

Jesus' True Family (12:46–50)
(Mark 3:31-35; Luke 8:19-21)

Each of the writers of Mathew, Mark, and Luke place this story in a context that extends their particular contextual interest. In other words, it is not clear when and where this incident occurred. It is not certain which one if any is the original context. Under the control of the Holy Spirit, each uses the story to advance their current topic.

“The chapter climaxes with a challenge to the crowds to distance themselves from the Pharisaic stance which they have been witnessing and unite with the disciples of Jesus in doing the will of his Father, the content of which it is the burden of Jesus’ ministry to make clear.”¹

Matthew 12:46 *While he was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him.*

Matthew 12:47 *“Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, asking to speak to you”*

the people².... The word means “**crowd**.” It therefor appears that quite a few people are gathered “inside” for his family are now identified as being “outside.” In Mark, we have a similar story of a crowd in a house.

“And when they could not get near him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him, and when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay.” (Mark 2:4, ESV)

The reference to “the people” helps identify our context; earlier we read:

“And all the people were amazed, and said, “Can this be the Son of David?”” (Matthew 12:23, ESV)

Matthew is still dealing with the healing story of the blind and mute man.

mother and his brothers.... “It is widely assumed that the mention of Jesus’ “mother and brothers” without a father is evidence that Joseph has died by this time....”³

brothers.... “The most natural way to understand “brothers” (v. 46) is that the term refers to sons of Mary and Joseph and thus to brothers of Jesus on his mother’s side.

¹ Nolland, J. (2005). *The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary (p. 516). Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

² *the people* ὄχλος, *crowd* “a casual non-membership group of people, fairly large in size and assembled for whatever purpose—‘crowd, multitude.’” Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 119.

³ France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 497). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

To support the dogma of Mary's perpetual virginity, a notion foreign to the NT and to the earliest church fathers, Roman Catholic scholars have suggested that "brothers" refers either to Joseph's sons by an earlier marriage or to sons of Mary's sister, who had the same name.... Certainly, "brothers" can have a wider meaning than male relatives (Acts 22:1). Yet it is very doubtful whether such a meaning is valid here for it raises insuperable problems. For instance, if "brothers" refers to Joseph's sons by an earlier marriage, not Jesus but Joseph's firstborn would have been legal heir to David's throne. The second theory—that "brothers" refers to sons of a sister of Mary also named "Mary"—faces the unlikelihood of two sisters having the same name. All things considered, the attempts to extend the meaning of "brothers" in this pericope... are nothing less than farfetched exegesis in support of a dogma that originated much later than the NT...."⁴

To escape the dilemma of the obvious, one Roman Catholic commentator dishonestly translates the passage: "Mary and the 'brethren' are outside."⁵ Another⁶ would not even comment on it, although it touches on a critical doctrine of the Roman Church, the perpetual virginity of Mary.

Matthew gives us additional detail on Mary and her children in chapter 13.

"Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?" (Matthew 13:55–56, ESV)

asking to speak to him.... In the context of the earlier charge that Jesus was empowered by Beelzebul (12:24) to do his great works, his brothers and sisters may have thought he was crazy and are attempting to "seize him" and get him out of Dodge before he gets himself stoned.

"And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, 'He is out of his mind.'" (Mark 3:21, ESV)

Matthew 12:48 But he replied to the man who told him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?"

Some think Jesus is suggesting that we must forsake our families if we are to serve God. I do not think that this is the point here. He is instead creating a dramatic

⁴ Carson, D. A. (1984). Matthew. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Vol. 8, p. 299). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

⁵ A. Jones, "The Gospel of Jesus Christ according to St Matthew," in *A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture* (ed. Bernard Orchard and Edmund F. Sutcliffe; Toronto; New York; Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson, 1953), 875.

⁶ John Maldonatus, *A Commentary on the Holy Gospels* (ed. George J. Davie; trans. George J. Davie; vol. 1, Second Edition.; Catholic Standard Library; London: John Hodges, 1888), 418.

confrontation between a natural family and his own disciples—a spiritual family. The spiritual and eternal must take the forefront in one’s life.

Matthew 12:49 *And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers!”*

This is not unlike what Jesus had said earlier.

“And Jesus said to him, “Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:60, ESV)

Jesus is not disrespecting family, he is explaining the eternal importance of Kingdom commitment and its priority to everything else. “The words do not dissolve family bonds but rather relativize them. They do this by revealing that there are even stronger bonds.”⁷ Let’s study this section in Matthew in its larger context.

First, let’s start in Matthew 11:28-29.

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” (Matthew 11:28–29, ESV)

This is Jesus’ call to Israel to follow him and thereby be a part of his heavenly family.

Second, this call occurred after Jesus’ curse on the cities of Galilee for not repenting in response to his ministry and miracles. In 11:20-27.

Third, we next see the rejection of Jesus as Lord of the Sabbath by the Pharisees in verses 12:1-12:14, all for plucking grain and healing the sick—on the Sabbath.

Fourth, Matthew then draws to our attention that Jesus is the promised “servant” spoken of by Isaiah and that as such God’s Spirit was upon him to do these miraculous signs (12:15-21) that in fact that did not respond to in repentance. This prepares us for the coming attack on Jesus saying his work was in the spirit of Satan.

Fifth, the Pharisees respond by saying that these signs were done by the power of Beelzebul not by the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus answers these comments by insisting that it is by the Spirit of God that he does these signs and that he thereby brings the kingdom of God to them. He says he does all this because he is more powerful than the strong man (Satan) and therefore plunders the strong man (heals and cast out demons, 12:22-32).

⁷ W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (vol. 2; International Critical Commentary; London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 364.

Sixth, he follows this up by warning them that they demonstrate their evil by their words—the worthless words that condemn Jesus as in league with Beelzebul (12:33-37).

Seventh, they then demand a sign, one that can only be from God, and not one that could be understood as the work of Satan. He gives them one, but not one they care to hear—his resurrection from the dead after they crucify him is the sign, a sign that will bring great judgment on them (12:38-42). This sign could not be confused with the work of Satan; the devil can kill, he cannot give life. It could get no clearer than this. But they will reject this sign as well.

Eight, he then returns to the unclean spirit he has cast out and draws to their attention that the nation, symbolized by this man, is swept and put in order through his miracles. But, clean as they are becoming through his healings and exorcisms, if they do not respond to the call to come to Jesus, then the nation will become demon possessed to an unprecedented degree and worse off than they ever were before Jesus first came. And as a result, they will be subject to a judgment that was to come upon in “this evil generation” (12:43-45).

Ninth, he then uses the presence of his mother and brothers to make a point. Not all have failed to respond to his call, his disciples have done so and are therefore his mother and brothers—his family (12:46-50). While these, the disciples, are included in his family, they do not replace his family.

“Although religious commitments may well weaken family ties, the disciple will not thereby be left alone, without a family. Rather, the Christian will join the household of faith, the church, in which there is a father (God) and in which there are many brothers and sisters (cf. 23:8). Thus, Jesus’ demand to forsake family is only made in view of the Christian family which awaits new members with open arms. It is not a call to a solitary existence.”⁸

Matthew 12:50 For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”

“We do not make ourselves Jesus’ close relatives by doing the will of his heavenly Father. Rather, doing the Father’s will *identifies us* as his mother and sisters and brothers (cf. 7:21).”⁹ Doing the will of God is a product of our salvation, not a means of

⁸ W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (vol. 2; International Critical Commentary; London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 367.

⁹ Carson, D. A. (1984). Matthew. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Vol. 8, p. 300). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

obtaining this salvation. “This statement reminds Matthew’s readers of the importance of obedience in Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, especially in 7:15–27.”¹⁰

So, the proof of family membership and of a real response to the call of God is found in doing “*the will of my Father.*” Talking the talk is not the same thing as walking the walk. Are you walking the walk?

¹⁰ Roger L. Hahn, *Matthew: A Commentary for Bible Students* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2007), 164.