6:1-6 (NIV) (Also Mt 13:54-58) - Jesus (left there) and went to his home town, accompanied by his disciples. ² When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed. "Where did this man get these things?" they asked. "What's this wisdom that has been given him, that he even does miracles! ³ Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?" And they took offence at him. ⁵ He could not do any miracles there.

v3. "...Isn't this the carpenter?.." - No mention of Joseph so it's assumed he had died, but not before passing on his carpenter's skill to Jesus and probably his other sons. So perhaps we can assume that Joseph was around until at least Jesus' teens.

This passage reveals that, as well as having given birth to Jesus, Mary also had several other children, four brothers and some sisters. The gospels are quite clear about Jesus having both brothers and sisters which gives an interesting insight to the kind of family environment he grew up in. It would have been interesting to see how Jesus dealt with sibling rivalry.

[Brief reference to Catholic/Orthodox teaching

As an aside, another observation from this passage is that it is evident that Mary did not occupy any place of special privilege as far as access into Jesus' presence was concerned. This and the fact that the NT refers several times to Jesus' brothers and sisters flies in the face of false Catholic & Eastern Orthodox teachings that have been built one on top of another over the centuries but have no basis whatsoever in the Bible.

These are that Mary was a perpetual virgin, that she had herself been conceived without any stain of original sin in the 'Immaculate Conception', that she is essential to salvation as the Mother of God and is the 'co-redemptrix' alongside Jesus, that people should pray to Mary and ask her to pray for us.

These teachings have no foundation whatsoever in scripture and require all sorts of historical and theological gymnastics to support what are completely flawed dogmas. They are red-herrings that side-track people away from the full sufficiency of what Jesus has achieved for us. They are counter to what we can actually read in the Bible and are just unnecessary and completely superfluous – religion for religion's sake. – Enough said.]

Back to references about Jesus' family:-

John 7:1-11 (NIV)

7 After this, Jesus went around in Galilee, purposely staying away from Judea because the Jews there were waiting to take his life. ² But when the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles was near, ³ Jesus' brothers said to him, "You ought to leave here and go to Judea, so that your disciples may see the miracles you do. ⁴ No-one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world." ⁵ For even his own brothers did not believe in him.

Note v5. *For even his own brothers did not believe in him.* – Believe what? That he was the son of God.

It looks as though Jesus' brothers wanted to encourage him to gain more fame closer to Jerusalem, perhaps because of some reflected fame they may have felt they could gain from it.

Jesus' response reveals that, having the attitude they did, he didn't feel he could trust his brothers not to jeopardise his purposes if he went with them, so we read that he went on to the feast alone.

However, things changed after Jesus' resurrection and later scriptures about Jesus' brothers reveal that they did come to believe in him. His brother **James** became one of the most prominent leaders in the early church and wrote the letter of James in our Bibles, and his brother Judas, (Jude in Hebrew) wrote the letter of Jude in our Bibles. All of this can be an encouragement for those of us who have family members who don't believe in Jesus.

Jesus' true family

So far, what we've seen gives us some interesting background, but let's get to the real point of what Jesus says here.

As we've seen, Jesus was very focused on his ministry. On receiving the message that his family were outside the house we can imagine Jesus realising almost immediately that here was a big distraction from his priorities – and he wasn't going to be distracted.

His immediate response is: *"Who are my mother and my brothers?" and then looking at those seated in a circle around him (Mk) and, pointing to his disciples (Mat) said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of God my Father in heaven, hearing God's word and putting it into practice, is my brother and sister and mother."*

Jesus often used hyperbole / overstatement to ram home a point of spiritual significance.

In making this statement, I don't believe Jesus was intending disrespect to Mary or to his brothers – but was emphasising that human relationships were to be transcended by spiritual considerations.

As well as a Jewish person's identity coming from their blood relationships, a key part of their national identity as Jews of which they were very proud was that of being God's chosen people. In a similar way for us today, we are often identified by our relationships – who we're related to, where we live, what we do for our living, our status in society, our nationality, race, etc.

But Jesus' viewpoint of what was important in life, particularly in terms of relationship to God, came from a very different perspective. Jesus totally changed the reference point for our true identity by redefining it in terms of our relationship to God.

This is great news for a large number of people whose family relationships, status or race give them a very poor self sense of personal identity, which is often revealed in its very negative effect on their behavior.

Jesus' key phrase is 'whoever does the **will of God** my **Father in heaven**,

Doing God's will

What does Jesus really mean by doing God's will? Is it abiding by a moral law, keeping a set of rules of what is right or wrong? Well, yes, but if we focus on doing that, we find that it's always beyond us. We know from our own experience that trying to please God from our own efforts invariably leads to failure. That's the very thing the Pharisees were trying to impose on people and all that did was tie people in knots, fill them with guilt and doom them to failure, and Jesus spoke against this.

So what is the key to doing God's will? We can only do God's will if our will is the same as his, aligned with his will. And what's always behind God's will is his nature/character. At it's root then, the ability to do God's will is determined by being conformed to his character, having our hearts aligned with his. It's only out of this that we can do his will. If our heart (our inner thought life that determines our attitudes) is in line with God's, then we will do his will.

What is God's nature/character like? – Here's just a few of God's character attributes relevant to today's subject:-

- Holy – He is absolutely perfect in moral purity.
- Loving – He desires the absolute best for his creation
- Righteous – There is no wrong in him in any way at all
- Just – He is perfect in all his judgements – absolutely fair
- Merciful – Willing to forgive the worst of sins
- Gracious – Bestowing undeserved favour on us

One of the wonderful revelations of the Bible is that through the power of God's Holy Spirit we can take on God's wonderful nature.

*2 Peter 1:3 :- His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. ⁴ Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them **you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.** – i.e. do God's will!*

This happens as we submit the government of our lives over to his authority (under his lordship).

Rom 12:1-2 - *Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. ² Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what **God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.***

'...in view of God's mercy...' - God has every right to judge our sin, but he is merciful – his mercy triumphs over judgement. Being let off! In response to this, let's offer everything of ourselves over to him, handing over (sacrificing) our desire to please ourselves and subordinating our desires to what he knows is best for us. It's only when we do that, that we discover that actually, he knew best for our lives all along. 'Offering ourselves to him' - that's what true worship is!

'..Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world' - Let's not allow the government of our lives, and hence our attitudes, to be shaped by the newspapers, TV, internet, media and general self-centred attitudes of society. Rather, let's engage with God's character and nature, letting him shape us so that we can be transformed by our minds being renewed out of a relationship with this amazing and wonderful God.

Why would we not want to share his incredible character? Surely the only reason would be because we want to keep the government of our lives under our own control. It sounds like the key to human freedom, but we need to admit that we're not wise enough, not knowledgeable enough about life and all its complexities, not morally good enough in our core being.

As human beings, we are full of contradictions, swinging back and forth like a pendulum. We can be kind and pleasant one minute, and then irritable and impatient the next. We can focus on the needs of others, able to show real altruism and even self-sacrifice one day and then on another day, swing back towards complete self-centredness, putting ourselves first and totally disregarding the needs of others. As the Bible says - without God, we are sinful!

We need power from outside ourselves in order to do God's will, and we can only receive such power when we put God in charge of the government of our lives.

How can we do that? How can we submit the government of our lives to God so that we can do his will?

Jesus reveals the starting point in John 6:40 – *"For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."*

He is the key - He is the means by which we can be made right with God, not just for this life but for the next life too!

We need to look to Jesus, believe that he truly is God's rescue plan in person through whom we can be reconnected to God, and entrust our lives to his leadership.

Becoming part of Jesus' family

Jesus' message right from the outset of his ministry was very simple:-

- The kingdom of heaven is near – within reach, there to be grasped
- Turn from your sins – which are the outcome of trying to run our own lives with us at the centre.
- Turn to God – allow him to be the governing influence over your life.
- Believe in Jesus:-
 - Believe that he is God revealed in a human body – God incarnate
 - Believe that he became the perfect sacrifice for us on the cross, taking the full blame for our sins - all the wrong things we've ever done or thought.
 - Believe that he was raised back to life after being put to death on the cross, demonstrating his victory over both sin and its ultimate result, death and final separation from God.

As we believe, we are changed from the inside out:-

2 Cor 5:17 – *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!* ¹⁸ *All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation:* ¹⁹ *that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them.*

- Believe that he has poured out the Holy Spirit, the very essence of God – his nature and his character – to indwell us at the core of our being.

Once we have accepted Christ, we can be filled with his Holy Spirit – who brings us the attributes of God's character and progressively changes us to be more and more like Jesus himself.

Conclusion

Jesus said “*whoever does the will of God my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.*”

Do you know for sure that you are in God’s family? Or are you standing outside?

Maybe you know you’re on the inside, but feel, or know, that Jesus is at the edge of your life.

Have you been trying to overcome some area of sin in your life through self-discipline, trying harder and failing?

Are you related to Jesus as closely as you want to be? Or would you like to know greater closeness in your walk with him?

God wants you to – that’s his will. Jesus wants you to .

If you’re not where you know God wants you to be in relationship to him, the solution is the same wherever you are.

The old fashioned word is ‘Repent’ – turn from giving your own way first place and turn to giving his way priority.

... and Believe - reach out in faith to a loving and gracious God and receive his presence and his holy spirit.

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21/05/2011