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Hear Ye Him #123  
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### The Sermon: WHO IS MY MOTHER?

Scripture: Matthew 12:46-50

While he yet talked to the people, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him. Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee. But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren. For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.

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He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me.

Jesus was always mindful of and sympathetic to family ties. Tradition tells us that Joseph died and left Mary a widow rather early in life. If so, then Jesus undoubtedly knew what it was to labor in support of a family; he knew some of the problems encountered in the maintenance of a home. Though there is evidence of a partial rift of misunderstanding between himself and his mother and his brethren because they did not understand the peculiar and inescapable impulsions of his ministry, yet there is also evidence that Jesus held his mother in high regard. Almost his last conscious act before his death on the cross was his commending of Mary in John's care.

When Jesus needed a word to express the relationship of God to man, he called God "Father." He taught that "a man shall leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; and they twain shall be one flesh..." His first miracle was performed at a wedding feast, where he was a welcome and honored guest. These and other sayings and incidents indicate his concern for the family, and his reverence for family relationships.

On the other hand, some of Jesus' teachings at first glance seem to deny the validity of family ties. He said, "He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me, And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me." Luke's gospel makes it even more imperative that under some conditions a man must adjure family ties. "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sister, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." "Hate" in this passage is a strong word. It has been explained as a bit of oriental hyperbole, or overstatement for the sake of emphasis. Some commentators explain that in the original Aramic in which Jesus spoke, it probably meant "to love less," rather than actually to hate, which agrees with Matthew's expression that "He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me."

What Jesus is saying, no matter how harshly or exaggeratedly he seems to be saying it, is that God's claim on our love, obedience, loyalty, and devotion take precedence over even the dearest human claims. No matter how much we love father, mother, wife, sister, brother, or child, they are all human, fallible. They will sometimes makes mistakes. They may betray us. They will not always be perfect examples. Regardless of how well we love them, our first allegiance is to God. Furthermore, our family ties gain stability, dept, breadth, and permanence, as all members of the family give their primary allegiance not to each other, but to God, the perfect, the absolute, the infallible, the eternal. The ties of blood are strong, but they are strengthened, rather than weakened, if all within the family tie give first allegiance to God.

Family ties must inevitably be broken some day by death. Sometimes, too, they are broken by disloyalty in those to whom we have given our love, by their forsaking and breaking the laws of God. Human loyalties, even the closest loyalties of family

life, frequently fail and leave us disillusioned, bitter, bewildered, forsaken. It is not unusual to observe people who are unworthy of the love given them their loved ones. But if one belongs to the family of God, if one can call God "Father," all the world may prove false, and still the tie to God remains. He who is spiritually begotten of God, and who is therefore God's adopted son, is never without family, never without a Father, or without a friend, in time or eternity.

One of the questions most frequently asked a minister is whether we shall know each other in eternity. I am quite certain in my own belief that we shall know each other in eternity. But I am not nearly so certain that we shall resume the relationships which are considered normal in this physical, mortal world. I believe that the family ties which we hold most dear in this life will be replaced and transcended by ties so much deeper, so much stronger, so much more enduring and eternal, that we shall very largely forget that in this life we were mother, or father, or wife, or husband, or sister, or brother, or son or daughter. Jesus gave an indication of this when he said that in heaven there is no marrying or giving in marriage, but that we shall all be as the angels of heaven, owing one common allegiance and one common Father.

Perhaps this can be illustrated by the experience which comes to everyone who has lived more than a few brief years. I can remember in my own experience that when I was fourteen years old, and a freshman in high school, the seniors who were seventeen and eighteen were in another world -- much older than I. At the same time, anyone who was ten years older than I, or twenty-four, was quite aged; he was to be looked up to with respect and called "Mister." But by the time I was twenty, one who was only four years older than I was practically my own age, and one ten years older did not seem to be very much older at all.

Now I am past fifty -- and there is less difference between me and a seventy-year-old than there once was between the fourteen and the eighteen-year-old. In other words, as we grow in age, there is an increasing levelling of age differences. My relationships with my father and mother now are quite different from the relationships of forty years ago. And by the same process of reasoning, the relationships in eternity will be even more different from those which exist in time. We love each other now in family relationships -- father, mother, husband, wife, parent, child, sister, brother -- but in eternity, although we shall still know each other and love each other, that eternal love will transcend the human physical, temporal, mortal relationships which now have to do with family, age, or race. In eternity there will be no difference in age, in sex, in race, in social status, or in economic worth.

For many there comes a time in this life when the normal ties which bind them to an earthly family -- a father, mother, sister, or brother, a husband or wife, or children -- must be repudiated in whole or in part in favor of a higher allegiance to God and Christ, when "he that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me." Many who have been deserted by family and friends because they have chosen to obey Christ and his gospel have found that the fellowship of the family of God is richer, fuller, more satisfying, and more binding than any of the ties of home or family. Many have discovered that their brothers and sisters in the church and family of God are more precious to them than brothers and sisters in the flesh, and that mothers and fathers in Israel are sometimes more worthy of love and respect and devotion than fathers and mothers in the flesh.

"Who is my mother?" asked Jesus; and then he answered his own question; "Whoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, my sister, and mother." The relationships of the human family endure for a lifetime, but the relationships of the family of God endure for eternity.