

# Jesus' Forever Family

Matthew 12:43-50


*King of Kings! (Gospel of Matthew Series)*

Prepared by: Matthew S. Black

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"It is greater for Mary to have been a believing disciple of Christ than the mother of Christ."

- **Aurelius Augustine** (354-430)

 Open your Bible to **Matthew 12**. We are continuing in our series in the book of Matthew entitled "Kingdom Come." This morning we are looking at a message entitled: "Jesus Forever Family."

## **\$40K but Died of Malnutrition**

Several years ago a prominent newspaper reported the story of an elderly man and wife who were found dead in their apartment. Autopsies revealed that both had died of severe malnutrition, although investigators found a total of \$40,000 in cash stored inside paper bags in a closet.

## **The Story of Hetty Green: America's Greatest Miser**

Another story I came across is that of Hetty Green. For many years she was called **America's greatest miser**. When she died in 1916, she left an estate valued at \$100 million (worth \$2.1 billion today) – so it was an especially vast fortune for that day. But she was so miserly that she ate **cold oatmeal** in order to save the expense of heating the water. When her son had a severe leg injury, she took so long trying to find a free clinic to treat him that his leg had to be amputated because of advanced infection. It has been said that she hastened her own death by bursting a blood vessel in her brain while arguing the merits of skim milk because it was cheaper than whole milk.

This study of God's forever family is for all of us who might be prone to treat our *spiritual* resources just like that miserly couple and Hetty Green treated their financial resources. We have been invited to partake of such riches in Christ, but we are often guilty of neglecting God's riches. Such believers are in danger of suffering from spiritual malnutrition, because they do not take advantage of the great storehouse of spiritual nourishment that they have at their disposal by simply knowing and walking with God.<sup>1</sup>

## **His Own Received Him Not**

The passage in Matthew 12 is really a story of the rejection of Jesus. "He came unto His own and His own received Him not" (**John 1:11**). In Matthew 10-12 we find the accounts of Jesus' public ministry. In Matthew 13, he begins to teach in parables. His ministry to Israel goes

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<sup>1</sup> John MacArthur. *Ephesians* (Moody: Chicago, 1986), vii. This is not a direct quote. I changed some of the wording to help make the point more suited to my people.

only for three more chapters. In Matthew 16, Jesus leaves Israel and really begins to train the 12 for ministry after His death and resurrection as the tour a bit of Gentile territory.

Matthew 12 begins with Jesus healing a blind and deaf man. Jesus is inviting people into His kingdom. He's going everywhere healing "every sickness and disease."

### **Pharisees Guilty of Spiritual Neglect**

Jesus is warning them that in verse 43ff that they must not neglect the spiritual riches among them. He is the Messiah. He is YHWH come in human flesh. He's demonstrated His power in extraordinary ways.

They think they already have a ticket to heaven. They were born into a believing home. They are children of Abraham. They have the Word of God. They are God's chosen nation.

And being in the midst of the very presence of the Son of God, they reject Him, and soon they are going to crucify Him.

### **We Are Capable of the Same Neglect**

Can I ask you a question? Are we capable of that level of neglect? You better believe we are!

### **No Automatic Entrance to Heaven**

Parents, our children do not get automatic entrance into God's forever family just because mom and dad are believers. They must come to Christ on their own. Today many children leave the faith because they have tried to follow Christ in their own limited self-righteousness. Reform never works for very long. In fact, to be part of God's forever family you must go far beyond reform. You must have been converted in your heart through a life-changing relationship with Christ. This is something most of the people of Jesus' day did not have. They thought they were part of God's forever family but they weren't. Let's read about it in Matthew 12:43-50.

### **Holy Scripture: Matthew 12:43-50**

"When an unclean spirit comes out of a man, it roams through waterless places looking for rest but doesn't find any. 44 Then it says, 'I'll go back to my house that I came from.' And returning, it finds the house vacant, swept, and put in order. 45 Then off it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and settle down there. As a result, that man's last condition is worse than the first. That's how it will also be with this evil generation."

## **I. The evil generation, "this evil generation."**

### **The Apple Tree with False Fruit**

The Pharisees looked like they had a lot of good fruit. They looked like they were a vibrant part of God's family, but they were not. They lived righteous lives. They had a beautiful marvelous Temple. They had Abraham as their physical father. They were from the Jewish people. God had given them the Law. They kept it. They offered sacrifices. They had the Word of God. But they were totally lost.

They were like a dead apple tree with false fruit. Have you ever seen a dead tree? If you tape living leaves and fruit to the tree it may look alive for a little bit, but the tree is still dead. Fake fruit does not make a tree live.

## The 613 Commandments

They obeyed the outward commandments of Moses Law, which consisted of not just 10 but 613 commandments. In fact the orthodox Jews of today still teach these laws which are both negative and positive. I have these laws listed in simple form that the Rabbis teach today, and the document I have is 31 pages typed and single spaced!

But these Pharisees were like a dead apple tree and they were duct-taping apples to their dead branches. Isn't that how some who are dead in their sins are? There is a temptation among every one of us to have self-righteous reform that replaces the work of the Holy Spirit.

## Matthew 12:43-45

“When an unclean spirit comes out of a man, it roams through waterless places looking for rest but doesn't find any. 44 Then it says, ‘I'll go back to my house that I came from.’ And returning, it finds the house vacant, swept, and put in order. 45 Then off it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and settle down there. As a result, that man's last condition is worse than the first. That's how it will also be with this evil generation.”

## This Evil Generation

These people thought they were part of God's forever family. But Jesus describes the people before Him as “this evil generation.” However much Bible knowledge they had or however many miracles they had seen, it did not help them. They were hard and cold and evil. How is that? Because these people were accusing Jesus of being an agent of Satan.

The Pharisees were denying Jesus in the light of crystal clear revelation and irrefutable facts that He was absolutely from God. We'll see in a moment that He tells them in very plain language that He is the Messianic **prophet, priest and king**.

- Verse 6: PRIEST – “I tell you, something greater than the **temple** is here.”
- Verse 41: PROPHET – “[The people of Nineveh] repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than **Jonah** is here.”
- Verse 42: KING – “something greater than **Solomon** is here.”

## Ample Opportunity: Books Could Not Contain All the Mighty Works of Jesus

These people had ample opportunity to become part of the family of God. These people are called an “evil generation.” In **Matthew 4:23-24** says that everywhere Jesus went He was proclaiming the good news that the Kingdom had come, and he was “healing every disease and every affliction among the people” and driving out demons from the masses of the people. He had a major exorcism ministry. And He was doing a massive amount of mighty miracles – so much were the mighty works of Jesus, the Apostle John writes that “the world itself could not contain the books that would be written” down (**John 21:25**).

**Mass Exorcisms.** So Jesus is doing a massive amount of exorcisms. The demons are fleeing Him. He is cleaning the “house” of Israel of all demons and demonic activity to give these people clarity of mind and ample opportunity to see and experience who Jesus in His office as the Messianic King. He's such a powerful king that demons are literally on the run!

## Only Man to Completely Resist Temptation

This is the most powerful man these Pharisees and the people have ever seen. He is the only man in the history of the world that has completely resisted the temptation of the devil

personally during His 40 day and 40 night temptation. The demons are fleeing Him all over the place. This man is filled with power from on high.

### **The Pharisees Knew Christ was of God**

In the words of one of their leaders, Nicodemus, the Pharisees knew that Jesus Christ was of God for “we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him” (John 3:2). It was undeniable. If the demon possessed people were bars, Jesus would have been closing every bar in Palestine. Demons were going out of business! The Pharisees couldn’t deny it.

### **Jesus Told Them Plainly He was Messiah**

Jesus told them plainly He was the Messiah. We see this in the three parallel statements of Jesus as we saw earlier: Christ is prophet, priest and king – greater than Jonah, greater than the temple, greater than great Solomon.

### **Pharisees Would Not Risk Losing Their Place**

What is Jesus saying? He’s saying the Pharisees will commit the unforgivable sin because they do not want to lose their position. They would rather plot to kill Jesus than surrender their place of prominence in society. They would rather live large now than risk losing their position.

### **Self-Righteous Reform**

The Pharisees had reformed themselves with self-righteousness. But self-righteousness does not make one part of God’s family. Self-righteousness is simply as Isaiah says, “filthy rags.” This self-righteous reform was a long time in the making. Here me now – self-reformation does more damage in the human heart because it breeds pride and self-contentment and self-conceit. But this self-righteous reform was a long time in the making.

### **Israel Clean and Swept**

Two hundred years before Jesus’ day there was a great upheaval after a pagan ruler (**Antiochus Epiphanes**, the megalomaniac King of Syria) had turned the Jerusalem **Temple** into a pagan shrine.

**Judas Maccabaeus** and his colleagues had beaten the Syrians, cleansed the Temple, and established a new royal house that lasted a hundred years. But it didn’t solve the problems. Israel remained sinful and compromised.

At least two groups then tried their own reformations, attempting to get to the heart of the problem. The **Pharisees** began as a pressure group trying to get people to keep the **Torah** more thoroughly and completely, with a view to liberating Israel inside and out from every kind of paganism. The **Essenes** were an even more rigorous sect, living by their own strict rules.

Then, in the years before Jesus’ birth and while he was growing up, **Herod** and his family were rebuilding the Temple, making it **one of the most beautiful buildings anywhere** in the ancient world. Many believed that **YHWH**, Israel’s God, had abandoned the Temple long ago; maybe he would now return.

I mean Jesus had come and cleaned the countryside of demons. Israel was now truly “clean and swept” like a house. Perhaps God would return!

Not so, says Jesus. This generation is like a person who has been exorcized, but the **demon** may return and ‘repossess’—with several others. All right, you’ve had your great revolution, and it worked in its way. You have swept and cleaned as best you can, with new programs of Torah-teaching and personal piety. The Temple itself is standing there, in working order. *But it’s still empty.* The demons will return, and this generation will end up worse off than it was before.<sup>2</sup>

### **Touched but not Transformed**

What’s the point of this story of a demon possessed person being healed, but not converted? The point is you can be touched by God without being transformed by God. Hebrews 6 speaks of people like this. Heb. 6:4-6 describes them as:

- once enlightened
- tasted the heavenly gift
- shared in the Holy Spirit
- tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come
- they fall away
- describes their nature as a nature of “thorns and thistles”

In other words these are people that have been touched by God. They’ve made a decision for God. They’ve decided to turn over a new leaf. They’ve been touched but not transformed. They’ve not repented of their sins. They’ve not left all to follow Christ. They follow Christ for carnal benefits. They follow Christ for a better life, a better salary, a better reputation, a better marriage perhaps. True followers of Christ follow Christ for Christ. They are touched AND transformed. They are born again. If you are not born again and relying on mere self-righteousness for change, then Satan will make life far worse for you.

### **A Dog Returning to Its Vomit**

Peter has something to say to us about this, and it’s not just to Israel of old, but to us today. Look at **2 Peter 2:20-22**, “For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. <sup>21</sup> For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. <sup>22</sup> What the true proverb says has happened to them: “The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire.””

### **Waterless Places**

Certainly, people wanting to enter Jesus’ forever family have the temptation to replace the humbling, soul-crushing work of the Holy Spirit with mere self-righteous moralism, but it will never work. Demons love the wilderness places. That is why a demon cannot abide where the life giving Spirit is!

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<sup>2</sup> N. T. Wright, (2004). *Matthew for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-15* (pp. 153–154). London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

## **Many Seemed to be Part of God's Family but were Not**

Many people in the Bible and in the church seemed to be part of God's forever family but were not.

**Wesley – Who will convert me?** I think about John Wesley. In 1735, he was invited to the United States to begin a new city in Savannah, Georgia. His brother Charles was made the Anglican parish priest. And John Wesley was to be the Anglican missionary to the Indians in Savannah, Georgia. He spent six months there. He preached, led in prayer, etc. But he was so discouraged. He knew the Word of God – but He did not know the God of the Word. As he sailed back to England he realized he was a lost man. He wrote in his journal, "I came to convert the Indians, but, oh, who will convert me?"

John Wesley struggled with no assurance of salvation for several years. He constantly prayed: "Lord, help my unbelief!" However, even then he felt dull within and little motivated even to pray for his own salvation. Yet one day, on May 24th, 1738 he opened his Bible at about 5am in the morning and came across these words in 2 Peter 1:4, "There are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, even that ye should partakers of the divine nature." That night as someone was reading Luther's Preface to the Epistle to Romans Wesley was converted. He records it in his journal. He says it was about 8:45pm that Saturday evening May 24th, 1738 at Aldersgate.

Wesley writes, "while the Preface to Romans by Luther was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, **I felt my heart strangely warmed.** I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death." What a joy to receive the assurance that he was now in Jesus true family!

## **The Last Worse than the First**

Don't rest in your rituals. Don't rest in your self-righteous reform. For the last state will be worse than the first if you do not repent!

**Warnings.** Scripture records warnings. **Matthew 7:21-23**, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. <sup>22</sup>On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' <sup>23</sup>And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'"

**Demas.** Don't be like Demas. In Philemon 1 and Colossians 4, Demas was listed with Mark and Luke as part of Paul's inner circle. He was one of the closest companions to Paul. And yet Paul records in **2 Timothy 4:10**, "Demas has deserted me, because he loved this present world."

## **There is Hope!**

There is hope! A true Christian will have a genuine assurance and certainty that he or she is a child of God. If you do not have that, you may still be lost in your sins. But many have come to Christ after years in the church.

**Martin Luther** was a priest in the Catholic church. He did all the rituals, but had no assurance. By reading the Bible, he realized that "the just shall live by faith." And he entered the family of God.

I think recently of **Charo Washer**, the wife of the well-known evangelist Paul Washer. For years she went around doing all her Christian activities without a certain assurance that she

was in Christ. She realized one day that in fact, though she was an evangelist's wife, she was actually truly lost! She came to know Christ.

## II. The true family of Jesus

### Matthew 12:46-50

“46 He was still speaking to the crowds when suddenly His mother and brothers were standing outside wanting to speak to Him. 47 Someone told Him, “Look, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to You.”

48 But He replied to the one who told Him, “Who is My mother and who are My brothers?” 49 And stretching out His hand toward His disciples, He said, “Here are My mother and My brothers! 50 For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven, that person is My brother and sister and mother.”

### Summary

The Pharisees thought they were God's family because they were children of Abraham. Jesus wanted to make a point with them. You are not part of God's family because you are Jewish. Or we might say today, you are not part of God's family because your mother and father are Christians. The true family of Jesus is surrendered to God in heaven to do His will.

### Jesus' Earthly Family

Mark tells us that earlier in this same cycle of controversy, Jesus was surrounded by a crowd. His family got wind of it and came to drag him home, saying, “He is out of his mind” (3:21). John 7:1–5 reveals that “his own brothers did not believe in him.” They even mocked him, sardonically urging him to go to Jerusalem and “show yourself to the world.”<sup>3</sup>

Jesus is not being cute. His reply is, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” (v. 48). With this reply, he is not being novel or ignorant. He knows that Mary is his mother. He knows that Joseph, his earthly father, has died (that's what most scholars surmise). And he knows he has sisters (13:56), who are not named in Matthew, and brothers, who are named—James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas (13:55). Jesus knew he had half-sisters and half-brothers.<sup>4</sup>

### Mary May Have Struggled

We know that none of Jesus' brothers and sisters believed until after the resurrection. Even Mary, like John the Baptist and the twelve disciples struggled, it may be that Mary at this time struggled to understand why Jesus' mission was to go to the cross instead of overtaking the crown from Rome.

**Aurelius Augustine** (354-430) said, "It is greater for Mary to have been a believing disciple of Christ than the mother of Christ."

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<sup>3</sup> Doriani, D. M. (2008). *Matthew & 2*. (R. D. Phillips, P. G. Ryken, & D. M. Doriani, Eds.) (Vol. 1, pp. 536–537). Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing.

<sup>4</sup> O'Donnell, D. S. (2013). *Matthew: All Authority in Heaven and on Earth*. (R. K. Hughes, Ed.) (pp. 348–349). Wheaton, IL: Crossway.

After the resurrection, Jesus' **brothers** eventually came to believe in Him, His brother James becoming the head of the Jerusalem church (see Acts 15:13–22) and author of the epistle that bears his name.<sup>5</sup>

### **Jesus' True Family**

But the point here is not so much a negative one about his physical family, as a strong and positive one about his **disciples**. They are doing God's will, he declares, by committing their lives to His kingdom-teaching. They are therefore his true family.<sup>6</sup>

### **The Will of the Father**

What is the will of the Father? It is to repent and believe that Jesus is the Christ.

## **APPLICATIONS**

### **1. If Jesus family thought He was crazy, don't be surprised if yours thinks you are crazy too!**

First, if Jesus' family, thinking He was out of His mind, showed confusion and perhaps even hostility toward Jesus and the gospel, we Christians today should not be surprised if unbelievers in our families think we are out of minds. Don't be surprised by family division and derision because of your faith in Christ. Put Christ first.

**Don't be surprised** when there is conflict with your earthly family. Christ predicted it. Father will turn against son and mothers against their daughters. Some of you feel rejected by your family for following Christ. **Psalm 27:10** says, "Even if my father and mother abandon me, the LORD will taken me up [and hold me close]."

### **2. Wait for God's Timing.**

The second application is this: give it time. Jesus family eventually all came to know Him. If you have a family member who does not believe in Jesus right now, give it time. For this isn't the last time we see Jesus' family, is it? The next time we see Mary, she is literally looking upon Jesus on the Cross. And in the language of adoption, Christ asks John the beloved disciple to care for His mother. Likely Joseph had died. We don't know why the other siblings of Jesus don't take this responsibility. It may be some of them are in Nazareth, and Mary is in Jerusalem.<sup>7</sup>

### **3. Put Jesus First**

Your relationship with Jesus Christ is more important than even earthly family. Sometimes you are going to feel far closer to your "forever family" of God's Kingdom than you do to your earthly family. Now Jesus loved His family, and eventually they came to trust in Him. That is our hope as well. Love your earthly family, but love Jesus more.

Jesus says some strange things at times in regard to the Gospel in family. You may have to put Jesus before your mother and father. You may have to put Jesus before your spouse and children. Jesus must always be first.

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<sup>5</sup> MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1985). *Matthew* (Mt 12:46). Chicago: Moody Press.

<sup>6</sup> Wright, *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> O'Donnell, 350.



#### **4. Don't Let Your Children Miss God's Forever Family**

Family is wonderful. And some of you have been given children by God. They may get good grades. They may get a six figure income. Your daughter may become the first female president. But what will any of this matter if your children are not with you in heaven? Above all things, make sure your children know Christ.

#### **5. Don't fake it. Physical Relation and Religious Practice Do Not Save.**

It is possible to be religious like the Pharisees, and still not be part of the kingdom of God. It is possible to be physically related to the Messiah himself, and still not be part of the kingdom of God. Religious practices and religious pedigree are utterly inadequate to bring anybody into the kingdom. There needs to be an acknowledgment of who Jesus is, and a determined decision to follow him<sup>8</sup>

#### **6. Find your place to serve in God's Forever Family.**

There are many metaphors for God's people. The New Testament calls the group of believers His family, His temple, His Body, His flock. He has a place for you. He wants you to serve and build up your forever family.

#### **Conclusion**

I've seen people fall away from the faith. It seemed like they were part of Christ's forever family, but they were just propped up. They were touched but not transformed. I've seen people serve here in this congregation and today they are in the world serving the wicked one. Satan will bring a fate a thousand times worse than the first. It is better that we never hear the name of Christ than to just dip our little toe in the water of His love. He wants you all in! He wants you to serve and love your forever family.

Let us as God's forever family reach out to one another, for we are the brother and the sister and mother of Jesus.

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<sup>8</sup> Michael Green, *The Message of Matthew*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), p. 151