

Matthew 12:46-50

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[0:00] Well, good morning. Today we open to Matthew chapter 12. And I want to ask you, how would you expect the perfect man to respond to a surprise visit from his mother?

! With flowers and a hug? With joy and gladness? With warm words and a quick smile? How about, wait, who is my family? These other people are my family.

Our Lord is happy to make us uncomfortable. In the first century Israel, where it was a society that treasured family, this scene would have been incredible.

What are we to make of it? The first thing I think we need to see is that, while shocking, it isn't a denunciation of his own family. He didn't disown them. He's not diminishing or dampening family responsibilities.

In fact, in chapter 15, he's going to reaffirm the fifth commandment to honor our father and our mother. In fact, as he hangs dying on the cross, Christ is going to provide and assign a guardian to his mother in his absence.

[1:20] And his apostles will continue preaching about the importance of family. And I suspect that after saying this, Matthew doesn't record it for us, but it's my, I bet, that he stood up and went outside and gave his mom a hug.

Jesus is not disowning his family, but he is pushing the boundaries. He's stretching us to look at family in a different light.

And he's increasing the weight of our spiritual family. A bond with Christ and with his church. And I think that that key verse is verse 50.

One that shows how all of this fits together. He says, whoever does the will of my father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother. So what is the will of his father in heaven?

I think that American evangelicals tend to follow the Roman Catholic mystics and use the term the will of God in one very specific way.

[2:32] We tend to ask questions like, what's God's will for my life today? What college does God want me to go to? What career does he want me to choose?

Who is the one that God wants me to marry? And now that's not an illegitimate way to talk about God's will. But I don't think that's what Jesus has in mind here in this passage.

We absolutely should ask those questions. And it's appropriate to call that the will of God. But in the context of Matthew 12 and 13, Jesus has been battling, really, in the public square, the Pharisees. Not over where they went to school or what profession they chose. He's been saying things like, it is from the heart that the mouth speaks. You're not in accord with the will of God for your heart.

He's been saying, you reject the will of God by rejecting his Messiah. He's been saying, you've missed the will of God because you've turned the Sabbath rest into a burden.

[3:37] And so the will of God in this context isn't about your life plan. We're talking about the will of God the way Jesus has been explaining it in terms of embracing and following the Lord's Messiah.

So that's what I think this passage is about. But before we get to what this passage is about, I actually want to talk a little bit about what it's not about. If that makes sense. I want to pause and give some pastoral words to you about that first way that we talk about, the will of God, for two reasons.

First, I think sometimes evangelicals kind of get trapped in finding the will of God for my life and our life choices. And that can lead to a kind of bondage.

And I want to free you from that into something better. And secondly, when we think about God's sovereignty over our lives, we're going to better appreciate who he is and what he has done for us. And my hope is that we will end up in worship. So, some Christians want to know God's will almost in the way of like turn-by-turn directions, unlike your GPS, for every decision.

[4:46] And now, that's actually a wonderful impulse. We should all remember that we live before the face of God in every moment.

We all should pray without ceasing. Like, I want that for you. I really do. Where I think we get tripped up in is when we start expecting or demanding that God give us specific instruction for specific moments.

Some Christian authors and teachers portray the Christian life as a constant looking to God, to hear from God in every choice, as if he were going to give us turn-by-turn directions.

Literally, some authors say that we should ask God which way we should, which path to work we should take each day. And again, I want to applaud the impulse to submit our whole lives to God. And God is absolutely capable of instructing us in any moment. I know two people, at least, who have had dreams that the Lord has given them about substantial moments in their lives.

[5:49] And I get the desire to want to be sure that every step is exactly what the Lord told me to do. That's comforting. But it's also exhausting.

And it's actually not what he ever promised to give us. And it's not actually a picture of Christian maturity. Let me give you two analogies.

First, the turn-by-turn directions. If you move to a new place and you rely on your GPS to get you everywhere, a year out, how well do you know your community? You don't know how to get anywhere, right?

You've made it places, but you still don't know how the community is connected together. You don't know how to get there yourself. That's not a mature understanding of your community.

Cadets, your swab summer experience, it was hard, right? But it was also very simple, right? You just did what you were told, right?

[6:52] Compare that to being a cadre. You're nearly as tired as the swabs, but now you're responsible for a group of teenagers who have been conditioned to turn their brains off, right?

You need to balance their schedule, their training, their hygiene, everything. Which is the picture of maturity? The swab that has every step instructed for them, or the cadre who must have a deep understanding of the principles of the Academy's mission?

Turn-by-turn directions, the swab's orders, moment-by-moment instruction. Even if the Bible told us that God did offer that, that's not maturity. What does the Bible want for us?

Wisdom. A heart reshaped by the Holy Spirit to desire holy things. Discernment. Formed Christian character and maturity.

And that is what God does promise. If any of you lacks wisdom, James says, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach.

[8:11] And so mature disciples do the will of God for their own lives from the heart. Because he shapes our desires and our judgment to look like his.

He shapes us to initiate God-honoring life from our own volition. Not robots, not slaves, not swabs. But as Jesus says in this passage, his brothers and his sisters.

We act like him because we're family. And that's beautiful. He promises to mature us and develop a Christ-like heart within us. And give us freedom.

You have the freedom in Christ to choose how you will honor God with your life and your decisions. Which God-honoring choice will you make?

You have the freedom to make that choice. Which wise path will you follow? You have freedom. Which morally formed goals will you pursue?

[9:17] In Christ, you have the freedom to decide. Just one example. 1 Corinthians 7.39 shows us that in the case of choosing a spouse, so long as they're a Christian, we may marry whomever we wish.

Assuming they agree to it. I hope that if you feel pressure to hear from the Lord on every decision, that this liberates you from that burden.

But if we don't get, moment by moment, instruction for the Lord, might we be ending up outside the will of God? That's a scary thought.

What if we married the wrong person? What if this is really the second best life for you? The second best spouse must also mean the second best kids.

Should we tell them that? You can see how quickly the pressure to hear from the Lord can kind of send us off the rails, right? Friends, if you could thwart God's purposes, that's not God.

[10:25] If our choices could supersede His, that's not God. If our plans could derail His, that's not God.

We can't thwart His plans, not because we're robots without free will, but because His ways are so much higher than our own. He superintends and governs all things in and through our free choices. He is utterly sovereign, completely independent. He does not need us at all, which at first might sound cold and calloused, but if you think about it, God's total independence and His sovereignty make the gospel even more beautiful.

And that's the second reason why I want to think about this idea of God's will for my life. He is sovereign. He does not need us.

He certainly does not need us to enact His plans. And He did not need to rescue. He did not need to save. He certainly did not need a cross.

[11:37] Nothing compelled Him to save us, let alone make us His family, as this passage says. Except that He loves. In love, He freely chose to rescue and redeem.

The magnitude of His lovers found in this, our God needs nothing. The Father, Son, and Spirit are utterly, eternally complete and reign in perfect sovereignty over all things and yet chose the cross. That God chose the cross. We can't thwart His plans. Which means that if He went to the cross, which He did, going to the cross was His freely chosen plan.

I've heard it said, the gospel is the only story where the hero dies for the villain. To which this passage today adds, the gospel is the only story where the hero dies for the villain and makes the villain family.

How great is our God? Okay, that's a long discussion about the will of God and the way Jesus didn't mean in this passage. I spent time there because, well, you'll run into books and teachers who advocate for that turn-by-turn decision, direction approach to the Christian life.

[13:17] And I hope that the encouragement towards Christian maturity gives you freedom from the bondage that that sometimes can put on us, the burden there. And I hope that you aren't worried about somehow missing the will of God or ruining His plans.

His sovereignty is unassailable. And I hope that seeing His complete sovereignty makes you wonder at the cross even more. This God who needs nothing who cannot be thwarted chose to love you all the way to Calvary.

And He chose to make you family. So what did Jesus mean when He said, whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother?

Two things. First, if you think way back to chapter 4, the first thing that Jesus says publicly in the book of Matthew is this, and it is the central theme of His ministry.

Matthew 4, 17, repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Over and over. That's the theme, right? That He says to us that He is here to call sinners to repentance.

[14:39] The Gospel of John records another conversation that Matthew does it, and He makes it even more explicit. John 6, 28. They said to Him, What must we do to be doing the works of God?

Jesus answered them, The work of God. This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent. What is, verse 50, the will of the Father in heaven?

That you would repent of your sins and believe in Jesus Christ, whom He sent to rescue you. That you would turn from sin and self and entrust yourself to the Savior.

That you would rest in His death, rejoice in His resurrection, and hope in His coming. What happens when we do that?

The Lord pardons all our sins and receives us into His family and begins that process of spiritual maturity that we were just talking about, the growth in holiness and wisdom.

[15:49] And that leads to the second way that Jesus talks about the will of the Father. Because He also talks about it in the ideas of obedience to His commands. We must remember that when we talk about obedience to God's commands, that we can't obey our way into His family.

Just like in our human families, nobody earns their adoption. But when we place our trust in Christ and rely entirely on His substitutionary death and His resurrection, He causes us to be born again and new birth necessarily begins the process of new life.

And that's why Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount and told us what we ought to do as His children. Now, this is a huge point.

And as we move into chapter 13, where Jesus is going to tell several spiritual stories, which are called parables, the very first one is going to focus on this point. So we're about to have a whole sermon on it.

So I'm going to put a bookmark here and we're going to come back to it in just a little while. For the rest of our time today, I want to focus on the fact here that Jesus calls those who do the Father's will of trusting and following Him that they get to be called the family of God.

[17:27] When we talk about the good news of the gospel, we focus a lot on forgiveness and our pardon from sin. And that's with good reason, right? At the beginning of Matthew's gospel, the angel announced Christ's upcoming birth with these words, Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

She will bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. That's the beginning of his ministry.

Here, the end of his ministry, the climax. Jesus explained the symbol of the Lord's Supper, which we're about to celebrate together, with these words. He took a cup and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them saying, drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

And so the clear purpose of Christ's ministry is to rescue us from beginning to end from sin. But it doesn't quite end there.

He doesn't just rescue people from the flames and then send them on their way. How sad would that be? Our pardon, which the Bible calls justification, justification, is the first of the many blessings of the gospel.

[18:50] We are saved out of sin and death and saved into blessings like justification, assurance, peace, joy, perseverance, adoption, communion with God, bold assurance to approach our Father's thrones, the indwelling of his Holy Spirit to comfort us, to convict us, and to prompt us into prayer and to illumine his Holy Word to us and to grow our desires into God for all these ways.

Right? So the gospel is big and broad. It is more than just you have been forgiven. That's the entry point into the many manifold blessings of the gospel. And that's why Jesus calls us his brothers and sisters.

Because the salvation he brings isn't just from hellfire. It's into his family. 1 Peter 2, you are a chosen people for his own possession that you may proclaim the excellencies who called you out of darkness into his marvelous life.

Once you were not a people but now you are God's people. So when we think and speak about the gospel, whether that's in our prayers or in our worship or in our own Bible study or in sharing our faith with someone who does not yet know Christ, let's not stop the story of the good news at its first step.

We're forgiven our sins so that a whole universe of blessing is opened up to us. That's the gospel. And that might be the very thing that helps someone kind of connect the dots to Jesus.

[20:38] We certainly can't lose the message of justification. There's no entrance into any of the blessings of the gospel without the cross of Christ. We might find that a friend or a neighbor is more able to connect with a conversation about Jesus and the relational aspects of our salvation with him.

And Jesus says, whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother. And now I can't read these verses and not highlight what Christ is saying to women.

See, the report comes to him that Jesus' mother and brothers wanted to see him. And he replies by naming his spiritual mothers and brothers and sisters.

So in a society, first century society, that devalued women, the natural move would have been to remove mothers and simply say, whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother.

Period. Instead, he kept mother and added sister. Now, in today's climate, the revolutionary claim that the Bible makes about women is that they're not interchangeable with men.

[21:55] But in the Roman world, Jesus' words, which emphasize the equality and value of women, that's what was revolutionary. In a world that didn't value sisters, Jesus did.

And he went out of his way to say to women, women, I love you and I'm here to make you family, my family, just as much as men. It doesn't matter what the world says about your value.

I formed you on purpose. You are so valuable to me that I will go to the cross for you. Everyone is welcome.

That's what he says, whoever does the will of my Father. Everyone is invited to do the will of the Father, to believe in the Son and inherit eternal life. No matter your gender, your social position, your criminal record, whoever, everyone is invited to find their place in his family.

Which, if you are Christ's brothers and sisters, and so am I, what does that make us? Galatians 6.10.

[23:15] So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone and especially to those who are of the household of faith. We are a home together.

Home is where the heart is and if your heart is hid with Christ, you will find your home in the church. In this church, in church, we're a family, which at Shoreline means you need to sign up to hold some babies.

And more than that, it means that the many one another commands of Scripture to show hospitality to one another, to bear one another's burdens, to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep, Jesus said in Matthew 19.29, everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands for my namesake that has joined the church will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life.

He means that we will find our family in the church. Now, if the church doesn't feel like family to you, why is that?

Well, there are two parties here, so it could be with one or the other. It could be you or the church. Let's start with you. That wasn't a joke.

[24:48] I don't know why that was... The first question, if church doesn't feel like family, is are you born again? If you don't love Christ, you won't love his church.

And this will seem like a very silly gathering on Sunday mornings, and very silly people who are wasting their time and efforts and money on something very vain. Second question, have you invested in the church?

You are born again of Christ by trusting in his death and resurrection, but you're not invested in the church? Well, I mean, what do you expect, right? There's a Twitter account called The Wrestling Pastor, which tweets stupid things that people say to pastors about church and then clips of wrestlers body slamming people, basically.

That's what the pastor in his mind wants to do to that person. Totally holy and edifying. One tweet goes like this, hey pastor, I show up late, leave early, never volunteer, refuse to attend a small group, but I don't understand why I can't seem to get plugged in.

And it's paired with like a sweet body slam. Humor and violence aside, if you don't throw yourself into the life of the church, don't expect to benefit from the community of faith.

[26:16] And don't mistake your perception for reality. If the church of the risen Lord Jesus hasn't been powerful in your life, that's not because it lacks power.

Now, that's you. What about the church? The church is filled with who? I mean, I'm one of the members of this church, but I'm not the church, right? The church is this body of believers.

And maybe this body of believers is not investing in you. If the people around you aren't living as the family they ought to be, it is your duty as a member of that family to help them towards it. And that requires some of the wisdom we talked about earlier. It might be simply as easy as saying, well, could you do better at this?

But it might also mean showing them the family love of Christ as an example so that they experience it firsthand and begin to want to pour into the church more themselves.

[27:32] And so the church, if you see your church family not investing in the way you think that Christ desires we do, friends, that's your ministry and that's your opportunity to pour into the life of your church family.

Now what does that look like in real life? How about your community group? Let's say, is it a real community? Do you genuinely serve and are you served by your brothers and sisters in Christ? Do you get involved in each other's struggles, give each other counsel and encouragement and support, or does everything, you know, stay kind of at the surface level? You could say, hey, I'd like to encourage everybody to be more open so that the depth of our community increases.

That's one approach. Another approach is, hey, I think we aren't really digging into the hard issues that would change our lives, so I'll start by being vulnerable about this issue that I'm struggling with and I need help in.

Another reason that you may not feel like church is family is a wound. The idea that church is family might be hard to hear if you or a loved one has been harmed at church.

[29:02] That ought not happen, but it is an evil that does exist in our sinful world. And so if you have been hurt or abused in the name of Christ or in a place that bears his name, I want to just say, I am so sorry.

The church is the place where you should feel most loved. But it's hard to feel love if you've been sinned against there. And friends, the Lord hates it when his household becomes a place of abuse. He saves his strongest rebuke and judgment for wolves in sheep's clothing because he is a jealous husband who passionately loves his church. And so as a pastor of this church family, we promise to minister Christ's comforts to you.

we promise not to blame you for being sinned against. We promise to protect you from further harm as best we are able. We want to show you the love of Christ as a family.

Another way you might feel disconnected from the life of a church, that church is not family, is if you're a cadet. Church life is especially hard for you. our congregation has less access to you and you to us than other members of the congregation.

[30:37] You aren't as free to participate in the life of our church with as much flexibility as those who don't live in Chase Hall. And so from the congregation, we want to commend to you, well, that we do try to come to you.

Some of our church family are involved in Officers Christian Fellowship. You can come to us. Some of our families are sponsor families, both officially and unofficially. We host the Cadet Bible Study that's going through the Psalms.

If you want to find opportunities to connect to this church family, please come talk to us and we want to help you or fill out a connection card that says, I want to get more connected to this church family because I need that.

And from you, that's our church to you, and from you to our church, your presence in the gathered worship matters. It's encouraging to us and to you.

So will you prioritize the gathered worship of the church? Being a Christian without the church is like having Thanksgiving dinner by yourself. Can you eat the turkey and the stuffing alone?

[31:42] Sure. But you're robbing yourself of one of the primary joys. And some of you do get involved in the life of this church, right?

I wasn't kidding when I said being part of Shoreline family often means holding babies. Some of you are actually children's ministers. That's awesome. Also, be on the lookout about other ways that we can connect, get involved, and form relationships.

And that's your ministry too. The last thing I want to talk about are church life and church family together. There's a book that just came out literally this week.

We pre-ordered it and it came in on Thursday. It's called *Dark Clouds Deep Mercy, Discovering the Grace of Lament*. I ordered a bunch of copies because the endorsements from people I know and trust were incredible.

This is a book about hard things and going to God with our grief and our pain and our struggles and our confusion.

[32:49] If this is something you need, there are copies in the back. When it came in, I haven't actually read the whole book yet, but I flipped right to the very last chapter, which has to do with lamenting as a community.

I just want to read you a few things. He's talking here about small groups, what we have as community groups. I've seen groups stumble their way through the grief of others, and perhaps this is an experience you will resonate with.

For example, during prayer request time in a small group, a couple shares a painful issue they are walking through. Their candid, heartfelt pain creates an awkward heaviness.

What should happen next? How do you prevent Jim from offering his well-meaning but shallow advice on how to fix the issue? Do you simply move on to take the next request?

How do you really care for hurting people if they open up? I think the answer is lament. Imagine what would happen if the leader seized the moment, opened up a lament psalm, and invited the group to echo the words of the psalmist on behalf of their friends.

[34:05] Consider the kind of grace that could be applied as brothers and sisters in Christ entered into one another's pain while collectively carrying their sorrow to the Lord.

He goes on to give an example of what that looks like in a couple that found out that one of them had a terminal diagnosis of cancer.

A few months before Nancy passed away, I met with Glenn, Nancy, and their small group. We talked about their journey together and what it meant for Glenn and Nancy to have close friends enter their pain.

The beauty and strength I observed that night provided yet another example of the power and value of lament. Glenn and Nancy were hurting and scared of the unknown before them, but they were finding a pathway to trust the Lord and his word.

Lamenting together in their small group was key by prayerfully pouring out their sorrows and their hopes to the Lord together. Not retreating or silencing the struggle, they found hope, strength, and mercy in the dark clouds of cancer.

[35:20] Friends, that is the power and the beauty of living together as the sons and daughters of our heavenly Father. Let's pray to him.

Lord, thank you that you sent your Son to die on a cross to rescue us from our sins.

And even more, we thank you that he did not stop there, but knit together with him, we are brothers and sisters of the risen Lord.

Lord. Will you help us to dive into our family fellowship with you? And Lord, will you help us to dive into our family fellowship as a church?

We pray these things in Christ's name who made this possible. Amen.