



CAPITOL COMMISSION

The True Family of Jesus (Luke 8:19-21)

SEPTEMBER 24, 2013

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This episode in which the family of Jesus seeks an audience with him is employed by Luke as a means to decisively communicate the previous teachings in the parable of soils and the lamp on the stand. Jesus has been proclaiming the good news of the kingdom far and wide throughout the region of Galilee. The delivering of this message has been interpreted by Jesus as sowing the word of God into the human heart. The seed falls in diverse types of hearts because the message is scattered indiscriminately for all to hear. Therefore the harvest, or lack thereof, does not call into question the sower or the seed, but the heart that hears the message. This language of being careful how one hears, or having ears to hear is interspersed through these parables and provides both a call and a warning to those to whom the message is presented. Due to the corrupt nature of the human heart the seed may have many obstacles before it reaches its goal, which is bearing fruit for harvesting. The light of Jesus' message is meant to expose any hindrances to the seed which are seen preventing its intended result. The singular goal in Jesus' mind is an abundant harvest which is within reach of all who listen with ears that desire to hear. The other soils mentioned, in which the seed grows but produces no harvest are not commended. They are challenged to allow the light of God's word to work and expose that which hinders them from continuing in faith and to produce faithfulness that they too might yield a crop.

When Jesus speaks of the harvest produced by the good heart, Luke has already communicated this understanding in the preceding narrative accounts. According to Jesus' Sermon on the Plain it meant loving, blessing, praying and giving to those who hate and abuse you. It produced those who no longer judge or condemn, but forgive because they have come to see the mercy of the Father extended to them in spite of their depravity. They are not offended by Jesus when he acts contrary to their expectations, and loves much because of the great debt forgiven them by God. They are the ones who followed Jesus and supported his work of proclaiming the good news of the kingdom. Into this teaching about the fruit of the good soil, Jesus' statement concerning his family is inserted to make his point emphatically. This would have sent shock waves through those who heard him because he was redefining a fundamental aspect of the Jewish patriarchal structure. A new family was being established, and according to Jesus it no longer existed along genealogical lines, but was spiritual and would be defined by him. Those who now hold a place of priority and attention to Jesus are those who hear God's word and obey it. In this bold declaration Jesus expects all to fall in-line under him. Their standing and position has been changed forever. They no longer exist on the basis of heritage, but upon their subjection to the word of God as revealed by him and a continued adherence to his teaching.

Luke 8:19-21 - (19) Then his mother and his brothers came to him, but they could not reach him because of the crowd. (20) And he was told,

“Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, desiring to see you.” (21) But he answered them, “My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it.”

A FAMILY GATHERING

Then his mother and his brothers came to him – This account offers no explanation to what prompted this visit by Jesus' mother and brothers. In both Matthew and Mark this incident is placed before the parable of the soils chronologically. However, this intervention by Jesus' family directly followed an encounter with the Pharisees in which Jesus was accused of being possessed by Beelzebul, the prince of demons. From this it becomes clear what prompted their visit. Jesus' behavior seemed erratic to those who knew him; the dregs of society sought after him in an unhealthy manner, and now the religious leaders have weighed in and assessed him as demon possessed. It was time for the family to step in and take charge of this first-born son. Jesus position in the family adds a level of complexity to the current situation. We note in this encounter that Jesus' father is not mentioned, which is odd because his patriarchal authority could have been utilized to take charge of his son. It is believed that Joseph died at some point before Jesus began his public ministry, since no mention of him is made following Jesus' disappearance in Jerusalem at the age of twelve. If, in fact, Joseph is dead, Jesus would hold the position of patriarch for the family, which makes the whole scene highly charged from the family's perspective. In considering these things, it is clear, that Jesus did not lead an isolated life in which he was unfamiliar with the expectations that life brings. However, even in the midst of this potential conflict, he makes use of this situation for the purpose of advancing the good news of the kingdom.

While facing a situation where the Jewish leadership attacks his ministry with the charge of demon-possession (Mark 3:29), or his family tries to interrupt his work for the purpose of speaking with him. These challenges are not what Luke seeks to communicate from this account. In moving this family interaction until after the parable of the soils, Luke chooses not to mention the reason for their visit, nor does he present them in a way that would distinguish them as outsiders to his mission. He makes this passage's focus not about the opposition Jesus faced, but the establishing of true relationships from God's perspective, as revealed by his Christ. Without doubt, the importance of the family is a basic understanding in the biblical narrative. Jesus takes this common language of the family and utilizes this theme to drive home his message. Obedience to his teachings is not only the defining characteristic of those who are in relationship to him, but those who engage with him on these terms are to understand their connection to

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others in context of this family dynamic. That which begins with a familial relationship with God through Jesus the Messiah, grows into the building of a new spiritual family on the basis of this shared commitment to Christ.

THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY

And he was told, - The priority of the family is an accepted reality in this account to those gathered around Jesus. It did not matter whether it was the committed follower or the casual observer; all understood the privileges and priority associated with these relationships. The crowds surrounding Jesus left no way possible for his mother and brothers to approach him; however, word begins to circulate through the group of their desire to see him. In an earlier incident, a paralytic and his friends sought out Jesus. As they arrived at the house where Jesus was teaching, they too were on the outside looking in, yet they found no sympathy from those who filled the house. Forced to take drastic measures, they removed the tiles from the roof in order to make a way for the paralytic to be placed before Jesus. This was not the case for Jesus family. While unable to contact him directly, the message is told to Jesus, most likely after being filtered through many intermediaries. Luke's use of the phrase, "he was told" is quite a shift from this Gospel's consistent portrayal of Jesus as the one who proclaims and brings the good news. This seems less like information brought to Jesus' attention, and more like an accusation of neglect toward his family. Jesus has already shown that the message lands in various types of hearts, so the crowds that surround him contain those who will hear and respond to the message, but also those who do not have ears that hear. In the minds of some, the charge of mistreatment toward his family is being raised because of the basic belief of the family's importance.

This priority and privilege of the family finds its moorings in the Scriptures. In the beginning God establishes the family as the building blocks of his creation. Man, the pinnacle of his creation, was only deemed very good when God joined both man and woman together as one flesh for the purpose of filling the entire earth. Later God established his chosen people through the ancestral line of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In this familial structure God invited this people into a special relationship with him in which he would be their God. They would also be granted the special privileges of intimacy with him that no other people had ever experienced. Through the physical family of Abraham and his offspring God established the nation of Israel. For an Israelite, their connection to the nation was found specifically in their connection to their family and the family's connection to the patriarchs. Any willing disregard of the family was viewed as disassociating one's self from God by rejecting the nation he had chosen.

From this robust understanding of the importance of the family, Jesus establishes the foundational aspects of a true spiritual family and one's connection to God.

THE ESTABLISHING OF A SPIRITUAL FAMILY

But he answered them – In Jesus' response, he addresses not an individual, but the crowd as a whole. This appears to reveal a basic understanding of the situation for those gathered. They were aware, at least in part, of his family's inability to see him. Jesus uses this opportunity, not so much to address this situation, but to teach that true commitment brings one into a familial relationship with him. In this way, Jesus is establishing a new family defined on the basis of his revealed expectations. As discussed previously, the traditional family for this audience had not only relational importance, it also carried with it spiritual implications in a person's ability to access God through public worship and the sacrificial system. Jesus' statement changes everything, no longer is access to God gained through a link to his relatives, but is found exclusively through Jesus Christ. If the way to God is through his Christ, and Christ's family consists of those whose faith produces fruitful obedience to his teachings, then those who are unwilling to traverse this path stand outside of his family, and are thus, disconnected from God.

My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it - One's belonging to Jesus and this new spiritual clan involves nothing more or less than an obedience that yields fruit for harvesting. Connection to Jesus is no longer on the basis of family heritage, a cursory acknowledgment of his teachings, or a nominal commitment. Jesus is building a new family, one whose foundation is laid upon a correct hearing of his teachings with the goal of obedience. These individuals have priority to Jesus and are called to a deeper relationship with him. While the message initially meets the needs of our broken life, Jesus expects more. His call is for us to go deeper into relationship with him than we ever dreamed or dare consider. He wants us to be part of his family. Being the broken and hurting of the world, whose lives hurt and damaged others, Christ intervened and saved us. Now, as part of his family, we participate with him in helping others through extending the message of the gospel. While more is expected of us than we ever imagined, we find our hearts compelled, out of love for Christ, to give even more. By faith, we trust our obedience is not wasted, but used by the Lord to minister to others and ushers us into a deeper relationship with him.

Green, Joel B. (2010-04-19). The Gospel of Luke (The New International Commentary on the New Testament) (p. 322). Eerdmans Publishing Co