

Jesus' Family

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[0 : 0 0] We're all here today because to one extent or another we have a connection with each other. For most of us, the connection we have, the friendships, the relationships we have with everyone else here have grown out of our faith in Jesus Christ. And so for most of us, our connection with Jesus comes first. We've got this in common. We're Christians. We're followers and disciples of the Lord Jesus. We heard the message of His cross and resurrection, and we believed. And now we're not merely connected to Him by faith, but to every other Christian.

The point is this. Ultimately, what connects us isn't a shared DNA, but a shared devotion to Jesus Christ. Not a shared genetic code, but a shared faith in Him. Our connection to Jesus Christ comes first.

Our relationship to Christ is primary. Our passage here in Luke chapter 8 verses 19 through 21 fires a shot across the bow of anyone who thinks that just because they were brought up in a Christian country by Christian parents in a Christian home doing Christian things like coming to church, that they are automatically connected to Jesus. This passage points the way to a living relationship with Jesus Christ, not through blood, but through belief, not through DNA, but through doing His will.

This passage falls neatly into two sections. First, from verse 19 to 20, a natural connection with Christ, a natural connection with Christ where Jesus' mother and brothers want to meet with Jesus, but can't reach Him because of the crowds. And secondly, a spiritual connection with Jesus.

In verse 21, a spiritual connection with Jesus where He explains to us how we can get to know Him for ourselves. So, first of all then, from verse 19 through 20, a natural connection with Christ, a natural connection with Christ. Our passage begins with Jesus' mother and His brothers trying to reach Jesus but being unable to because of the size of the thronging crowds surrounding Him on every side.

[2 : 4 6] Mary, Jesus' mother, wants to see her boy, and His brothers want to see Him also. Perhaps they came because they were concerned that Jesus was overdoing it. Perhaps they came because they were anxious that He was attracting the wrong kind of attention and was in danger. Perhaps they just came because they wanted to spend time with Him. We shouldn't read bad motives into their intention to come, for after all, their connection with Him is family and blood. Mothers don't stop being mothers just because their children reach adulthood. And sometimes the relationships between brothers and sisters becomes stronger in adulthood than it was in childhood. They say that blood's thicker than water, and ultimately, that's why Mary and Jesus' brothers were there. They wanted to spend time with Jesus and talk to Him because they loved Him.

Biblical commentators are divided on the identity of Jesus' brothers. Many Christians don't believe that these so-called Jesus' brothers were real brothers. They propose that they were His cousins. Likewise, many Christians do not believe that after Jesus, Mary had any other children and hold to what's called her perpetual virginity. This isn't a cardinal article of our faith, and to be fair to them, there are biblical arguments why these so-called brothers may have been cousins. For example, why did Jesus on the cross commit the fortunes of His mother Mary to the apostle John and not to one of His brothers? In Mark chapter 6, verse 3, the Pharisees ask concerning Jesus, is this not the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James and Joseph and Judas and Simon, are not His sisters here with us? On the balance of evidence, we believe that these were real brothers of Christ. History points to a very strange incident dating from the early second century where two Syrian farmers. These two Syrian farmers were brothers and they were described as being the grand nephews of, and I quote, him who is called Jesus the Christ.

So, Jesus did have physical relatives, a flesh and blood mother, brothers and sisters who shared His DNA, nephews and nieces who at least partly shared His genetics. I know this sounds a bit fanciful, but this is one reason that we in this church are so passionate about Christian mission to Jewish people, for at least some of them are genetic descendants of our Lord. At a recent funeral, someone who knew my father very well said to me, Colin, you look just like your dad.

As I get older, I know it's true. We even share the same mannerisms like how we hold a cup of tea and how we fold our hands behind our back when we walk. As we share the gospel with our Jewish neighbors and friends, let's look into, let's see the Lord's face in their faces, and for the sake of Jesus, love them.

But is it enough to share the DNA and blood of our Lord? Certainly not for those Jewish people who do not believe in Him, and certainly not for the Jewish people of Jesus' day. The Jews looked to Him as the Jewish Messiah who would liberate them from the yoke of the Romans because He was one of them. And yet throughout Jesus' public ministry, He condemns their leaders, He calls them hypocrites, He breaks their social codes and transgresses their culture by, as we have seen, raising the dignity of woman and breaking the rabbinic Sabbath laws.

[7 : 15] As time goes on, we'll see Him increasingly reaching out to Gentiles. The early church to whom Luke is writing was filled with both Jews and Gentiles, with those who partially shared Jesus' DNA and those who did not.

And Luke, who is writing this gospel, is passionately concerned that the early church understand that what matters is not a natural connection with Jesus Christ through His blood, but a spiritual connection with Jesus Christ through belief in Him as Lord and Savior, a connection which is offered to both Jew and Gentile, irrespective of background or blood.

So I had my DNA tested a couple of years ago, and I discovered that I have both Pictish and Scandinavian origins. But just because I've got Pictish and Scandinavian origins doesn't mean to say I'm going to go out and buy a Viking helmet and start reading monasteries, or I'm going to start carving strange images into stones and wear blue paint on my face. Just because the Jewish people of Jesus' day shared His genetics didn't mean that they followed Him and became His disciples.

Both Absalom and Solomon, David's sons, shared King David's DNA, but one was faithful to God, Solomon, and the other was not, Absalom. A natural connection with Jesus Christ was not enough for them then, and it's not enough now. Being brought up in a Christian country does not make us Christians.

This is a mistake many of us make, and it's a mistake particularly many of our Islamic neighbors make. Most of our Islamic neighbors think of us as a Christian country, so when they see the depravity on our TV screens and the dishonesty of our politicians, they write Christianity off as a fraud.

[9 : 31] But this passage teaches us that just because we come from a Christian country doesn't make us Christians. Likewise, just because many of us were brought up in Christian homes doesn't make us Christians. The great American Christian singer-songwriter Keith Green used to say, going to McDonald's doesn't make me a hamburger. Likewise, just because many of us were brought up by Christian parents, it doesn't make us Christians. There are incredible advantages in being brought up by Christians who love us and point us both by the words they say and the example they set to Jesus, yet we may as readily reject Jesus as accept Him. Furthermore, just because we do Christian things like go to church doesn't make us Christians. What matters isn't our DNA or anything physical.

What matters is the state of our hearts before God. Now, none of this is to say that family was unimportant to Jesus and that it should be unimportant to us. Jesus loved His mother and His brothers.

He made careful provision for His mother's care on the cross, and we believe from church tradition that John the apostle to whom Jesus committed Mary loved her like His own mother and took her with Him to Ephesus where He became the bishop, and she then died. Likewise, this passage does not tell us that Jesus did not meet with His mothers and brothers after He'd stopped speaking to the crowds.

In all likelihood, He did, and they were able to share their concerns with Him. After His resurrection, we learn that He appeared to both His mother and His brothers, and we believe that at least two of His physical brothers, James and Jude, went on to write New Testament letters.

When we become Christians, our families become more important to us, not less. We become more devoted to loving our wives like Christ has loved His church. We become more diligent in setting our children a good example and loving them from the heart. No one should ever use their Christian faith as an excuse to abandon their families. If anything, becoming a Christian should make us better husbands, better wives, better parents, better children than we were before.

[12 : 00] But the point remains, does it not, that what matters is the nature of our connection to Jesus. A natural connection is not enough, for if most of those who shared the DNA of our Lord did not believe in Him and therefore stand condemned before God, how much greater shall be our condemnation?

Being brought up in a Christian country, or coming from a Christian culture, by Christian parents, doing Christian things, it's not enough. A natural connection with Jesus is insufficient for salvation.

Are there any here today who believe that a natural connection is enough, who would argue that because their parents were Christians and they were brought up in a Christian home, that it automatically assures them salvation? Luke would spare us the shock of the day of judgment, when the question Christ our Lord shall ask us shall not be, do you share my blood, but do you believe in me?

How are we connected to Jesus today? By DNA or by devotion? By blood or by belief? By family? Or by faith? A natural connection with Christ. It's not enough. Second, a spiritual connection with Christ, verse 21, a spiritual connection with Christ. When we are reading the gospel of Luke, we should not automatically assume that he records the life of Christ in a strictly chronological order. Rather, he often arranges his material according to topics. In particular, Luke has arranged the first three passages in Luke chapter 8 according to the topic of hearing the Word of God.

We have the sword and the seed, the message of which is that we have to be careful how we hear the Word of God. We have the light under the bowl, the message of which is that we must not harden our hearts against the gospel. And we have this passage, the message of which is that our connection with Jesus, our relationship with Him, is all about how we hear and obey the Word of God.

[14 : 32] That is Jesus' clear teaching in verse 1, where He uses the occasion of His physical family coming to visit Him to say, my mother and brothers are those who hear the Word of God and do it.

In other words, the fundamental and ultimate connection anyone has with Jesus Christ must be spiritual, not natural. Our connection with Him is about hearing the Word of God and doing it, not hereditary, but hearing, not DNA, but doing. Luke's mentor, the apostle Paul, will go on to say in Romans 2, 28 through 29, for no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, not a circumcision outward and physical, but a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart.

What matters isn't our background, it's our belief. What matters isn't our DNA, it's our hearts. What matters isn't our family, it's our faith in Jesus. These grand nephews of Jesus, these two Syrian farmers, they themselves had to hear the Word of God and believe it to enjoy Christian salvation, just as we do. So did Mary's mother, so did Jesus' mother, Mary, so did Jesus' brothers. Never once, as we read through the letters of James and Jude in the New Testament, do these physical brothers of Christ treat their physical connection to Jesus as being of primary importance or even conferring upon the many advantage. Rather, both James and Jude point to the ultimacy of faith in Christ as being what saved them. We want to know what connects us to Jesus.

It is hearing the Word of God and doing the Word of God. Perhaps we're from Christian homes, and today's been rather challenging to us. We're rather offended when we hear that going to McDonald's doesn't make us hamburgers. The truth is that ultimately, to be connected to Jesus Christ, we ourselves need to hear the Word of God and to do it. Or perhaps we're not from Christian homes, don't have Christian families, and we think that this excludes us from being followers and disciples of Jesus. Again, ultimately, what connects us to Jesus isn't where we've come from, but what we do with the Word that's preached and the offer of salvation Jesus makes to us.

No one is included in salvation because of their background, and no one is excluded from salvation because of their background. What matters according to Jesus in this verse is hearing the Word of God and doing it. Now, we know that in the world of Jesus' day, hearing was more than mere listening.

[17 : 58] We've already seen this from the previous two passages. Whereas in our world, hearing is used as a synonym for listening and therefore concerns just our ears, in Jesus' world, hearing was far more.

It concerns not merely our reception of the message, but how it affects our minds, our hearts, and our wills. It is entirely possible, as so many of us know to our cost, to listen to the Bible, but not to hear the message, for it not to affect how we think, how we feel, what we do. We're listening, but we're not heeding. When the gospel's preached, it doesn't warm our hearts. It doesn't fill our minds with joy.

It doesn't change our wills. It doesn't convict us of our sin. It doesn't drive us to Christ for forgiveness and strengthen our resolve to pursue holiness of life and love for God and for others.

We're listening, but we're not hearing. The writer to the Hebrews discusses this issue in context of the Israelites under Moses as they wandered through the wilderness on their way from Egypt to Canaan. It's clear that the majority of those Israelites didn't really believe in God's promise of a land of their own. They were always grumbling, complaining, and falling away from God.

I love the way in which the King James Version puts it in Hebrews 4 verse 2. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them. But the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.

[19 : 55] The reason the wandering Israelites did not believe what God had promised to them was because their hearing was not mixed with faith. The question for us is this, are we mixing the Word of God to which we're exposed even today with faith? Let me put it in even starker terms.

Do we want to believe what we're hearing today? Do we want to believe that Jesus died on the cross to take away our sins and to give us eternal life? Do we want the good news of Jesus Christ? That might not be fully fledged, faith. It's mustard seed faith. It's mustard seed faith that we want to believe. It's that desire to believe that separates fulsome, healthy hearing from empty, vain listening. Many listen to the Word of God being preached but do not want to hear because it challenges their lifestyle or their core beliefs about themselves or the world in which we live. It requires too much from them.

But Jesus tells us here that what connects us to Him is our willingness and readiness to both hear and believe what He's saying. Many of the Jews of Jesus' day and most today do not want to believe that He is the Messiah and that through Him and His death and resurrection, God is offering salvation to anyone who puts their faith in Him. Anyone who puts their faith in Him, Jew or Gentile, so they refuse to hear.

Let that never be said of any of us. Surely our presence here is at least a sign that we want to believe in Jesus. That is the first step to genuine connection with Him. It provides the perfect environment for authentic faith.

It's the good ground upon which the seed of His Word can germinate and grow. It provides the light that will not hide under a bowl but meditate upon and allow to give the light of the gospel to everything else in our lives.

[22 : 25] But Jesus does not stop with hearing. He adds that our connection to Him is secured not merely by our hearing but also by our doing of the Word of God.

Here we have the ultimate test of whether we have merely been listening to the gospel compared to whether we truly believe it and it's changed our hearts forever.

We'll do it. We'll obey it. We'll practice it. Jesus talked in the parable of the sower and the seed about the seed of the good soil in which the seed of the gospel is planted and which by patient endurance produces a fruitful crop, many times that which was sown.

Erred in the gospel, Jesus spoke about those fruits which faith in the gospel produces within us. Forgiveness of our sins, forgiveness of the sins of others rather, a refusal to judge others on mere externals, showing mercy to the helpless, a resolution to turn our back on any kind of unholiness or hypocrisy and so on.

It is not enough that we merely listen and hear the Word of God. We must do it also. At the conclusion to His Sermon on the Plain in Luke 6, Jesus tells a story about two men who built houses.

[23 : 48] One laid its foundation on a rock. The other laid no foundation for his house. When the storm came, the house with its foundation on the rock stood firm.

The other, having no foundation, was swept away and destroyed. And we read in Luke 6, 47 that Jesus begins this section by saying, everyone who comes to Me and hears My Word and does them... In other words, hearing is not enough.

It only lays half a foundation. It is doing what Jesus commands, which founds our house on the rock. Jesus' brother James, who overheard Jesus' words here in Luke 8, 21, would later write in James 1, 22, James 1, 22, Be doers of the Word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

Heeding and doing. The two wings of the airplane of Christian faith and discipleship. Remember how in the Great Commission of Jesus, He commands us to go and make disciples of all nations.

And He says, Teach them to observe or do all that I've commanded you. Teach them to do it. A true disciple of Jesus does what she's commanded by Jesus.

[25 : 14] She isn't merely here, she does. She's a doer of the Word, not just a listener. She loves others because that's what Jesus commands her to do.

She forgives others because that's what Jesus commands her to do. She remains pure because that's what Jesus commands her to do.

She shows mercy to the helpless because that's what Jesus commands her to do. yet I suggest that one of the reasons the church in Scotland is in such a sorry state is because up and down our land people are neither hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ being preached nor when they do are they putting it into practice in their lives.

Of course we believe in salvation by grace alone, in Christ alone, through faith alone, but listen carefully to what Jesus says here in Luke 8 21, our connection to Jesus, the basis of our relationship to Him is through hearing the word of the gospel and putting it into practice in our lives, however difficult that might be for us. So this brings us back full circle to where we began in the question, how can I have a living connection, a relationship with Jesus Christ?

How can I have a relationship with Jesus? We've established that it's not about our DNA or our background, it's about our faith, our hearing, and our doing of the word of God. Our faith in Jesus, listening to the word of Jesus, and doing the word of Jesus. And so I end with the invitation of Jesus where He commands us in Mark 1 15. The time is fulfilled. The kingdom of God is at hand.

[27 : 12] Repent and believe the gospel. Believe it, hear it, obey it. This is the living Christ's call to every one of us here today. Let us pray. Our God and Father, we thank you for the plain teaching of your word that no one is included in salvation because of their background, and no one is excluded from salvation because of their background. Lord, we recognize that naturally not one of us has the capacity to believe in you, that we are darkened by our sin and dead in transgression.

Make us alive, O Lord. Open our ears and hearts. Let your light shine into our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge, the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, that we might both believe and do the word of the gospel. I'm going to remember, O Lord, at this time, mission to Jewish people all over the world, those who bear the DNA and the genetic code of our Lord Jesus Himself.

We pray that you would bless every missionary who is dedicated to reaching out to those Jewish people and bringing them to know their own Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. We ask these things in His name. Amen.