

## Family Concerns

During this recent Thanksgiving holiday season, we were blessed to have two of our beloved grandchildren spending some time with us. And we enjoyed them so very much. They both have such delightful and agreeable personalities, always loving and kind to their Mimi and Papa.

But with all of their sweet responses to their grandmother and me, we were also able to observe the beginnings of some sibling rivalry taking place between the two of them. And sadly, we know that as they get older, that sibling rivalry is likely to continue and to grow.

We know that to be true because, such rivalry is not at all a new behavior. It has been part of family life since the beginning of time. And while that rivalry can remain mild, it all too often becomes harsh and can seriously interfere with good family life. We have only to turn the pages of these scriptures and we can find all manner of sibling rivalry taking place, Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers, and on and on. And again, it is no different within the families of our day.

And also, one of the other differences that we see taking place within so many families in today's culture is that while many families here in the south are regular church goers, often we can clearly see that while some of those family members are truly sincere and devout in their relationship with the Lord, others in those same families are not.

And that may be so within some of your families. Sadly, it's so within my own family. And it grieves my heart each Sunday as my wife and I attend church, I know that some of our most beloved of family members are not doing the same.

As we read these scriptures, we can see that the Lord Jesus also suffered most all of the same kinds of sufferings that each of us experience and suffer. And this same sad reality that some of His family members did not believe in Him was one of His sufferings.

Listen to the words of our passage for today given in Luke chapter 8, beginning in verse 19.

<sup>19</sup>Then His mother and brothers came to Him, and could not approach Him because of the crowd. <sup>20</sup>And it was told Him by some, who said, "Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, desiring to see You."  
<sup>21</sup>But He answered and said to them, "My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it." (Luke 8:19-21)

Just before Jesus' mother and brothers arrived at this house where Jesus was meeting with these people, we are told in Mark chapter 3,

<sup>20</sup> Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. <sup>21</sup> When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind." (Mark 3:20-21)

The cost of being a Christian can sometimes be far greater, and be measured in ways that we would have never imagined when we first responded to the Lord Jesus for salvation.

I can't recall all of the thoughts that ran through my own mind during those days that God was drawing me to Christ. I only knew that something was very wrong in me and I knew that sin was somehow at the heart of it all. But I didn't know how to rid myself of that burden.

Mercifully, God's Spirit intervened and convinced me that crying out to Jesus was my only hope. And though that final moment of my salvation did not come easily or in a single moment as seems to happen with other people, that was what I did. I cried out to the Lord Jesus. And I did that for no less than three months, before the treasured peace of salvation finally began to take place.

But during all those months of suffering and crying out to Jesus, I don't believe that I was taking into account the real cost that my salvation would require of me. In my misery, I only knew that I needed the remedy that Jesus offered, else my sin would destroy me.

Let me hasten to say at this point that the scriptures are clear and true when they tell us that salvation is truly "free", a free gift of grace from God, and I did very little to gain it. Jesus did everything that would be required. He paid the full price, gave everything so that I might have eternal life with Him.

The only part of that initial transaction of salvation that is required of you and me is to believe on Him and to receive His forgiveness. And in doing that, we are saved, eternally saved.

But folks, as I have said so many times, that first moment of salvation is only the beginning. Soon after our taking those first steps of salvation, we find ourselves being urged on by God's Spirit, to continue to move on further and deeper into our relationship with Him.

We find that from its beginning, our salvation has other continuing dimensions to it, responsibilities that pull us on further and deeper into a next step of our salvation.

And it's then that we begin to encounter our most difficult of trials. Listen to the way God describes that part in Philippians 2. He tells us to

<sup>12</sup> . . . work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. <sup>13</sup>For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of *his* good pleasure.

(Philippians 2:12-13)

Here is when the price of our salvation begins to cost us something. And the deeper our souls become immersed within our faith, the greater that cost becomes. And unfortunately, we are often surprised by its strong demands.

For myself and my family, shortly after I was saved, I began to feel a compelling need within my soul to leave my very promising lucrative career as a banker to go into some form of full-time Christian ministry. Fortunately, my wife and family were in agreement with my desires and so we stepped out into ministry. But that is not always the case.

When Jesus chose to come and walk among us as a common man, many of the difficulties and demands of human existence became part of His daily life, and He too was required to pay some of the same costs.

Here in today's text, we see Jesus encountering the dynamics of family relationships, but recognizing also that He had to push on forward through the difficulties of it all.

Follow along again with me if you will. First from Mark chapter 3,

<sup>20</sup> Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. <sup>21</sup> When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind."  
(Mark 3:20-21)

And from Luke chapter 8.

<sup>19</sup>Then His mother and brothers came to Him, and could not approach Him because of the crowd. <sup>20</sup>And it was told Him *by some*, who said, "Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, desiring to see You."

<sup>21</sup>But He answered and said to them, "My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it." (Luke 8:19-21)

Note first here that Jesus was so pressed by the crowd that His mother and His brothers could not come near to Him. Those words folks, reveal a hidden truth to us. Dozens and dozens of people had gathered in and around that house to see and to hear the things that Jesus would say and do. And the simple fact that all those people were between Jesus and His family, meant that those people, many of them strangers, were more eager to see and to hear Jesus than were His own family members. Otherwise, His mother and His brothers would have been there first and sitting on the front row.

Why would this circumstance be taking place? Jesus answered that question in Mark chapter 6, when He said that

<sup>4</sup> . . . "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country, among his own relatives, and in his own house." (Mark 6:4)

One of my favorite preachers, John Piper, offers some thoughts about the probable family circumstance that Jesus lived within as He was growing up. Piper tells us,

I'll bet it was difficult to have Jesus for a brother.

First, Jesus would have been without equal in intellect and wisdom. He was astounding the rabbis in the temple by age 12 . A sinful, fallen, family member is one thing, but a perfect one would be a hard act to follow. Imagine having a perfect and gifted brother.

Piper goes on to say,

And also, Jesus' consistent and extraordinary moral character must have made him odd and unnerving to be around. His brothers and sisters would

have grown increasingly self-conscious around him, aware of their own sinful, self-obsessed motives and conduct, while seeing that Jesus didn't seem to exhibit any of those wrong behaviors. That surely would have been hard for them to have lived with.

Folks, while you and I can only imagine what it would have been like to grow up in a house with Jesus, these words of John Piper are probably true.

And we see here in the Book of Mark how even Jesus' mother, though she had once been visited by the Archangel Gabriel and had been told that her Son, Jesus, was the Son of God. And now here, in a moment of weakness she seemed to be struggling with doubts.

And the unbelief by Jesus' brothers seems to have continued, at least throughout most of Jesus' living years. In John chapter 7, we read,

<sup>2</sup>Now the Jews' Feast of Tabernacles was at hand. <sup>3</sup>His brothers therefore said to Him, "Depart from here and go into Judea, that Your disciples also may see the works that You are doing. <sup>4</sup>For no one does anything in secret while he himself seeks to be known openly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world." <sup>5</sup>For even His brothers did not believe in Him. (John 7:2-5)

Did you note those words in verse 5?

<sup>5</sup>For even His brothers did not believe in Him. (John 7:5)

In those words, we read where Jesus' family was advising Him to make Himself more well-known, both to His disciples and to the world. But recall one phenomenon that is repeated often throughout these gospels, and that is that Jesus always knew the thoughts of the people as they would come near Him. And here with His brothers, He knew that they did not truly believe in Him. Their motives were for other purposes. So, He refused to follow their advice and desires.

I do want to be careful in my thoughts and comments about Jesus' family and about their unbelief. I know very well that I might have probably been much like them had I lived in their family.

And no doubt, even in my own case, with some of my own family members, having known me from childhood, perhaps they too, at times, struggle as they

have seen and heard me in the pulpit. They know about my past and the wretched sinfulness that controlled my life those many years before I was saved. And they know, even now, about my continuing propensity to sin. So, I understand if they sit in the pews and sometimes wonder if the words I am saying are coming from the “mind of Christ” or coming out from my own mind.

And as Jesus’ brothers heard His response to their asking to see Him, they may have wondered if He was being disrespectful toward them and their mother when

<sup>21</sup>He answered and said to them, “My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it.” (Luke 8:19-21)

Folks, though these words might sound strange, the Lord Jesus would never have been disrespectful towards His mother. He is always perfectly Holy and righteous in everything He says and does. In the new role that He had taken on as Savior and Lord, the word “family” truly would have taken on a new meaning.

Yes, His mother and brothers would always be a part of His earthly family. But, in the salvation He was bringing into the world, Jesus was now adopting a new “family”, an “eternal family”. And only those who would accept and believe the gospel He preached would be a part of that new family. And that was a painful truth that Jesus had to accept about His siblings and His mother.

And that is also a painful truth that you and I will have to accept about our own families. No matter how dearly we love our earthly family, if they, our mother or father, our brothers or our sisters, our wife or our husband, our children, if they don’t believe and receive Christ as their Savior, they will not be a part of God’s “eternal family”, and they will not be with us in the Kingdom of God.

What a sorrowful reality that will surely be! And knowing that to be true, what must our response be? Our response must be one of steadfast love and mercy. And we must not form long-term opinions based on some immediate occurrences taking place. The moments we have in front of us are just a “snapshot” in time. And they don’t often reflect what someone will become later on.

And that was so with Jesus. Yes, His mother and His brothers might have had some doubt in those beginning years, some may have even been unbelievers all of the days of their lives. But we have firm evidence that at least some of them would come to believe in Him. Because praise be to God, we see in Acts

chapter 1 that Jesus' Mother and brothers were gathered with Jesus' disciples in the upper room in the beginning days of Pentecost.

And also, one of His brothers, James, the writer of the Book of James, came to believe in Him very devoutly. And James later became the leader of the Jerusalem church.

And folks, the same must be your and my earnest desire and goal for our own families, that our brothers and sisters in the flesh would also become brothers and sisters in Christ.

And it is of the utmost urgency that we begin to reach out to each of our family members today, else they may not be with us in the Kingdom of God. And what a heartbreaking thing that will be.

But how can we begin to reach out to them? How should we begin? Folks, we must begin first with our own relationship with Christ. If we don't have that in good order, it will be like the blind leading the blind. And that will never get our loved ones saved.

For ourselves, we can begin by asking the Lord to help us to love Him more and more. In Deuteronomy 6, we are told,

<sup>5</sup>You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. (Deuteronomy 6:5)

And then, we can go on from there, beginning with teaching and ministering to our immediate family members. Again, in Deuteronomy 6, we are told

<sup>6</sup>“And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. <sup>7</sup>You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. <sup>8</sup>You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. <sup>9</sup>You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:6-9)

Note in those words that we have a very special responsibility to our children, diligently training them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

And as husbands, we are told in Ephesians chapter 5 that we must always be ministering to our wives. There, God instructs us to

<sup>25</sup>Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, <sup>26</sup>that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word. (Ephesians 5:25-26)

All of these scriptures speak a clear and demanding instruction to you and me, that we are to have a deep, intentional and committed love for the Lord, and for all the things that He wants to take place in His beloved children's lives, yours and mine.

And He wants each of us to begin within our own soul, then reach out from there, into our family, and then on out into our community, and into all of the interactions and business dealings that we get involved in each day.

His truth must permeate and saturate everything that we are, everything that we say and everything we do. His truth must become our way of life.

And we need always to remember that God has a perfect plan for our loved ones, just as He has a plan for you and me. And as it was for some in Jesus' family, the plan for them may just be on a different timetable.

Regardless of the events and the sufferings that may come to us in our Christian experience, we really must continue to press on forward towards our upward calling in Christ Jesus.

Listen again to these words of Philippians 2, as we close.

<sup>12</sup> . . . work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. <sup>13</sup>For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of *his* good pleasure.  
(Philippians 2:12-13)

May we Pray.