

Series: "Encounters With Christ"
"Jesus' Mom and Brothers"

Did Jesus have a family? We know his mother was Mary. And there was Joseph. Did He have any sisters or brothers? The answer is yes. Turn to Matthew 13:54-56. "He (Jesus) came to his hometown and began to teach the people in their synagogue, so that they were astounded and said, 'Where did this man get this wisdom, and these deeds of power? 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 this?'"

We know from this that Jesus had 4 brothers – James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas. He had sisters, although it doesn't say how many. I wonder how they got along, as children? As adults? Did they ever have disagreements?

I'm continuing a series of messages from the Gospel of John called "Encounters With Jesus". What happened as various people met up with Christ? Today we'll take a peek into the family life of Jesus.

John 7:1 says, "After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He did not wish to go about in Judea because the Jews were looking for an opportunity to kill him." Jewish religious leaders are out to kill Jesus. Because of that, He stayed for a while way north in Galilee, far from the center of Jewish religion, Jerusalem.

"Now the Jewish festival of Booths was near. So his brothers said to him, 'Leave here and go to Judea so that your disciples also may see the works you are doing, for no one who wants to be widely known acts in secret. If you do these things, show yourself to the world'" (John 7:2-4). It was the time for the festival of Booths, an 8-day feast, second only to Passover in importance. Jesus' brothers urge Him to go. There seems to be an element of taunting in this. It's like they're saying, "You're doing all this teaching and miracle working stuff – now's a good time to show yourself to the world, when Jerusalem will be teeming with religious travelers." Notice the next verse, "For even his brothers did not believe in him" (verse 5).

The narrative continues, "Jesus said to them, 'My time has not yet come, but your time is always here'" (verse 6). Various times in the Gospel of John Jesus says, "my time has not yet come". God's appointed hour for Jesus to go to the cross was not here yet. Jesus says to them, "You go to the festival. I'm staying here."

But notice verse 10: "But after his brothers had gone to the festival, then he also went, not publicly but as it were in secret." He wouldn't be forced or rushed into anything. He wouldn't go up to Jerusalem to make a splash and get people claiming He was Messiah – so he went up quietly and secretly. Do you get the feeling that things were a little tense between Jesus and his brothers? They seemed skeptical about His budding and enlarging ministry. (Maybe His sisters felt the same, too. We don't know).

This isn't the only time where the relationship between Jesus and His family members appears to be strained. Remember when He was 12 years old, and left behind in Jerusalem? Jesus' parents go back and find Him conversing with the religious teachers in the temple. What was Mary's

comment? “Son...why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been frantic, searching for you everywhere” (Luke 2:48).

Then there is that episode at a wedding in the village of Cana. Jesus and His mother are there. And the bride and groom run out of wine. John 2:3-5 says, "When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.' And Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.' His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.'" We may remember that Jesus turned the water in the water pots into wine and saved the day, but isn't Jesus a bit brusque with His mom? “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me?" In other words, Jesus is saying to His mother, “Your point of view is quite different from mine!”

Jesus' family life wasn't perfect! The Bible doesn't give us details of day-to-day living in Mary and Joseph's home, nor what happened as the kids grew up. But we do know that *there was spiritual discord within Jesus' family.*

Some of our families are like that. Maybe your husband or your wife isn't really a follower of Christ. He or she may be OK with your coming to church, or you practicing your faith. But there is still that sense of distance because there is no spiritual unity in your home – and you really can't have intimacy in your marriage when it comes to spiritual conversation, or sharing prayer together, or coming to church as a couple.

Maybe your husband or wife *isn't* so happy about your being a Christian and being active in the church. "You're going to that church again!" "Church, church, church! It's always church first." And so you're torn. Or maybe there are differences over how to raise the children in regards to religious training.

Perhaps you're a Christian and your children haven't given their lives to Christ. They fuss about going to church. Or your grown children have no interest in the Lord. And you wonder about how much you should say to them. How hard do you push?

Sometimes this is played out when grandchildren enter the picture. We as grandparents want our grandchildren to be exposed to the claims of Christ - but our grown children (their parents) aren't interested. So how much do we push to bring our grandchildren to church, or read them Bible stories, etc.?

Maybe you're a young person and your parents don't share the same faith as you do. When I first got serious about Christ and gave my life over to Him, my parents were nominal Christians and weren't that active in the church. When I told them I felt a call to ministry, they were worried I was becoming a religious fanatic. They asked our pastor to come over to the house for a talk!

My sister also got really involved in church and in the Christian life, and I remember discussions

my dad had with her and me. Dad was a smoker, and he said he wasn't sure he wanted to give up smoking to be a Christian. I tried to get across to him that whether or not you smoke doesn't determine whether you're a Christian or not.

Perhaps you have a sister, or brother, or other family member who are not believers, and there's a certain amount of turmoil because of that! A man in another church I served once asked me for advice. His brother was not a Christian. This church member talking to me had generally tried to abstain from alcohol as a Christian, but when he refused to drink beer at family gatherings, his brother thought he was acting "holier than thou". The church member asked me, "What do you think? Should I drink so I won't turn my brother more away from being a Christian?" It was a tough call.

Interacting with family members who do not share our faith can be difficult. Remember that Jesus experienced this in His own family!

Here's something to keep in mind that may help us: *Jesus' emphasized the importance of one's spiritual family.* Mark 3:31-32 says this: "Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, 'Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you.'" Look at Jesus' response to this: "And he replied, 'Who are my mother and my brothers?' And looking at those who sat around him, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother'" (verses 33-35).

Jesus expanded the definition of family. *All who do God's will are in His family. In fact, Jesus said our faith can create conflict in our biological family.* Here are some really tough words of Jesus: "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and one's foes will be members of one's own household" (Matthew 10:34-36).

Jesus was a realist here. He understood that commitment to Him can alienate us from members of our own family. Here's the clincher! "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Matthew 10:37). We have to love Him more than we love even our family members! We have to put kingdom values and God's will above our family's views.

So what might this mean – to love Jesus, more than we love family? Each of us has to work that out for our situation. It might mean we don't quit all church activity just because someone in our family complains. It might mean we balance things out somewhat. (Some people are "church-a-holics" – they're at the church all the time, trying to do everything. Sometimes just to escape an unhappy home situation. That's not good!). It could mean a believing parent does all they can to get their children to Sunday School, even if their partner isn't supportive.

Now family values are important! Some Christians need to spend more quality time with their

family members. But we can make an *idol* of our family. One distinguished church leader has pointed out that if someone in the military does a tour of duty away from family to serve his or her country, we honor and respect that person's love of country. But if a Christian does missionary work, or some kind of ministry that separates him or her from family members, we may think that person is neglecting family duties, or half crazy over religion. Hear again Jesus' words: "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Matthew 10:37).

Whatever happened to Jesus' family members? Did any of them ever come to believe in Him? Yes, at least some in His family did! In 1 Corinthians, chapter 9, the Apostle Paul is defending his right to be called an apostle. He says, "This is my defense to those who would examine me. Do we not have the right to our food and drink? Do we not have the right to be accompanied by a believing wife, as do the other apostles *and the brothers of the Lord* and Cephas?" (1 Corinthians 9:5). Note here that *Jesus' brothers* are among those believers in the early church proclaiming the Good News of Jesus!

In his letter to the Galatians, the apostle Paul describes what he did after his conversion to Christ. "Then after three years I did go up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas (Peter) and stayed with him fifteen days; but I did not see any other apostle except James the Lord's brother" (Galatians 1:19). Jesus' brother James is one of the apostles! He is an influential leader in the early church! (cf. Acts 15:12ff.).

Here's some good news! Family members *can* come to Christ and be saved! Maybe some of you have seen that happen in your own family!

Here's are things we can do when we have unsaved family members.

First of all, pray for them. Trust in the power of God. Trust in the power of prayer. Pray daily for your loved ones who aren't yet believers. Remember, God *wants them to be saved* even more than we do!

Second, love them. Even when they irritate you. Even if they oppose your being active in your faith. Love them! The more you love them in practical ways, the greater the chance they'll see something in you that will make them want to be a Christian.

Third, stand your ground. Don't compromise your faith, or your spiritual values, just to please them. If you do, you will lose their respect. If you are steadfast in putting Christ first and trying to obey His will, they will most likely see that you have found something worth standing up for.

Harry L. Kaufhold, Jr.
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