

Discipleship and Family Ties

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Preacher: Daniel Ralph

[0 : 00] is something which I can guarantee without any shadow of a doubt affects us all. Some sermons, of course, are not always time appropriate for all of us in a congregation.

Some of them are time appropriate for other people. In other words, I can think who that would really apply to, but it's not really applying to me right now. The danger of that is that you don't do what Ephesians effectively tells you to do, and that is always be prepared for that day to come. So far, we've seen that perseverance effectively starts with God. If God doesn't continue to do what he does, then we couldn't continue to follow him faithfully.

If God stopped, the natural follow-on from that is that we would stop. If God stopped being faithful, we have no hope of being faithful. If God stopped being merciful and graceful, we have no way of putting a right foot forward. We're in deep trouble. The very fact that we will not perish is nothing to do with something that we can keep ourselves from, but it has everything to do with what God is doing. So perseverance starts with God. God perseveres. But then we moved on to other issues, issues in the church, Hebrews 10, about, you know, not neglecting to meet together and the reasons, and those who deliberately continue to sin don't have God to look forward to, but only the judgment of God to look forward to. Then last week we saw how denying to be a disciple is effectively denying Jesus, and it's quite a sobering thought that I can actually deny Jesus by denying my own discipleship, by deciding that I want to follow Jesus today or not. Now, mixed in with all of that, we've realized that persevering in your faith or continuing faithfully in the faith is not defined by the fact that you believe. Remember, the demons believe, and that's not the type of company you want to keep. Neither is it defined purely by serving God, because the Pharisees and the Scribes, they all served God, and in fact, they did a far better job of it than perhaps any of us ever could.

So again, persevering in the faith cannot be defined in that way. It's included, serving and believing is included, but it means way, way more than that. Well, hopefully from our readings this evening, you've got at least a hint of where we might be going, and that is perseverance and family ties. Someone once said to me, you can't choose who your family is going to be. Well, that's only true if you're the son of the daughter. You can choose whether or not to have, you know, children yourself. I mean, you could make that choice. So you can sort of put a full stop on it if you like. But tonight, we're going to address the issue of persevering in the faith and family ties.

[3 : 37] The reason for that is because their family ties can either be the greatest source of encouragement to our discipleship, or it can be the greatest tension, even the worst kind of tension, to us continuing in the faith faithfully. Family can either make it really easy to follow Jesus, or really hard to follow Jesus. Now, here's some background you need to know. When the gospel message began to spread, you need to bear in mind that people were already married, and that people already had children. And so as the gospel made its way out into Philippi, as it made its way out into Ephesus, as it's made its way out into Corinth, the gospel was then coming into homes and into workplace places. And while everyone was faced with the same message of repent and believe and follow the Lord Jesus Christ, not everyone did. The result was that back in the home, you would then have a wife who believed, but a husband who didn't. Or you might have a husband who believed, but a wife who didn't.

Or you might have children who believed, but parents who didn't. Now, that was because the family already existed. The marriage already existed. You already had husbands and wives and parents and children. You already had that. And then the gospel comes in, and it doesn't create peace, but creates division. It's the very thing that Jesus said would happen, that the gospel actually creates division.

I know an elderly couple that have been married for donkey's years. Neither of them were saved. They got married, and no sooner after they got married, she came to faith. They'd been married for 60-odd years or whatever. She became so poorly, she couldn't take herself to church anymore. She's now in like her 80s. So her husband takes her. The first time that he's been in church, and it was whole, you imagine the prayers that would have went up, and how long that wife has probably prayed and waited for that to happen. And here he is now in church, and you're here in the to salvation in his life. And that's exactly what Paul says in Corinth, that if you find yourself in the situation where the gospel has come into your home, and you as the wife has got saved and your husband hasn't, you're not allowed to walk out on him. You are to stay with him to preserve a witness of Christ that you may win him to the Lord Jesus Christ. And God's grace is in that because Jesus said himself how difficult it'll be to live in an environment where there is such division. He says, you know, there'll be five in the household and two against three or one against two or whatever it may be.

In my wider family, I live in that type of household. And I'm pretty sure that you in either your immediate family or wider family live in that same type of household. And it is difficult, and you go around, and your brother says, here, I'll do a barbecue, and we'll get all the family together. And you get there, and you've got nothing to talk about. And so everything gets directed to sort of, you know, the weather, or how the children are doing, or what are they doing at school, and stuff like that. Because this is just, and you realize, you know what, I grew up with you in the same house for over, for over 20 years. And we've got nothing to speak about. And you're my brother. So I know what it feels like. I don't live in, I don't actually live in the home anymore where that's happening. But, you know, I'm not unfamiliar with it at all.

[7 : 58] So you can understand how the gospel is not something that brings peace everywhere. But it is something that brings persecution. It is something that can bring suffering. It's something that can bring a huge amount of tension, some really quite odd tensions within the family unit.

And so here we have Jesus, and the gospel explaining it quite clearly into the New Testament, where we are to persevere in our faith, but we're to persevere in our faith in the ties that bind, that are full of tension, our family ties. The outside world, and by that I mean everyone who's not a believer, if you take the Romans in particular at Corinth, the Romans had a couple of historians, one called Tacitus. And this is something that he said. He believed that Christians who refused to worship any other god than their god, what we would call the triune god of scripture, were a danger to family life and to children's education and a commitment to their own family. That was a historian around the same time as Paul, effectively saying that that is what a Christian is, that they're a danger to family life, that they're a danger to Christians' children's education, that they are a danger to a commitment to their own family. Obviously, he's not reading the part where Paul says, you're to stay with your family, you're to, you know, you're not reading that. He seems to be quite selective in what he chooses to read. But historian after historian does not view Christianity in the light of the gospel, but only in the light of people putting Jesus first, even before their own family, which is right. It is right, but it will never under, it will never be understood by the world. It will never be understood by the world. You're always going to be accused of loving someone else more than them. But that is what it is to persevere in the faith faithfully.

Let me give you an illustration. Sunday school has only been around for about, what, 150 years, maybe a bit more? What did the church do before they had Sunday school?

Right, but think about it this way, and I've been in this situation myself. You run a holiday Bible club, or you run a Sunday school, or you run something, and the children come in, and they hear the gospel, and they get converted. Or at least they start talking about Jesus more when they get home. And suddenly there's a knock on your door.

[10 : 52] Who do you think you are? What do you think you're doing? Who gave you the right to influence my children in this way? See, we think we're doing the right thing when we have children come off Clovenstone Estate into the church, and we teach them the gospel, and we think, that's great, the gospel will get back to their homes. Well, it might, but what might come back the other way? I'm not saying that we should stop proclaiming the gospel to whoever who walks through the door. What I'm saying is we need to be mindful of the ties that bind, and how Christianity doesn't just cause peace, but it actually can cause deep divisions within the immediate family, and the reaction to the church.

Repercussions are not always favorable when people start talking about Jesus in the home. Will you stop going on about that? Why do you think Jesus is the answer? Why do you think trust is the answer? Why do you think faith is the answer? Can you just, listen, when we have our meal tonight, can you just not talk about your faith? You know, when your brother starts on you, can you just, can you just not answer him? You ever had that? You ever had people say to you, can you just stop being a Christian for one night? Well, they're not effectively saying that, but that's what they're saying. It's difficult. So what we see here in these passages is that leaving family in terms of make them from being number one to actually being second is a legitimate call, and it's legitimate because Jesus is the Son of God. [12:45] We're going to look at this in three short parts. The first is this. Jesus calls people. He says, come and follow me.

And not everyone does come and follow Jesus. The second is this, that when Jesus says, come and follow me, he literally puts his hand up and says, have you counted the cost? He wants you to think about the cost that it's going to have on your family. He wants you to think about the cost that it's going to have on your own life. He wants you to think about the ramifications. Because Jesus doesn't want you to follow and then turn back, and he doesn't want you to follow half-heartedly.

So he basically says, oh, you want to follow? Well, before you do, before you go any further, let me just lay down a few ground rules. And then thirdly, the purpose to all of it.

In Matthew 8, where we started, two men want to follow Jesus. But Jesus seems to think that neither of them are ready. The first man says, well, Jesus, I will follow you wherever you go.

[14:00] And Jesus sort of looks at him. It appears, he sort of says to him, well, you know, have you really thought this through? You seem to be very quick in wanting to follow me, but you don't seem to have counted the cost.

So Jesus says to him, Mark 8, verse 20, foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head. In other words, you sure you want to follow me?

I mean, this is what it would mean. It would mean that you would be following someone that, you know, doesn't have a home. You know, are you sure you're ready for that type of following?

So instead of Jesus saying what we might say as, oh, great, do you know what? We had someone new in church last night. And do you know what? The fact that, oh, great, we just hope that they come back.

We just want them to follow so much. Jesus isn't quite so eager as much as he is clear.

[15:08] Of course, he wants people to repent and believe and follow him. But he wants them to count the cost. A second man then comes to him. But this man first wants to go and bury his father.

And Jesus says, verse 22, follow me and leave the dead to bury their own dead. And so now we begin to see the cost of following Jesus or at least the cost of following Jesus that it has on family. Imagine you're that man. Imagine you're that man. And you don't go to your father's funeral because now you're following Jesus. Imagine how you will be seen in your family.

Imagine for a moment how people will interpret you putting Jesus first and not your own father who's being buried. And yet that is the very thing that Jesus is asking for.

I don't see any other way of reading that. Other than Jesus is saying, are you ready? Let's go. Let's go now. And so the first one is quick, but not really counting the cost.

[16:20] The second one is he wants to, but he doesn't see the urgency of following Jesus. I can do it in a week's time after the funeral is over. No, it's. So Jesus, in one sense, is saying, well, hold your horses.

In another sense, he says, right, let's go right now. There are other examples throughout the gospel where following Jesus affects family life and family ties.

And the reason why this happens is because following Jesus means that we put him first, even above our wife, our husband, our brother, our sister, our children.

Very, very difficult to explain that. Even more difficult. It's one thing to explain it to someone your own age, like your husband or your wife, or they're relatively within your own age.

It's much harder to explain it to children who've not got perhaps a better understanding that I'm putting Jesus first. And Jesus is not asking you to sort of give up on your family.

[17:32] He's not asking you to not be responsible towards your family. What he's asking for is that every other relationship when it comes to being with Jesus is now subordinate.

Every other relationship. If I don't love my wife, if I don't love God more than I love my wife, okay, my relationship with God is going to go wrong.

Okay? And my relationship with my wife is going to go wrong. But I just so happen to be married to someone who believes the same thing I do. But I did grow up in a home where that wasn't the case. Okay? And so I've seen it from a child's point of view where the mum believes and the father doesn't. And I've seen God's grace incredibly at work.

But I've seen it at work in some of the most high-level tensions, moments that you can possibly imagine. But God is definitely gracious.

[18 : 39] So God isn't saying, right, well, you know, just if you can't make good of it, just walk away. And he's not saying that. What he's saying is, you put me first. Okay? They're not going to like it.

But I will be with you always. Even to the end of the age. When Peter says in Luke verse 18, well, we've left everything and followed you.

We've left homes. We've left everything and followed you. Jesus says to him, no, you haven't. I mean, that's effectively what Jesus is saying, isn't it?

No, you haven't. You haven't left anything. Well, let me try and put it a slightly different way for you. What do you have that you're going to take with you when you go to glory? Did you know that when I go to glory, and if I go to glory on the same day as some of you go to glory, I will take you and you will take me, but I won't take some of my brothers.

And that's what Jesus is saying. Truly, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God.

[19 : 49] Who will not receive many times more in this time and in the age to come eternal life. He's effectively saying at that point, the moment you become a believer, you have a new home.

You have a new family. You have new family ties. That's your new family. That's your new community. There is a legitimacy of leaving the relationships that you have with others behind for a single relationship with Christ.

And when you have that relationship with Christ, you then have relationships with each other. In other words, we are family. We are the people of God. We will not leave each other behind because we belong to the same person.

But we do have to live in a world and with people who think we're mad. Who think that to put a relationship with Jesus Christ first is ridiculous.

And how dare you do it? Just a side note, but it's worth pointing out.

[21 : 11] I was out this morning, obviously, went into summer Sunday school, aware that Susan was going into crash. And that I was leaving one of my children in the church to listen to the message.

Never had a problem with that. Never do have a problem with that. But, of course, I also knew that there was communion coming out. So I instructed him, when communion comes, if you want to take it, you take it.

Sometimes we can be incredibly judgmental and not realize the damage we do by withholding the graces. If I said to you as I look at you tonight, I don't think you're a believer and you shouldn't take communion.

But it can be looked down on a child. Then what judgment are you making other than one of age? When we are a family, we are a family on one basis and one basis alone.

That is repentance and belief in the Lord Jesus Christ. Every family on earth wants their children to be their brothers and sisters in Christ.

[22 : 25] That's the dream. That's the dream. And that's the passion. But sometimes we want to draw the line of who is in and who is out with the graces of God.

And I think that that is a cost that we get terribly wrong. I mean, I wonder how many children have actually been put off from following Jesus because pastors have said to them, I don't think you're ready to get baptized yet.

And who made him God? Yes, there has to be a level of discernment, but there has to be an observation of repentance and belief.

What other qualification is there? So I think we need to think long and hard about these issues because I don't think a lot of us have got them right. What makes the family of God the family of God is have you repented and believed in the Lord Jesus Christ?

The cost then, secondly, is found here in Luke 12 where he says, I have come to cast fire on the earth. Would it not be already kindled?

[23 : 49] Lord, I have a baptism to be baptism with and how great my distress until it is accomplished. Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division.

For from now on, one house, there will be five divided, three against two, two against three. They will be divided, father against son, son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against mother-in-law, and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law. I think Jesus is reeling off a list, but you could put far more in there. But what's the point that Jesus is bringing out here? That is, that even in the family unit, Jesus is going to be divisive.

And the only thing that unites us to any other member in our family is not actually blood, but faith in Christ. Jesus understands the gospel will cause division in the family.

But at the same time, we are not to renege on our responsibilities to be a family member. When family members turn against each other because of Jesus, Jesus is saying, well, didn't I tell you that it would be that way?

[25 : 11] He's not saying, well, when it happens, you can go your own way. He's effectively saying, no, you stay in it. You know, Jesus is with us until the end of the age, and he's going to be there with us forever.

In Matthew 10, he says this, whoever loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves his son and daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Do you know, I can remember being a teenager, sort of wrestling with these things, and I was, you know, who does Jesus think that he is?

And there I am singing, Jesus is king, and I will extol him. I haven't got the faintest idea that Jesus is king and that Jesus is Lord.

I'm singing it, but it's not showing up. And so here I am now struggling with the fact that Jesus wants me to love him more than my brother, that Jesus wants me to love him more than my mother.

I find it really just who do you think you are? And that brings us to exactly who Jesus is. In other words, when we understand who it is that is calling us, that it is God the Son, that it is King Jesus, that it is the Lord of all, that it is the Savior, then it's not hard to understand why it is legitimate for him to say, put me first.

[26 : 47] That it's not unreasonable for Jesus to say, I should be first in your life before any other relationship. So the fact that division happens in the family because of the gospel is not something that is unusual, but actually something to be expected.

Because not all family members repent, some actually reject. And that is a really difficult environment to live in. But what you don't want to do is you want to create those kind of divisions beforehand.

Like determining. I can remember somebody saying to me, actually, not so long ago, but long enough for it to, for the soreness to wear off, saying that, you know, that when I was brought up in my home and I would say to my mom, mom, I think I'm a Christian, she would say to me, well, some will wait and see.

No. Okay. I will take you at your word. It's very easy for us to start determining the family of God and withholding communion, withholding baptism, until, you know, sort of we baptize them into the kingdom at the age of 50.

15. What are we doing? We're, we're getting it wrong, I feel. Whoever loves me first is the one who will follow me always, is what Jesus is saying.

[28 : 22] He is not saying that he is an agitator to a family unit. He is saying, however, that he is to be first in the family. And if I deny my discipleship within the family, then what am I doing?

I'm doing a Peter. And Jesus said to Peter, you'll deny me three times. And how did Peter deny Jesus three times? By saying that he denied Jesus? No. By denying that he was a disciple. By denying that he was in the garden with Jesus. By denying that he was a follower of Jesus. And Jesus says, you've denied me. In other words, it's really easy not to be a disciple in the environments where you're put on the spot.

Really easy. But it's not right. When you are faced with the question of, what do I do now? The family won't mind you following Jesus. As long as Jesus is second. When Christians were persecuted in the early church, they were not persecuted because they worshiped Jesus.

[29 : 34] They were persecuted because they did not worship Caesar. They only worshiped Jesus alone. Okay? No society has got a problem, it would appear, with Jesus being second.

And no family has a problem with Jesus being second. The only time suffering comes and persecution comes is when Jesus is first. that's when it comes.

When you start putting someone else before me, you're going to put Jesus before me, your own flesh and blood? That's when it comes.

Thirdly then, the purpose. I'm convinced that if we don't know who Jesus is, we're not going to be able to persevere in the faith faithfully.

Now, Jesus, remember, remains faithful even when we're not. Right? This is why we began with the perseverance of God. And perhaps we need to finish with the perseverance of God just to remind you that God is on your side all the time and that God is not angry at you when you fail.

[30 : 50] Okay? Sometimes we can get this complex. Do you know what? The way things are going lately, God must be, God must have it in for me. God's not got it in for you.

God's not, God's not like you. God's not like me. God, God doesn't treat me like I treat me. The trouble is, is I think God treats me like I, like I would want, you know.

You know, you have those heart lawyers, don't you, that when somebody sins against you, the heart lawyers jump up and they've got a fantastic case. I'm going to make you pay. I'm convinced then that if we don't know who Jesus is, that if we don't know that he's king, it's no good singing.

You're better off just stop singing it. That if you don't know that Jesus is, don't sing Jesus is Lord, don't sing that, just don't sing it. Because what will happen is that your life will ebb and flow.

Your faith will drift and even stop. Because the whole issue, as we saw in the video, is all about worship. Worship is putting Jesus first. Worship is behaving the way that we ought to.

[32 : 07] Worship is how the creation responds to the creator the right way all the time. Worship is simply just putting Jesus first.

When God sent Jesus to the world and he sent him to the woman at Samaria, I must go through Samaria, we find the reason. It's not because the woman at the well is seeking God, but actually because God is seeking people.

And God is seeking people who will worship him in spirit and in truth. And so the reason why mission exists is because worship doesn't. And the reason why worship doesn't is because people are sinful.

They turn to other gods, they turn to other idols, even if it is themselves. In other words, the world is full of people who do not place God first. In fact, they may not place him anywhere.

And worship, in a simple definition, is that God is first and everything else is second. that's when you know you're worshipping God.

[33 : 14] And so none of us actually worship God perfectly. But here's the thing. True worship will never ever seem right to an unbeliever.

It will never seem right. It will never look like the right thing to do. True worship sometimes doesn't even seem right to a Christian struggling in their faith. It is the first thing to go.

When you have children that go through Sunday school and then get to the end of Sunday school and they're not at church anymore, okay, the issue's not really much to do with the church. It's to do with God.

It's an issue of, there's no worship. God is not first. It's as simple as that. I have a great tension here because I have a great problem with some of the latter books of the Bible, especially regarding eldership.

I'll share it with you now because we're a fellowship. It's the one over what qualification makes an elder, a teaching elder like myself, qualified to be able to stand here.

[34 : 25] And one of them is the word faithful, children. Is it faithful or believing children? Meaning that if my children turn out to be unbelievers, okay, depending on how you read it, the neglected qualification as some call it, I'd have to stop being a pastor.

Oh, you're just taking the Bible a little bit too seriously there, Daniel. But what if that is what it means? So these issues are deep, real deep.

You know, they cut long and they cut hard. And so I'm convinced that unless worship exists, true worship, then we're all going to stop persevering in our faith.

We are going to drift. And the moment we struggle in our faith, the first thing to go, the first thing to disappear in a person's life when they're struggling in their faith or when they are drifting from Jesus

or even when they're turning their back on Jesus, the first thing, the first place for it to turn up is worship, prayer, fellowship with God, that's in devotional time with him, singing to him, bowing down to him, making everything else subordinate to him.

That's the first thing to go. And so what you begin to see in a person's life that is drifting from God or is drifting or turning is that worship starts to disappear.

[36 : 06] They may still pray, they may still sing, but it's not, it's going through the motions, but it's contentless. In other words, the church is full of people and this is proven to be so with some of the great revivals of people who have an attachment to the church with no attachment to God.

You read Jonathan Edwards on his sermon, The Sin is in the Hand of an Angry God. He preached that sermon, he was so poorly that he held to the column with holding one of these candles and he read his sermon.

And it said that the people in the congregation felt as though they were standing on rice paper, fearful that they were going to fall through into a lost eternity. He read the sermon, it wasn't him, it was the power of God upon him.

And then you had, this is back in America, in Massachusetts, the Northampton Revival. Do you know where 90% of all the converts came from? The pews.

The interesting thing was he preached the same sermon a few weeks later, nothing happened and a few years later they sacked him. I think Jesus said something about that, didn't he?

[37 : 35] You'll be treated in exactly the same way as I was treated. Let's conclude. Persevering in the faith is really difficult in the area of family life.

Really difficult. Because we're put on the spot and we're faced to make choices that are incredibly difficult. And the choice is more difficult because the person who puts us in that place to make that decision doesn't understand.

Doesn't actually, just wouldn't understand even if we spout it out for them. Let me sort of meet your conscience in your heart if it's a bit tender at this point.

We're those times where we have all given into family and we know that we've sort of let Jesus down. You know, we just know we should have said something.

We just know we should have owned our faith and we didn't. They owned us. You say, well, what must God must think about me now? Well, he loves you just the same as he did before.

[38 : 51] God doesn't think any differently of you. He loves you with an everlasting love. And here's the thing, you are going to fail in this area because we're sinners.

Not even we worship God perfectly. But it is the case even in the church that if family division can happen in the world because Jesus is not first, then family division in the church will happen if Jesus is not first.

So long before we try and get it right anywhere else, we are almost duty bound to get it right in here first. And when we get it right in here, we will have the support of other believers in the fellowship of getting it right out there.

Okay? I know having grown up in an environment, you know, that single woman up the road with seven boys, you know, all the criticism, she must like the taste of wedding cake, you hear all these type of things growing up.

So I know the type of, you know, and I know the type of defenses that go up within a family. You know, you have a newborn baby and nobody, you've got it all right and nobody else can dare to, and you don't, and you become protective and you, you know, and we all know deep within our heart that we'd, we'd, when it comes to family members being hurt, you'd much rather it be you than them.

[40 : 34] And so I know how difficult it is to be faithful to Christ in that type of environment. But I have to say as a minister of the gospel that that is what Jesus asks for.

Jesus is still asking, despite everything else that we have said, and despite all the realities that we will face in the home, Jesus is still asking for your undivided allegiance to him.

But he will be with you even to the end of the age. Let me just say this is one final point. I think our prayer meetings need to be filled with these type of prayers far more than what they are.

Instead of being embarrassed by our family situation, whether it be immediate or general, we need to uphold one another with the tensions that we have within our families.

Because family life is really, really difficult. because we have to live together even more than we do. I mean, can you imagine living with me?

[41 : 51] That wasn't a point to be laughed at. Remember, Jesus loves you. Please remember that Jesus loves you.

Okay? But it's the same Jesus that loves you that calls you to be, put him first. Okay? Amen.

Thank you, amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.