

Matthew 12:46-50 Talk: Who are you?

By Ewan Kerr, 17 March 2024

Intro

Hi there, my name's Ewan and it's great to be with you this morning.

I'm British so it's not something I'm entirely comfortable with, but I'd like to start our talk this morning by telling you a bit about myself.

[Slide] I am a fairly obsessive runner (and I occasionally do a bit of orienteering too)

[Slide] I like to play games, board games with a strategy element.

For football I support Partick Thistle but really I prefer **[Slide]** Rugby (at least when we are playing England, not so much when we play Italy or Ireland) and I like American Football too.

I know some people define themselves by their music, but while I like music ultimately I'm not really the world's biggest music fan it doesn't define me.

[Slide] I am, however, proudly Scottish (even though i'm not really sure what that means).

[Slide] And I'm a Kerr. And i don't really mean a Kerr from the historic border family (which is where the Kerr family came from).

Rather I mean a Kerr in two more personal ways.

1. **[Slide]** I'm a Kerr from a family in Blanefield, son, brother to this lot.
2. **[Slide]** And importantly a Kerr from Corstorphine in Edinburgh, married to Rachel with **[Slide]** three children.

Well that's more than enough about me.

What about you? **[Slide]** Who are you? Hopefully you had the chance to introduce yourself to someone earlier, and perhaps you can carry on those discussions later.

What did you choose to say about yourself?

And ultimately, who are you?

Really who are you? What's your identity? Where do you belong?

This isn't an easy question, but the passage we are looking at in the bible this week has something to say about.

Bible **[Slide]**

What we do in Hope City each week is to work through sequential passages from a book of the bible. We're trying to make sure we teach all that it teaches, not cherry picking passages that we like.

In today's passage we are continuing our time looking at Matthew's eye witness account of Jesus' life. For a lot of you it'll likely be helpful if you read along. It's on page X of the blue church bibles and Andrew is going to read it for us.

[Slide]

[BIBLE READING]

A short passage this week, and it'll probably help you to keep the bible open. So, to recap. While Jesus was speaking to the crowd, His mother and brothers come and want to speak to him. Jesus doesn't drop everything and go to speak to them, rather Jesus uses this as a teaching moment - and says to the crowd that his disciples are his mother and brothers. And then repeats that whoever does God's will are his mother and sister and brothers - that is his family.

[Slide]

Family Identity

Its good to think what this would have sounded like to those listening to Jesus - because it's a really shocking statement. I mean, family is important today, but family ties were even stronger back then (and are in many other parts of the world today). On the whole people didn't move to far away cities, like i have done, which naturally leads to physical and metaphorical distance in families. Most people would stay in the same town or village where they grew up, many would have done the same job as their parents. There wasn't the same government structures and safety net that exist today, rather families would be expected to take care of each other at the youngest end of the spectrum, and in old age. Family mattered.

And Jesus' actual, flesh-and-blood family are outside and asking for him - these would obviously be the most important people to him. So clearly what he will do is to go to them, to prioritise them.

No! Shockingly that's not what he does, rather he says - this other group, his followers are more important. These people are family to him. His birth family are standing outside but he's pointing to, and even defining, a new family identity **[Slide]** - his disciples, that is his followers.

The context of this is that over the past few weeks we've seen a lot of opposition to Jesus. Lots of this has come from the religious establishment. Back in v23 (just further up the page), after one of his miracles some of the people are wondering if Jesus could be the special, promised King, but the Pharisees emphasise how much they disagree by rather saying he is a demon. Against this backdrop Jesus says that everyone who is not with him is against him (v30). And in fact we see the religious establishment plotting to kill him, that's how much they are against him.

There's a real, hard division between the two groups. You can only be in one or the other. And he defines those who follow him as a new community - his family.

Who is the part of this new community? It's not defined by blood lines. Not about the most outwardly religious people (arguably those Pharisees who were against Jesus fitted into this category), it's not all of those present listening to Jesus, it's not even about his immediate family. It's about his disciples - his followers. **[Slide]**

Jesus calls his followers his brothers and sisters and mother. He gives them a new identity, having the closest relationship possible with Jesus. Jesus is prioritising these relationships more than his birth family. This status is what matters.

So I'd like to go back to where I started, and I'd like to re-introduce myself. I'm Ewan and I'm a follower of Jesus. I'm a Christian. That's who I am. That relationship with Jesus is the most important thing to me. More than running. More than my nationality - even more than my family, and that's a pretty shocking thing to say. I am a follower of Jesus and that means I'm part of his family.

[Slide]

What about you? Who are you? Where do you belong, What's your identity?

Because this works both ways. Either you are identified as part of the family or you are not. As I've said you don't become part of Jesus' family by being born in a certain bloodline, or for that matter by coming to church, by following a set of rules, or even by being a good person. You have to make a choice. A choice to follow Jesus.

Now if you wouldn't call yourself a Christian, I'm really glad you are willing to come here this morning and think about these things. You might wonder why anyone would want to be a member of this family.

God made people to be in a relationship with him and with one another, but people (that's all of us) are the problem. I think we can see that many of the problems in the world are directly linked back to the sin in people's hearts (the greed, envy, mean-spiritedness, the violence, the hatred). God's rescue mission includes building a new people, a new community - who will live with him again and with each other, and all things will be good. He's creating a new family.

And Jesus is the one who finally comes to bring all this to fulfilment. He's the one really starting this new family, bringing people into relationship with God.

Many of us have that deep desire for relationship, for belonging - looking for it in clubs, in shared enjoyment of running, or of rugby, or of common nationality. Or often in their own families.

Jesus brings the answer to that feeling, that need. This is because we are made by God to be in relationship. He brings us into the closest of communities - a new family that is the church. As part of his solution to everything that's wrong in the world. Without God what is that need inside each one of us for relationship - is it just evolution trying to keep us alive? I think we all feel that there's more to it than that.

Not everything has been fixed yet - that's clear for us all to see. That there's still sin and suffering, pain and problems in the world. But we are promised that it will be made perfect in the end, in heaven. That's why we talk about the Hope that we have in Jesus each week here at Hope City.

So, if you don't follow Jesus, can I ask that you might think about these things? Perhaps speak to someone you know here at church about it, we also run courses here to help people think through what it all means. Don't just ignore it - think through these things.

And if you have decided that you would like to become part of Jesus' family by becoming one of his followers, then that's great. Why not talk to myself or Matt, or frankly any Christian you know. There's going to be an option for new followers to be baptised on Easter day here in church, to mark your part of that new family - why not think about being part of that. There's a choice to make and you can only ultimately be inside or outside the family, not sitting on the edge.

Family benefits [Slide]

So next, I want to think about what we gain by being part of this new family, for those who are Jesus followers - what are the family benefits?

[Slide] Well I think that part of it is that Jesus was pointing out how they, and how his disciples today are loved and treasured by Him. And as a reminder, who is it who has this status?. It's not an accident of birth, it's by following Jesus. He cares for his followers, his new family, they matter to him. In fact we'll see how much they matter to him as he'll go on, towards the end of Matthew's gospel, to willingly die for them. That's how he saves them.

So we are loved and treasured and saved. That is why this is the most important part of their identity (and ours if we follow Jesus too).

Now I'm very aware that we will have people here with very different experiences of family. Between you there will likely be a range of family situations, from those with great families; nurturing, supportive, loving. Through those who feel annoyed by, or overlooked by their families, to the more serious situations of those who haven't been loved by or supported by their families, potentially even people who have been abused by their own families.

I'm so sorry if your experience of family is one of hurt and pain, and if you are still suffering as a result. I'm aware that can be something that can cut deep in a person. If you need someone to talk to then we have a pastoral support team here at Hope City who would love to sit down with you, and listen to you. I need to be honest and tell you that they aren't able to fix everything, but they are able to be with you in your pain, as brothers and sisters in Jesus, loving and supporting you in your journey. Those situations of pain are not part of God's good design for our families, but there is hope with Jesus and I hope you can experience his perfect love.

There's another aspect to this idea of being part of Jesus' family that I want to touch on. There's a passage from a letter, later in the bible, the letter to a church in a place called Galatia, that I think helpfully points out some more of what being part of this family means.

[Slide]

Gal 3:26-29. So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, 27 for all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ

Jesus. 29 If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Again, this passage reiterates how we become part of this family, it's through faith in Jesus.

We'll come back to the middle part of this passage in a few minutes, but what i want to point out here is that, as part of his family, we are heirs with him as per v29. **[Slide]** That's truly amazing. Because this is Jesus, God's son and the promised king. But the bible tells us that we will inherit the world alongside him. As I mentioned earlier, we hope for a day when all the problems in the world will be fixed, when this new family will live with God and Jesus in a place where all the problems have been solved. And we will inherit this alongside Jesus. That really is amazing, and is the reason for the Hope we have in him and that we want to share here at Hope City.

Family Relations **[Slide]**

So far we've seen our Family Identity, and Family Benefits of being part of this new family.

We like to ask the "So What" question at Hope City. So what does this mean for our lives? If we are already followers of Jesus, there's something important in changing our thoughts and understanding that you are loved and that you are heirs with Jesus. And there's also ways in which it impacts how we act. So i've called this last section: family relations, because i think that's how it should impact us. What does being part of this family look like in our lives, what does it mean for us?

[Slide] And I probably need a short aside here about the phrase the "Will of my Father in heaven". It might just be me, but when I first read this I was struggling to understand what it means. The bible tells us elsewhere that being a Christian isn't about fulfilling a tick box of rules, or about being a good person, rather being a Christian is about faith in Jesus. We saw that in the passage from Galatians that we looked at earlier. But here it says that those who follow Jesus are those who **DO** God's will? "Doing" naturally means following some rules doesn't it?

So I had a look at the other places this word "will" is used through Matthew's gospel to try to understand what it was meaning. Each time it's used it's about the big picture of God's will in all history, not about a tick box of rules. Ie when we pray the Lord's prayer that God's will be done, or that it's God's will is that Jesus died to save us. And we've seen throughout Matthew's gospel that people's own righteousness is never enough, rather we need transformed hearts to trust in him. We are in God's will by trusting in his son to save us and following him. And because of this we want it to impact how we live. We need his spirit in us to transform our hearts (his kingdom of transformed hearts for those who remember it).

Or in other words, it's a relationship. It should change how we act.

[Slide] Well there's two directions I want to talk about. Firstly upward. Being a Christian is about a close relationship with God through Jesus. And it's fairly obvious, but therefore you should speak to God - pray to him. Share the challenges and good things in your life. Ask for help, say sorry. And read the bible - which is the main way he speaks to us. Seek to get to know him better through what he has revealed about himself.

The second direction is sideways. Part of this comes from that passage in Galatians that we read earlier. I said I'd come back to v28 at the time.

[Slide] We are all children of God - so there is no Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, neither male or female, for we are all one in Jesus.

What does that mean? Well, all followers of Jesus are loved by him. There's no different classifications of worthiness. And that's important when we look round at each other here at Hope City. There's no set of people who are more loved by God. People who stand up the front aren't more loved or more family or lesser family, and importantly neither are those online at home or in hospital unable to attend. All are valued and treasured. Whether you are old or young. Rich or poor. Even if you are Scottish or not. Everyone who follows Jesus is equally part of the family.

[Slide] So our sideways relationships means we can't look down on anyone else as a follower of Jesus, we're not better than any of them, you don't count more, you are not in some way entitled. But it equally means (possibly more relevant for some people here) you are not loved less than other Christians either. Jesus says you too are as loved as the rest of his followers, so important that he's happy to call YOU his brother or sister.

And as we are all family together, I think there's an obvious outworking of this that that we are to love our new family. Who do you know about at Hope City who you have an opportunity to love like family? And how might you do so? Can you see them here this morning, or have you noticed their absence? As I said earlier, God made us to be in relationship with one another. Perhaps one way to love others is simply to talk to people around you. To ask them how they are, to encourage them, and support them when things are hard. To live your lives together.

Alternatively, how can you serve people at church? There are many ways you could use your gifts to serve other people in church - from music, to kids work, to baking, to lighting or Tech, to setup or tear down. There are many ways to serve here, it's not about being on a rota, it's about serving one another.

And serving each other can make a real difference.

On a personal note, my family has been through a hard time recently with my wife Rachel undergoing cancer treatment, and I can't express how much we appreciate the practical and personal support we've received from a number of people here. It's made a real difference to us.

I don't really want to define what is the right way for you to be part of this family - because there aren't a set of rules about how that should be done - but asking yourself how you can be loving those around you seems like the right thing.

And if you've been hurt by church family members - again I'm sorry. I know that this family isn't perfect either, at least not yet. Again, one day it will be that's what we hope for. But in the meantime people inside the church will fail too I'm afraid. If you need support for what

has happened to you, then again, please talk to someone you can trust or the pastoral support team.

But on the more minor end of the scale, I have to also admit that if people in church don't annoy you occasionally, then I suspect you're not really getting close enough to them. We're all different and we're all imperfect and that's going to happen sometimes. Jesus is wanting us to love those around us here even if it's hard at times.

What does this all mean for members of your family who don't follow Jesus? Well you should still love them too. Jesus tells us particularly to love our Mother and Father, and to love those around us. One of the best ways of loving those around us is to tell them about the relationship you have with Jesus (in a loving and gracious way). It might not be easy to work out how to balance those things, pray and ask for Jesus help, remember that Jesus is the most important, but also that loving your family is a way of being faithful to Jesus.

Conclusion [Slide]

So as I wrap up, let me remind you where we've been.

Our primary identity is as part of Jesus' family and it separates us from the world. That gives us great benefits as it means you are loved and treasured by him and heirs with him. So seek to live that in your relationships, with Jesus and with one another in God's new family - the church.

Sentence to remember: As a follower of Jesus you are part of his family (the church), loved and treasured by him.