

# God's Extended Family

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 17 January 2016

Preacher: Rev. Thomas Hinson

[ 0 : 0 0 ] Today's Old Testament lesson comes from the book of Isaiah, chapter 56, verses 3 through 8. Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord say, The Lord will surely separate me from his people.

And let not the eunuch say, Behold, I am a dry tree. For thus says the Lord, to the eunuchs who keep my Sabbath, who choose the things that please me and hold fast to my covenant, I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters.

I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off. And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord and to be his servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it and holds fast my covenant, these I will bring to my holy mountain and make them joyful in my house of prayer.

Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar. For my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. The Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, declares, I will gather yet others to him besides those already gathered.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Well, as I said at the beginning of the service, we're so glad that you are here, especially if this is your first Sunday with us.

[ 1 : 3 0 ] We want to do everything we can to make sure you feel welcome, and I trust that that has already happened to some extent. There will be an opportunity to hang around after the service if you'd like a chance to meet some people, to shake some hands, and to make some connections here before you head out.

Certainly, if I've not met you, I'd love the chance to do so. We started a series last week called Church, God's Family in the World.

And as the title would indicate, we are looking at these places in the Bible where we see very clearly that the church, God's people, is really meant to be thought of as a family.

That of all the images that are used to describe God's people, the image of family is perhaps the most helpful, the most comprehensive. It runs from the beginning to the end of Scripture.

And we're doing this for a lot of reasons. I mean, I think, first off, the idea of family or the topic of family is immediately evocative to us all. A lot of you went and traveled to see your family over the holidays not too long ago.

[ 2 : 4 0 ] Maybe you were freshly reminded both of the joy and also the struggle of family. Maybe some of you had no family to visit.

And maybe every time the concept of family comes up, you feel the ache of that absence. But certainly family and the idea of family is evocative to us all. But there's a deeper reason that we're talking about this.

And that is that I personally believe that the church, especially in the West, has largely lost sight of the fact that we're called to be a family.

Because we don't operate that way. And what I hope that we will see over the course of these few weeks of looking at this is that we are called to be a family in the deepest sense of the word.

And so last week we looked at this place where God promises a family. He comes to a man named Abram in Genesis 12 and he says, I see all the brokenness in the world.

[ 3 : 41 ] I see all the tragedy. I see all the injustice, all the heartbreak. And here's what I'm going to do about it. You know, people say, well, what's God's response to the suffering in the world? God says, here's what I'm going to do.

I'm going to build a family. It's going to be a new family, a new humanity. And through this family, all the families of the earth will be blessed. So that's what we saw last week.

And then this week, we're going to learn a little bit more about what this family's like. We're looking at Isaiah chapter 56, verses 3 through 8. And at this point in Isaiah, Isaiah's just talked in chapters 52 and 53 about this servant who's going to come, the servant of the Lord.

And he's going to suffer on behalf of the world and God's people. And then in chapters 54 and 55, Isaiah says that because of his suffering, God is going to pardon and forgive sin.

And that this grace is going to be open to all who come. Chapter 55. And so it could end right there. You know, Isaiah, forgiveness for everybody.

[ 4 : 44 ] End of the book. But it goes on. And chapter 56 begins to show us the so what. So now that this servant, whom the early church immediately recognized as Jesus, now that the servant has done this, so what?

What changes? And that's what chapter 56 is all about. As a result of the servant of the Lord coming and suffering, God's family in the world becomes unlike any other family.

And so we're going to see a couple of things about this family. First, we're going to see why we need a new family. And then second, we're going to see what's so new about God's family.

What makes it different? And then at the very end, there'll be a little word on how we join God's family. So why do we need a new family? What's so new about God's family? And then lastly, just a little bit on how we join God's family.

Let's pray. Lord, we do recognize that this is a topic fraught with emotion, fraught with struggle. It evokes specific memories. Lord, as we think about potentially the fragmentation, the division, the brokenness that we experience in our own families here, those of us with families, and also those of us who struggle because we don't have family, we feel alone in the world.

[ 6 : 04 ] May this speak to all of us, Lord, and give us a kind of hope that can only be found in you. We pray this in your son's holy name. Amen. So the first question we want to ask is, why do we even need a new family?

Why would this be good, relevant news for any of us here? The fact of family is this. Family is necessary. To some extent, family is necessary.

It was necessary to bring you into the world. And it's very important and very central to what it means to be human. But there's one Achilles heel in every family.

One weakness inherent to all families. And that is this, that families are by definition exclusive. By definition, families are exclusive.

What makes you family is that you share a unique family lineage, a unique bloodline, a unique DNA. And while in some ways you can marry into and be adopted and all of these things, there's still this sense that blood ties us together more closely than anything else in the world.

[ 7 : 21 ] And there's no way to get that DNA unless you're born in. There's no way to really, truly be family in the DNA sense of the word unless you're born into it.

And over the course of human history, what history has shown us, if anything, is that we have inherited a tendency to prefer people who are like us, to prefer people who are family, to prefer people who are similar, to prefer the closer kinship ties over people who are not.

We give preference to our family over anybody else. And most people in the world would say, as it should be. But by definition, family is exclusive. And that way of thinking had become entrenched in Israel.

They not only preferred personally Israelites to anyone else, but they had actually come to believe that God was the same way. That the family of Israel, the nation of Israel, occupied a special place in God's economy.

That they were uniquely blessed because they were Israelites, descendants of Abram. And so we have this place in Isaiah 56, where God addresses this very thing.

[ 8 : 40 ] It says this in verse 3, Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord say, The Lord will surely separate me from his people. And let not the eunuch say, Behold, I am a dry tree.

So here we have two groups of people, two categories, who under the old covenant, the old standard of relationship between God's people and God.

According to the old covenant, these are people who were not allowed into the temple. They were not allowed into the presence of God. They were not allowed to have fellowship with God's people. They were excluded from the family of God.

They were on the outside. And I want to look at each just in a little more detail to help you understand this. First of all, we have this category of foreigners. We need to understand that originally God, as we said a moment ago, God came to Abram and said, Here's my plan.

I'm going to make out of you a family and a nation. And through your family, all the families of the earth are going to be blessed. So it was important for a while to make sure that Abraham's family remained distinct so that it would be clearly seen when God fulfilled his promise.

[ 9 : 55 ] If the family became diffuse and ceased to be a family, how could we ever see whether or not God fulfilled his promise? And yet, we see this progression.

Abraham and Sarah miraculously get pregnant. They have kids, and they have kids, and they have kids, and eventually this becomes a huge family. Abraham, a small nation. And so naturally, by Isaiah's time, many Israelites had come to believe that they were somehow favored by God because they were related to Abraham, were sons of Abraham.

So their racial identity had become an idol. Right? You ask a Jew in Isaiah's day, What is your hope of salvation? What's your hope of fellowship with God?

Well, you have to be born an Israelite. You have to be of the right race. It's salvation through race. And if you're not, well, tough luck. And still today, this doesn't exist in the same form today, but still today, I would say that the church, God's people, our world, our society in general, is deeply divided by race.

As we all know, I don't have to make that case for you. We're reminded of it again and again and again in the news. We're reminded of it when we look around this room. Deeply divided by race.

[ 11 : 14 ] Here in D.C. there are white churches and African-American churches and Hispanic churches and Korean churches. Because of our tendency to want to be around people who look and act like we do.

And there's been a tendency all through the history of the church to assume that God must be with you more. That God must prefer your kind of worship music more.

That God must be more glorified by your culture of worship than anyone else. That God, the way you talk about God, that you must have it more right.

Now, we don't say this, but many of us think it. On some deep level. So that's foreigners. But also, it goes on, and it doesn't just address people who are of other races.

It addresses eunuchs. Let not the eunuchs say, behold, I am a dry tree. Now, eunuch in the Bible is a complicated category. It's a very broad category. It can refer to any number of situations.

[ 12 : 17 ] In the ancient Near East, you don't have a free market society. Right? You have the entire political and economic sphere was governed largely by kings and emperors.

Who had, you know, it was monarchy. And many of these rulers had harems. And one of the ways that you could, if you were just an average guy, and you wanted to climb the ranks and have success in your career, one of the ways that you could really put yourself, you know, one of the things that would make your resume stand out from the pile, is if you were castrated.

Because if you castrate yourself, that king who has that harem, knows, well, I can trust this guy, not to fool around in the harem. And so eunuchs would get promoted.

They would be put in positions of great trust and great responsibility. They were given enormous amounts of power because these monarchs could trust them. And it was one of the only ways you could climb the ladder of success, was to castrate yourself.

But beyond that, there's also references, like Jesus says in Matthew 19, that there are other kinds of eunuchs. There are eunuchs who have been so from birth, he says. People who are either asexual, or they lack sexual attraction, or because of any number of sexual desires other than the opposite sex, they would never procreate.

[ 13 : 41 ] And what we need to see here is that in Isaiah, the focus is really on procreation. So when we hear the word eunuch, and we think about people, we think about any number of people who, for any number of reasons, will not go on to procreate.

And the reason that that's the focus is because in the ancient Near Eastern culture, I know I'm giving you a lot of context here, but it's really important to understand this. In this culture, family was everything. Now we can't imagine that really in the same way because of the society we live in.

We're much more individualistic. But in this society, if you had a family, if you had kids, if you had a lot of kids, and you could pass on the family name and the family land, that was everything.

That was all of your hope. To not have a family, to not have kids, to be barren, to be unmarried, to be a widow, was a death sentence.

A death sentence. To not have a family was a death sentence. You were a nobody. You were worse than a nobody. So let's think about how this would apply today.

[ 14 : 50 ] I mean, luckily today, castration isn't as necessary for career success and ascension. Luckily, that's not really required for most jobs.

But here in D.C., here in D.C., we still have plenty of people who have so prioritized career and success that they have forsaken family.

They're not castrated, but they're people who have basically said, I can either choose to invest in a family and finding somebody and getting married, or I can invest in my career, and I choose my career.

And that's a very viable choice today. More and more and more people are making that choice. And they get older and older and older, and at some point, their ability to get married, their ability to have kids is gone, and they're married to their career.

So this happens a lot. Also, some of us are here and we're single, and maybe we want to get married, but for whatever reason, it hasn't happened. You just haven't found the right person.

[ 15 : 55 ] It just hasn't worked out. And though many people who are single who want to get married will end up getting married probably one day, there will probably be some of us who don't.

And we're looking at life as a single, unmarried person. So there's also some people who have been married, but you got divorced.

And so because you got divorced, that's the reality that you face, and you may not ever get remarried. Some of us are married. Some of us are married and we really want to have kids, but we struggle with infertility.

And no matter what you do, no matter how hard you try, no matter what methodology you employ, no matter how much you research it, for whatever reason, doctors don't fully understand it. You just aren't able to get pregnant.

Now I bring all these things up, and you do a list like this, and I want to recognize each one of these things is a source of great pain and great struggle. Great pain and great struggle in our church.

[ 17 : 00 ] These are very relevant issues in our community right now. So whether you've forsaken these things because of your career, or you haven't been able to get married and you want to, or you were married but divorced, or you're unable to have children, they're all categories of people who would in some way fit what Isaiah's talking about.

Because here's the thing. Even though our culture is very individualistic, I'll make a contention here. You can feel free to disagree with me. This is an observation.

Even though we're individualistic, I think that paradoxically, we still have a high idolatry of the nuclear family. I think they both coexist in our culture, and it's a weird paradox. But we still have a kind of paradoxical idolatry of the ideal of getting married and having kids.

It's as though the only valid way to grow up is to get married and have kids. I don't know if that resonates with you at all, but I know that at least in the conservative church world, this is very much encouraged, this way of thinking.

Not overtly, I think largely unintentionally. But in the conservative church, Christians have perpetuated this. They've put the vision of traditional family kind of up on this pedestal.

[ 18 : 31 ] And it said, here's this ideal, and they've defended it from onslaught, from all sides, right? And what this does unintentionally is it sends a message. It says, the only valid way to become a grown-up is to get married and have kids.

But, unless you're marriageable and fertile, this is not for you. And so then the question becomes, well, what is there for me?

Silence. Well, I don't know. You can join our singles ministry. So if you're single or divorced, or you're married but you're infertile, or you're a gay or lesbian person or transgender person who's chosen to remain unmarried, or you're an orphan, you're a widow, if you diverge in any way from the ideal, then you're made to feel somehow incomplete, like a second-class citizen, like there's really not a place for you here, like you're somehow less than.

So this is why God, from the beginning, promised to establish an entirely new kind of family. This is why the concept of nuclear family, as good as it is, is not good enough.

Because there are way too many people in the world for whom that's not going to be a reality. That's a huge need right here in this city, right here in our congregation. So that leads us to the second question, what's so new about God's family?

[ 20 : 05 ] And I just want to read you this. Remember, in light of the fact that the servant of the Lord has come, in light of the fact that Jesus has come, here's what God says. To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbath, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant.

In other words, to those who bind themselves to the Lord and say, your way is my way, I trust you, I want to belong to you. To those people, I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters.

I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off. So in other words, you're worried about not having kids? In my house, in my family, in the family of God, you're going to have so many kids, you're not going to know what to do with them.

You're worried about your name not being passed to the next generation? I will give you a name and a monument greater than sons and daughters. Whatever blessing you think that you might have through a nuclear family, you're going to find so much more in the family of God.

And then he goes on and says, and the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord and be his servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it and holds fast my covenant, these I will bring to my holy mountain and make them joyful in my house of prayer.

[ 21 : 20 ] So what's he saying here? Jesus came to establish a new family. And it's a family that unlike nuclear families is radically inclusive in a way that no other family on earth could be.

And you see this regarding foreigners, regarding racial division. Regarding racial division, this is why when Jesus came, one of the first things he did, and he did this multiple times, in John's gospel, he does it early, in the other gospels, he does it later in his ministry, and what that means is he probably did it multiple times.

He goes straight to the temple in Jerusalem, and he goes into the area called the Court of the Gentiles, where foreigners were allowed to come. You couldn't come in the temple, but you could come to the Court of the Gentiles.

It had been filled with money lenders and vendors and animal sellers, and so the Gentiles couldn't get in to pray. And so Jesus comes and he kicks all those people out, and what does he do?

He quotes this passage. For it is written, my house shall be a prayer, a house of prayer for all people. In other words, he's blatantly accusing them of racism.

[ 22 : 26 ] He's saying, you're racist. You've forgotten what you're about. You've forgotten that this is meant to be for everybody, not just you, but a global family. Let not the foreigners say, I am a second-class citizen in God's family.

And the early Christians got this, and it's so beautiful when you see how the early church lived this out. I've said this before, but one of my favorite illustrations of this is the story of Antioch, which is the place where Christians were first called Christians, and it was a derogatory term.

But in the city of Antioch, when they built Antioch, they didn't just build walls around the city, but they built large walls to separate all of the ethnic groups from one another. And so there were at least 18 distinct walled-off sectors of the city.

So life was completely divided along racial and ethnic lines. Now, if you looked at a map of D.C., now we don't have physical walls, but you could probably draw some pretty strong lines, and you'd see the same thing.

And guess what? Until the Christian gospel came, that was the way it was. But when the Christian gospel hit Antioch, what the Christians began to do, because they recognized that the purpose of the family of God was to be a family inclusive of all people, they began to climb over the walls.

- [ 23 : 52 ] And they began to share the good news of Jesus with everybody. And so that's why in that great place in Acts, when we see the leaders, the leaders who represent the church in Antioch, it's leaders from all different races, all different backgrounds, who represented the leadership of the church in Antioch.

And you know, this is especially important to remember on this weekend, Martin Luther King weekend of all weekends, and to recognize how much work there is still to do. So there was an overcoming of racial division because God's family was never meant to be limited to one race, one ethnicity, one culture, one country.

All of the rhetoric about America being God's kind of chosen Christian nation, it completely loses sight of this. But then he goes on and it talks about all the people who for various reasons don't have a nuclear family or a spouse or they're not going to have kids of their own.

It says, let not the eunuch say I'm a dry tree. So it's saying this, to all of us who are single or who are infertile or who are divorced or who have lost our parents, for whatever reason we don't have a nuclear family, God is saying this, that even the best family in the world is only a shadow of what the family of God is and is becoming and will be.

Even the best family in the world is only a shadow, a preview of what God's family is going to be in the world. The family, the church, is our family.

- [ 25 : 27 ] The reality of the church is this, everybody around you who's a part of the church, this is your family. So all of the people who are older than you, those are your mothers and your fathers.

They took this literally. All of the people who are younger than you, those are your children. You didn't know you had so many children. Why do you think every week we pray for our children together?

Have you ever thought about what we pray? We pray together for our children and then we pray for ourselves that we would be able to raise them knowing the Lord and loving the Lord because we recognize that we share in the responsibility for raising our kids.

So when my five-year-old is dancing up here, for those of you who can see him, you know, everybody should be thinking, I wonder if he should be doing that, right? Not just me.

But I think it's great. I love to see him dance. But we should all have a sense of responsibility over one another's kids. The people who are your same age, those are your brothers and sisters.

- [ 26 : 36 ] You have many, many, many brothers and sisters. Everybody in here, if you keep the Sabbath, in other words, if you have put your life in God's hands in Jesus Christ, we are family.

And again, the early church got this and it radically changed their lives. You know, Rodney Stark, the sociologist, historian, researched the early church and he says, this is one of the main reasons the church grew so quickly in Rome.

It's because they took in and cared for widows and orphans and eunuchs and slaves, people who didn't have a family. The Christians said, we will be your family. Right? So they would say to widows, you don't have to remarry unless you want to because we will be family for you.

They said to the orphans, we will be your mothers and your fathers. You know, they said to the eunuchs, here you're going to have more children than you know what to do with. And they believed it and they lived it out.

Christian households were full of people who were not just biological family, but people who had been taken in and adopted and become a part of their household. This is a vision for what the church needs to be today.

[ 27 : 46 ] It's a commitment to rethinking what it means to be family. See, most of us think, I have a family and I go to church. This is saying, no, no, no, no, no. The church is your family.

That is the source, that is the locus of your primary loyalty if you're a Christian, is to the Christian community. Now, if you have a family, that's great, but that's a part of a larger thing.

And that's why it's so amazing when you see guys like Stanley Hauerwas talking about how radically this redefined the concept of family. He says, the thing that made Christianity unique among all the traditional religions is that this is the only place where you see singleness and marriage as two equally viable vocations.

No longer is marriage necessary. No longer is it the only vision for a way to be an adult in the world. Then all of a sudden you have singleness and marriage and they both represent something about God and they both represent something about the Christian community and they're both necessary.

And in fact, a lot of the early writers, the church fathers would say that singleness was preferable to marriage for all of these reasons because they recognized that in the church they had gained a family that is unimaginably large and inclusive more than you could ever dream of.

[ 29 : 03 ] There's a great example of this in C.S. Lewis' The Great Divorce. If you haven't read The Great Divorce, it's a shorter book. It's essentially about a field trip that some people take from hell to heaven and it essentially becomes a kind of character study and you see a series of characters excuse me you see a set of characters who are all kind of on the edge of a choice between the self-absorption of hell and the joyful loss of self found in heaven.

And so the narrator is witnessing all of these people and also seeing these heavenly beings. And at one point the narrator turns and sees this beautiful procession. You know, think of the greatest bridal procession you've ever seen.

It's this glorious procession with singing and dancing and all of this and down either side of the street streams of children. Boys on one side, girls on the other, these children dancing.

And at the very center of it all is this beautiful woman who's surrounded by attendants. And so he says, he asks who she is and his guide says this, his guide says, it's someone you'll never have heard of.

Her name on earth was Sarah Smith and she lived at Golders Green. And the narrator says, well she seems to be a person of particular importance.

[ 30 : 30 ] And the narrator says, aye, she is one of the great ones. You've heard that fame in this country and fame on earth are two quite different things. So the narrator says, and who are all these young men and women on either side?

Who are all these children? And the guide responds, they're her sons and daughters. And he says, well she must have had a very large family, sir. And listen to what the guide says, every young man or boy that met her became her son.

Even if it was only the boy that brought the meat to her back door, every girl that met her was like her daughter. And the narrator still not fully getting it says, isn't that a bit hard on their own parents?



No, says the guide. There are those that steal other people's children. But her motherhood was of a different kind. Those on whom it fell went back to their natural parents loving them more.

And here at the end, here is the summation, the explanation of how this is possible. The abundance of life she has in Christ from the father flows over into them.

[ 31 : 41 ] So what is he saying here? That there's this woman who nobody had heard of, who likely didn't even have kids. We meet her husband, but we hear no mention of them having children. Her husband is a little wispy ghost who ends up choosing hell rather than choosing to remain with her in heaven.

And, but we never hear of any earthly kids, and yet in the heavenly reality, which is more real than the earthly reality. That's one of the things about this book, that the heavenly reality is more real.

She has countless sons and daughters. Why? Because of the way she loved them. They weren't biologically her own children, but the love of Christ flowed through her into them and joined them to her as a family, a family that is more real than her nuclear family.

We see her husband disappearing, withering, into this hellish existence. But we see her as this beautiful, radiant queen attended by children for miles and miles and miles.

Let not the eunuch say I'm a dry tree. See, though Jesus Christ has established, or through Jesus Christ, God has established an entirely new kind of family. So the question becomes, how do we become a part of this family?

[ 32 : 56 ] And I said this would be very quick because we're out of time. I knew we would be out of time. So how do we join God's family? I'm not going to get into all kinds of bullet points. I just want to tell you a story. I want to remind us as we close here of the story that we see in Acts chapter 8.

You heard it read a little while ago. I just want to remind you of the story. Here's how you become a part of this family. You read Acts chapter 8 and you see the story of this Ethiopian eunuch. Double whammy, he's a foreigner and he's a eunuch.

And we see that he's this great high official in the Ethiopian court. He's over all the money. Israel. And he's obviously been reading and hearing about this God of Israel.

And he's been studying and so he wants to come and see is there anything that this God has to offer me? Is there anything that this God has that's relevant to me? And if you know anything about that journey, it was incredibly long, incredibly perilous, incredibly dangerous, incredibly expensive.

Travels all the way to Jerusalem. What would have happened when he got to the temple? Can't come in. Sorry. So Acts 8 tells us that he's returning from this trip and he's reading in Isaiah.

[ 34 : 08 ] He's reading in the chapter in around the 50s. No chapter numbers back then, but he's reading around the 50s where we are in Isaiah. Why is he reading Isaiah? Because he's trying to figure out why they wouldn't let him in.

And he's reading it and he's reading about this suffering servant in chapters 52 and 53. And it says he's reading about this person and surely he's read a little bit later when it says, because of this servant, because of what the servant has done, let not the eunuch say, I'm a dry tree.

I will give the eunuch a name and a monument. And so you can imagine him reading that, going back to the servant, reading that, going back to the servant, and wondering who in the world is this servant? And so Philip shows up and he says, do you understand what you're reading?

And he says, no I don't because I need somebody to explain it to me. And I almost think that's a veiled reference to the people in Jerusalem. I want to understand this. And they slam the door in my face. Who is this servant?

And he says, is it the prophet or is he talking about somebody else? And what does Philip do? And Philip began to share with him the good news of Jesus Christ. And what does the eunuch do at the end when he hears about Jesus?

[ 35 : 16 ] He sees water, maybe nothing more than a little puddle on the side of the road. And he says, well there's water. Baptize me right now. Now why does he say that?

Because of what it says in Isaiah 56. Let the eunuch who binds himself to me, who throws his lot in with me, who says I want your way to be my way, I want your people to be my people, I want your name to be my name, to replace my name.

Let not that person say, behold I'm a dry tree, I will give you a monument better than sons and daughters, an everlasting name. And he says, I want that, I need that, and Jesus can give that to me, and what does it require of me?

It requires that I repent, that I accept his forgiveness, and that I'm baptized. Why? Because baptism is what marks our entry into the family of God.

It's baptism. baptism. That's the distinguishing family characteristic. And so he says, I want that right now. So what we see here is this, the new family of God is not a family of blood, it's a family of faith.

[ 36 : 16 ] And what this story shows us here is this profound truth that we're going to continue to unpack over the next several weeks, that in God's family, water is thicker than blood. Water is thicker than blood.

God, let's pray. Our Father, we're talking about things that are big and maybe even seemingly abstract.

May we not hear this and simply think it's something curious to ponder, but rather, Lord, I pray that whatever of this is from you, that it would strike us, that it would strike our hearts, that we would look at our own houses, our own families, our own friendships, that we would look, those of us who are a part of this church, that we would look at the way we think about this community and that this would kindle and inspire our imaginations to wonder what would it look like if we lived this out?

What might our church, what might our community, our friendships, how might our houses look different if this became more real to us? We pray this in your son's holy name.

Amen. Amen.