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Matthew 12:46 - 12:50



Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

In this session, Steve Gregg discusses Matthew 12:46-12:50, where Jesus refuses to see his mother and brothers. Gregg explains that although some may question Jesus' behavior, as he is the Son of God and can do no wrong, it is important to understand the cultural context of the time. He also touches on the importance of being related to Jesus through submission to God, rather than through blood ties. Overall, Gregg emphasizes the need to understand the biblical context when interpreting passages such as this one.

Transcript

In this session, we're going to take the verses at the end of Matthew 12, which sort of wind up that chapter. Now, for many of the sessions that we've had in the past several days, we have been looking at one event and its aftermath. The event was the deliverance of a man from demons.

Jesus cast a demon out of a man. There was a criticism made of him by his opponents, and then there was a great deal of talk after that, where Jesus taught a lot about his enemies and about his generation in general. And we read now in Matthew 12, verse 46, So this is after he finished this long discourse that we've just been reading.

Now, this story is very helpful in understanding many issues and the attitude of Jesus toward them. Certainly, one of the issues that it raises, and it's not the one we'll dwell on the most, but it certainly raises the issue of Jesus' relationship with his mother, because there are those who tell us that Jesus never denied a request from his mother. Of course, I'm referring to the Roman Catholics who say that, you know, we might want to pray to Mary, or ask her, because she can go to Jesus on our behalf, and Jesus would never deny a request made by his mother.

Well, I'm not sure where anyone got the idea that Jesus would never deny a request made by his mother, because, as a matter of fact, we just read of one. There was a time when his mother and his brothers requested to see him, and he did not grant them a request. In fact, he practically disavowed any relationship to them.

I think the idea that Jesus would never turn down a request from his mother comes

entirely out of sentiment, and out of wishful thinking, but it certainly is not biblical. You see, Jesus, apparently, in this story, did not believe that his mother had more of a claim on him than anybody else, and in some cases, she had less claim on him than others did. I'll try to explain this a little more, but it's very clear that he did not put his mother in a class above others, as one who would have his full attention whenever she wanted it, and under all conditions.

Now, on the other hand, there might be a tendency in this to feel that Jesus was a little too harsh with his mother. There are only a few places in the Bible that we read of Jesus speaking to his mother, and sometimes, there almost seems to be a reproof that he gives to her. The very first time he speaks to his mother is in Luke chapter 2, when he's 12 years old, and she's lost him in Jerusalem, doesn't know where he is, and she's looking and finally discovers him in the temple, and he's discussing theology with the teachers in the temple, and she says to Jesus, she kind of scolds him, she says, Why have you done this to us? We've been worried sick about you, you know? And Jesus said to her, Why did you seek me? Did you not know that I must be about my father's business? That sounds to me like a rather gentle reproof of his mother.

You didn't know where to find me? What's wrong? Didn't you know where I would be? Didn't you know who my father is and whose business I'm about? Well, obviously, he didn't say it in a disrespectful tone, but it doesn't sound as if he was simply the patsy of his mother. When, in John chapter 2, his mother approached him at the wedding feast of Cana, she said, They've run out of wine. Jesus said, Woman, what have I to do with you? My time has not yet come.

Now, as a matter of fact, he later did something along the lines of what she was hoping he would do. He made some more wine for them. But the point is, he made it very clear to her, she is not going to be calling the plays for him.

He's going to be doing his father's will, and his mother had better get used to that fact. He's not taking orders from his mother. That's essentially what he said when he said, Woman, what have I to do with you? So, Jesus never really, in his ministry as an adult, showed any special deference to his mother.

And this story of his mother and brothers coming to see him, and he doesn't even grant them an audience, is another good example of that. Now, for people to read these stories and then come up with the opinion that today, Jesus would never deny a request from his mother, as if he would listen to her more than he'd listen to others, is basically to depict a Jesus different than the Jesus in the Bible. And by the way, there's a danger of doing that.

The Mormons have a Jesus like that. They talk about Jesus Christ, but it's quite clear when you read about the Jesus they have, it's not the same Jesus in the Bible. And we need to be cautious about this, because Paul said in 2 Corinthians 11, that he feared that

some might come and preach another Jesus, and that the Christians might be gullible enough to accept that Jesus.

Well, obviously, the people he's talking about are preaching something about Jesus. They're using the name of Jesus, but the Jesus they're preaching is not the Jesus who is the real Jesus. And the real Jesus is the Jesus of whom we read in the Gospels.

So, if somebody is preaching that there's a Jesus who never says no to his mother, then they're teaching a different Jesus than the Jesus in the Bible, because he said no to his mother a number of times. And so, we better be careful that we're worshipping and following the Jesus in the Bible, and not some imaginary Jesus that we've formed from our own sentiments or from traditions. Now, still, one wonders, why did Jesus give his mother and his brothers this brush off, as it were, this cold shoulder? It doesn't seem very polite of him.

After all, the Bible does say, honor your father and your mother. And yet, she has to see him, and he wouldn't see her. Well, we get more light on this if we look at the parallel to it in Mark chapter 3. We have the same story in Mark chapter 3, beginning at verse 31.

It says, Then his brothers and his mother came, and standing outside, they sent him, calling him. And a multitude was sitting around him, and they said to him, Look, your mother and your brothers are outside seeking you. But he answered them, saying, Who is my mother or my brothers? And he looked around in the circle at those who sat about him and said, Here are my mother and my brothers, for whoever does the will of God is my brother and my sister and my mother.

Obviously, this is the same story in Mark. But Mark tells us something Matthew does not tell us. If you look a few verses before this, back to Mark chapter 3 and verse 20, we are told, The multitude came together again, so that Jesus and his disciples could not so much as eat bread.

But when his own people heard about this, they went out to lay hold of him, for they said, He is out of his mind. Now you see, in Mark chapter 3 verses 20 and 21, we find that Jesus' family thought he was out of his mind. Because he was so absorbed in his ministry, he did not take time out even to have meals.

Now you can imagine how a Jewish mother would feel if her son was not getting adequate meals. And Mary was a Jewish mother, and she and his brothers felt like he is going overboard here. Now some people say, How could Mary possibly feel that way about him? She certainly knew about the virgin birth, and she knew her son was the Messiah, so how could she possibly have thought he was out of his mind? Well once again, do you remember when we were talking about John the Baptist in prison, and he sent messengers saying, Are you the one who is to come, or do we look for another? John the Baptist was a prophet, he knew who Jesus was, he had seen the dove come

down on his head, and yet in prison, and hearing of what Jesus was doing, and thinking, Well this isn't what the Messiah is supposed to do, he entertained his doubts.

Or if he did not entertain his doubts, he at least questioned whether Jesus was really on the right track. Remember too, that you and I, who are Christians, have a thorough understanding, or I shouldn't say we have a thorough understanding, but we have a developed theology of the deity of Christ. That Jesus was God in the flesh.

Of course if you believe that Jesus is God in the flesh, as I do, you would never think he's doing anything wrong, because God can't do anything wrong. But the understanding that Jesus was God in the flesh, is something that was not fully understood, even by his friends and family, even by his mother probably, when he was walking the earth. That understanding seems to have come later, as the Christians reflected, and as the Holy Spirit led them into all truth, they came to understand more fully the doctrine of the deity of Christ.

What Mary did know of course, was that God was Jesus' father, because she knew that she had become pregnant without any relations with a man. She knew that Jesus was called the Son of God for this reason, but she also knew he was a human being. And remember she had raised him in her home.

She had changed his diapers. She had nursed him at her breast for years. She had to teach him how to tie his shoes.

This was a little child that grew up in her home. She may not have had a thorough understanding of the deity of Christ, but she certainly had a thorough understanding of his humanity, because she had seen him go through all the stages of childhood and so forth. She knew he was special.

She knew he was the Messiah, and she knew that he had come into existence supernaturally. But I suspect she did not know that he was God in the flesh. I don't think his disciples understood that either, until after the resurrection and maybe even sometime after that.

In any case, what I'm saying is it's not too surprising, given Mary's orientation at that time. He was her son. That was the strongest instinct she had, was the preservation of her son.

And if it seemed like he was missing meals, he was not taking care of himself, he ought to be taken aside for some recuperation. He's not thinking straight. He's getting a little obsessed.

He might be a little fanatical with his mission. And she apparently bought into this whole hysteria of his brothers and others who felt like, you know, we've got to stop him. He's going to do something crazy here.

They said he was out of his mind. That's what it says in Mark 3, verses 20 and 21. His family thought this about him.

And so when they came to him and stood outside and summonsed him, as it were, to come to them, their intentions were to take him aside, take him out of the ministry, give him some R&R. They were not there to honor him or learn from him. They were there to correct him.

They were there to interfere with him. They were not coming with a confidence in his ministry. They were coming with a loss of confidence in his ministry, feeling like they needed to straighten him out.

Now, this being so, it's clear that they were not operating as God's agents in the matter. God didn't send them to do that. They were not operating in the will of God.

They were operating in their own human sentiments. So when Jesus heard they were there, I believe that it was revealed to him through the Holy Spirit that they were not there for any good purpose. First of all, we're told that they stood outside seeking to speak with him.

In Mark it says they were calling for him. Now here, Jesus is surrounded by multitudes. He's teaching them.

He's healing them. We're told it was in the context of him talking to the multitudes, right there in verse 46 of Matthew 12. And they're calling him away from the pulpit, as it were.

They're asking him to step down and tell the multitudes to wait. And he's going to go talk to his mother and brothers outside. And they intend to take him into their custody and take him away from the crowds.

Forget it. He's not going to go for that. They're not discerning the will of God.

And he's not going to surrender to that. And that's why Jesus says forget it. They are not my mother and my brothers.

Now, he didn't say specifically they are not my mother and brothers, but he strongly implied it when he said this, who are my mother and my brothers? You see, he was informed by a messenger, your mother and your brothers are standing outside seeking to speak with you. And he answered and said to one who told him, who is my mother and who are my brothers? Now, the question is rhetorical. But it's essentially a statement of non-recognition of his mother and brothers as his mother and brothers.

It's as when Moses came to Pharaoh and said, thus saith Jehovah God, let my people go that they may serve me in the wilderness. And Pharaoh said, who is Jehovah that I should obey him? The statement who is Jehovah was not an inquiry really seeking for

information. It was a statement of disgust and disdain and disowning Jehovah.

I don't recognize Jehovah. It's basically what Pharaoh was saying. Who is he that I should obey him? And when Jesus said, who are my mother and my brothers? He was saying something very similar.

I don't recognize them. I don't call these people my mother and my brothers. Why should I honor them? They are not here on an errand from God.

In fact, they are here to interfere with the will of God. And so he turns and he says, he stretches his hand toward his disciples. He says, here are my mother and my brothers.

For whoever does the will of my father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother. Now, think of the implications of this. There is so much I want to say about this.

First of all, when he implies that Mary and his brothers are not really worthy of that label at this moment, he is saying, I have other mother and brothers. In fact, anyone who does the will of my father is my mother and my brothers. This strongly implies that Mary and the brothers were not doing the will of the father at that moment.

They were doing their own will. And since they were not doing the will of the father, he did not acknowledge their authority. Now, here is something very interesting because his statement, those who do the will of my father in heaven is my brother and my sister and my mother.

What he is saying is this. A mother is supposed to obey the father of the family. Supposed to do the will of the father.

If somebody is not doing the will of the father, they must not be in the role of the mother. And the children are supposed to submit to the father. And if somebody is not doing the will of the father, they must be disavowing their role as children of his.

Now, Jesus was, what was his first statement he ever made to his mother? I mean, on record, of course, he said things earlier. But when he was 12, he said, did you not know that I must be about my father's business? Jesus was the model son. God is his father.

He was the son and he must always do the will of his father. His relationship with God was the defining characteristic of his life. And if anyone wished to be in the family with him, whether as mother or brothers, they would have to do so by virtue of their relationship with his father also.

Now, in a correctly operating family, the father's will is honored by the mother and by the brothers. That is to say, by the children and the wife. Jesus was a son who was honoring his father's will.

But Mary was not operating in the father's will at this time. And therefore, she was not

really worthy of the role of being the wife, or more properly, the mother of Jesus, the wife of the father. She was not submitted to God at this time.

And his brothers were not acting like people submitted to the father either. And therefore, he said, they must not be my brothers because they're not obeying the same father I have. That must not be my mom because she's not obeying my father.

Now, the very implication of this analogy is that wives and children are supposed to seek to conform to the will of the head of the household, the father. But of course, he's not teaching that as a primary lesson here. But that's a starting assumption.

We have to remember that we can learn much from the Bible, not only from the direct lessons, but also from the assumptions that underlie those lessons. Because certain things were assumed to be true because they were so obviously true in biblical times. But in our culture, they're not necessarily so obvious.

Jesus assumed that any true wife and child would be concerned about doing the will of the man of the house, the father, the husband. And since obviously Mary was not doing the will of Jesus' father, and his brothers were not doing the will of Jesus' father, they apparently weren't his mother and brothers. And he said the ones who are his mothers and brothers are the ones who are doing the will of his father.

They that do the will of my father in heaven, they are my mother and sister and brothers, he says. So, one thing very important to note about this is that Jesus does not seem to give any significance to blood relationship in this case. It is spiritual relationship.

Those who have the same father I do, those who are Christians, those who are my disciples, they are my real relatives. My blood relatives, if they're not disciples, if they're not submitted to my father, then they're not my relatives as far as I'm concerned. That's what Jesus is apparently saying.

Now, this is helpful in a number of ways. One, it certainly serves as a corrective to that notion that many Christians have today that somehow the Jews as a race are all Christ's brothers. When Jesus said in Matthew 25, inasmuch as you did it to the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.

There are many Christians who think that he means the Jews when he speaks of my brethren. You did it to my brethren, you did it to me. There are those who teach, and there are quite a few who teach this, that the way that the nations treat the Jews is the way they treat Christ and that they will be judged on the last day by the way they treated his brethren, the Jews.

Well, there's no place in the Bible that he refers to the Jews as his brethren. And he does identify his followers as those who do the will of God. They are his brethren.

Obviously, when he talks about my brethren, he's not talking about the Jewish race. He's talking about people like himself who follow the father. He's talking about Christians, in other words.

But Jesus not only did not consider the Jewish race his brothers, he didn't even consider those Jewish people who were closest to him, his actual blood relations. He didn't consider them his brothers, his mother and his brothers. He did not consider, in other words, biological relationship to be a factor.

Now, by the way, I want to make this clear. I'm not saying something anti-Semitic. The ones that Jesus did identify as his mother and brethren were also Jewish people.

His disciples were all Jewish as he himself was. But he identified them as his mother and brother and sisters because they were doing the will of the father, not because of any racial consideration, not because of any biological connection. The fact that Jesus was a Jew by race is incidental to his mission.

I mean, in one sense it's central because he had to be Jewish to be the Jewish Messiah. But in terms of relating to God, his relationship to God transcended any relationship to the Jewish people. So much so that anyone, Jew or Gentile, who is submitted to God is more closely related to Jesus than the Jewish people are who don't believe in Christ or in God.

So, doing the will of God is that which brings a person into a relationship with Christ that he recognizes as family. Now, if we desire to be saved, of course, we need to have God as our father and Christ as our brother. That is very clear in Scripture.

He is the firstborn of many brethren, the Bible says. And that's, of course, in Romans chapter 8 and verse 29. But the point here is the saved community is a family.

It's the family of God. God is the father and all the members of the family are brothers and Jesus is the chief oldest brother. But if a person is not in the family of God, they're not saved.

I don't even know if Mary at that moment was saved. She was not doing the will of the father and Jesus disowned her. Later, however, she did become a believer.

She was at the foot of the cross. She saw him after his resurrection and she was in the upper room in Acts chapter 2 when the spirit fell. Mary was, in fact, a part of the church later on.

But it's very clear from these incidents in the life of Jesus that he did not give her an exalted position above that of other disciples. And even when she was acting not like a disciple, he disowned any relationship with her, disavowed it. Only those who do the father's will are related to Christ.

Now, Jesus said that before, too. Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but those who do the will of my father in heaven. Let us take that to heart because many churches teach otherwise.

If a church teaches otherwise than Jesus, the worse for them. Let's follow Jesus.