

A Song of degrees of David. Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore. (Psa 133:1-3)

Today we will explore another element of the conversation Jesus displayed in the time He walked the earth during His first advent. This conversation is important to us because it gives us examples of how to deal with certain things we will encounter ourselves and puts on display what it means to “have our conversation in Christ”.

Remember from my first sermon in this series that we are considering this verse:

1Pe 3:16 “Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your **good conversation in Christ.**”

And when I say this verse, I encourage you to explore all the context around it. It is rich in exhortation and comfort to a soul weary of the constant grinding and grating this world puts us through, who might be overly vexed with the wickedness that surrounds us like a thick London fog; to those who find their hearts and minds in that state, rest in the words Peter wrote to his friends who were scattered abroad.

To have our conversation in Christ requires that we understand His conversation so that we can properly emulate it and bring ourselves into subjection. That’s the whole point of this sermon series, to examine what we can about His life, the things that were happening when he spoke the words we cling to, which give us context and greater understanding when we examine them. We’re not interested in so-called histories written by men void of the Holy Spirit’s divine influence in these matters. We turn to the law and the testimony (Isa. 8:2), not the fairy tales men have written to create a narrative of doe-eyed, long-haired, bobble-heading-yes Jesus.

Our focus for today is what Jesus gave us by way of example in regard to dealing with family. One out of three or four stories written about this little flock of slaughter has some slanderous angle to it about how we abandon, reject, eject, shun, disregard, hatefully despise or somehow, in some way, mistreat our family. This of course is generally focused on those who have departed from this place with a lot of hateful lies spewed from their lips mis-representing the truth.

Before I dive into these events in Jesus’ life, I want to remind especially our younger cadre, who are almost always hardest hit by these events and lies when they are told, because they are not as experienced or normally as knowledgeable in Scripture as the more mature parts of the body of two important things.

First, these lies aren't going to stop being told. This is not unique to us, to this instantiation of Christ's Bride we call Westboro Baptist Church, and up to the very end of this Gentile administration His churches, wherever they are, will have people fall away – some quietly, some dramatically. That doesn't make it easier, per se, but knowing this is simply reality can make it more bearable when a close relation rejects the safety and security of the flock and falls into a pit or the mouths of wolves.

Second, we don't have to be stoic about these matters and pretend we don't care. Too frequently we equate submission with trying to have a blank face about an emotional matter and stuffing down heartbreak or anguish. I don't think we have to do that. I don't think we get to throw a fit when we don't like some element of God's providence, but pretending we aren't impacted by something is foolishness. Do you think because you wear a stony face about it and say "I'm fine" when you're really not that God doesn't know what's in your heart? Don't be silly. **How** we react and what behavior we let rule our spirits absolutely matters, but don't equate submitting with a happy face when you're struggling. How many times does David express similar notions to these:

Psa 61:1-3 "To the chief Musician upon Neginah, A Psalm of David. Hear my cry, O God; attend unto my prayer. From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I. For thou hast been a shelter for me, and a strong tower from the enemy."

Being overwhelmed isn't a problem, as long as you aren't wallowing in it and you seek relief from the appropriate source. Don't linger there, but don't think you shouldn't ask for help, certainly from our Comforter, and from each other, too.

Today we will explore some solid examples from Jesus of how to deal with family, what perspective to hold on it and how to frame our conversation in regard to it. I'm sure there are other examples and other lessons; this is not a comprehensive treatment of the subject; these have just stood to me for some time.

Foremost for this discussion consider that family does matter. It doesn't matter in the paper mache, folksy Hobby Lobby signs about "faith, family, flag" or some nonsense like that, but it matters. It has a place in our pilgrimage.

Consider this fact as framing the idea that family does matter – four of twelve Apostles were blood relations.

Mat 4:18-22 "And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets, and followed him. And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a

ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them. And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him.”

This is one of those spots where I'm not interested in speculation, only what we're told specifically. Lots of academics and theologians want to make out that James and John were also Jesus' first cousins and that there were other family ties amongst the Apostles. That might be true, but it isn't singularly made clear without a lot of guesswork about who several unnamed, though frequently present people were. What we're given in the book is sufficient to the purpose.

Now, you might say “this doesn't prove anything about familial ties and Christ's conversation regarding them, He could have just as easily called different people working that fishing area to be His disciples”. Yes, yes, He could. He could have also made a llama and a goldfish His apostles. But He didn't. And God doesn't do anything without purpose. He called these four men, two sets of brothers, and they all dropped the family business immediately to follow Him. They all heard “follow me” the same as the others around them. And these two sets of brothers came together and stayed with Christ through it all.

I don't pretend to fully understand this choice, nor should we place speculative importance on it, but this choice Christ made says to me we should not be surprised by, nor should we reject the familial ties in our pilgrim throng we find ourselves with. There is strength and comfort to be found in these relationships that are based in the flesh. Not the strength or the comfort found in unity with Christ, but I believe these brothers are called together to the office of Apostle as a gracious resource to each other. These relationships undoubtedly helped these men endure the trials of the flesh they were going to encounter. Do we not have similar experiences?

There is no particular call-out by Jesus bringing these relationships into focus, and in fact He points out that there is a shift that should happen when he makes a very important – and perhaps unexpected point **because** of these familial relationships amongst His disciples – when He declares who His family is

Mat 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.”

Like so many things in our life of service and ambassadorship, there is a balance to be had. This is not a 50/50 balance. This is heavily weighted toward our King. In this situation, there is no hesitation, no sense that there is thought needed to arrive at an

answer – it is direct and pointed. This was settled for Him. Blood family is not the standard of who family is. His behavior followed this idea. There was no favoritism as it were, given to His blood relations.

Mat 13:53-58 “And it came to pass, that when Jesus had finished these parables, he departed thence. And when he was come into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things? And they were offended in him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house. And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief.”

Consistency and constancy. Behavior matches words. Look to His many miracles, the number of times He heals and then comments on the person’s faith. He could have done many mighty works in Nazareth but would not because of their unbelief – and He still had family in town

Mar 6:1-5 “And he went out from thence, and came into his own country; and his disciples follow him. And when the sabbath day was come, he began to teach in the synagogue: and many hearing him were astonished, saying, From whence hath this man these things? and what wisdom is this which is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house. And he could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them.”

Now you might look at the “healing of a few sick folk” and wonder about that not being a “mighty work”. But that’s not the point – our definition of mighty work isn’t at play here. Consider the context of some of the miracles Christ performed – healing the Centurion’s servant, the casting out of devils, the feeding of the masses – all coming about through the expressions of faith of those around Him. Very public, very pronounced works – mighty works. Here, among the people He knew and had communed with growing up, who knew Him to be an honest and righteous person full of the knowledge of the Scripture, even if they did not know Him to be the Christ, unbelief abounded. Consider the Luke telling of this same event:

Luk 4:22-30 “And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, Is not this Joseph's son? And he said unto them, Ye will surely say unto me this proverb, Physician, heal

thyself: whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in thy country. And he said, Verily I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own country. But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; But unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian. And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, And rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong. But he passing through the midst of them went his way”

Not only did they not believe, but they also hated Him – His family hated Him – for the truth He spoke. Plain, simple truth caused them to be filled with wrath and to drive Him out of His own hometown seeking to kill Him. His conversation teaches us here. Family matters, it can be an important vessel He uses to provide for His people, but the colloquialism “blood is thicker than water” has no place in our thoughts.

He tells us family will not be the steadfast thing in our lives, and our experience will mirror His

Mat 10:21 “And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death.”

Fretting this reality is a waste of energy, but look at Jesus’ reaction afforded us in Mark

Mar 6:6 “And he marvelled because of their unbelief. And he went round about the villages, teaching.”

He marveled at their behavior as a man, because it was so outrageous and they worked and toiled against their own self-interest in such an obvious and significant way. He was moved. The flesh reacts, and that isn’t in itself problematic. He didn’t wear a stiff upper lip or just shrug it off. He marveled. He didn’t marvel because He didn’t know this was the case, but this is in the part of His nature that was also tempted, that hungered and thirsted, that needed the necessities of life tended to. Of course, He knew this would happen, as He expounded the very prophecy that spoke to this truth, yet he marveled.

But there is more He shows us in dealing with family when we consider the “family of faith” and the realization that what we believe that family to be, may indeed not be His family

Mat 7:21-23 “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”

Friends, if that passage doesn't occasionally give you pause, you have a much greater sense of your own faith than I do at times. Those who would call Him "Lord" are those who see themselves as a member of this family of faith. What terrifies me is that I don't think this is only those we refer to as "cardboard Christians". It certainly includes them, but the membership definition for this family is very plainly stated – *“whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven”*.

Look at what these who call Him Lord are laying claim to doing – prophesying and casting out devils and many wonderful works. These were actions associated with great followers. I don't know how they would have done these great works and not be of the household, but they plainly are not. I'm not sure how Balaam said the great things he said or how Janes and Jambres matched the plagues of Moses that they did except they were vessels used by God to accomplish His will. I can't change those facts. Either these claims are just bald lies and they never did any of these things, or they are simply of this character and were vessels still:

Mat 15:8 “This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me.”

When I consider the multitude of times where I have failed to meet this definition, I cannot help but wonder whether I delude myself into thinking that I have done the will of the Father, and whether I have an irrevocable interest in Christ's saving blood. This is why we are exhorted to “make our calling and election sure”, to study these Scriptures and make our prayers continual, putting voice to our plea and seeking our place at His throne. It is the work of faith to do these things and seek always to be aligned to Him and His will. It is a constant work to seek greater and greater unity to Christ and to humble ourselves before Him.

Christ is the answer to these doubts and fears, obviously. That knowledge and His grace afford us the peace of mind and spirit to not be overwhelmed by those feelings of inadequacy and fear, thankfully.

The last example I want to look at today is an amazingly practical display of proper familial perspective. It starts here

Mat 15:1-6 “Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying, Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for

they wash not their hands when they eat bread. But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; And honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition."

Familial ties and obligations abound in the Law, and Jesus here points out the horrendous hypocrisy of the Pharisees in how they ignore those obligations to God. This is a truly heinous and evil thing that they were, *by tradition*, doing. What Jesus points out here, though, is like most of the things the Pharisees called Him and His followers out for, they were guilty of far worse.

Here is a snippet of Albert Barnes' explanation, which I think is the clearest of most expositions:

"In Mark it (the gift) is "corban." The word "corban" is a Hebrew word denoting a gift. Here it means a thing dedicated to the service of God, and therefore not to be appropriated to any other use. The Jews were in the habit of making such dedications. They devoted their property to God for sacred uses, as they pleased... The law required that when a dedication of this kind was made it should be fulfilled. "Vow and pay unto the Lord your God," Psa 76:11. See Deu 23:21. The law of God required that a son should honor his parent; i. e., among other things, that he should provide for his needs when he was old and in distress. Yet the Jewish teachers said that it was more important for a man to dedicate his property to God than to provide for the needs of his parent. If he had once devoted his property once said it was "corban," or a gift to God - it could not be appropriated even to the support of a parent. If a parent was needy and poor, and if he should apply to a son for assistance, and the son should reply, though in anger, "It is devoted to God; this property which you need, and by which you might be profited by me, is "corban" - I have given it to God;" the Jews said the property could not be recalled, and the son was not under obligation to aid a parent with it. He had done a more important thing in giving it to God. The son was free. He could not be required to do anything for his father after that. Thus, he might, in a moment, free himself from the obligation to obey his father or mother."

Note how Christ points out that these selfish behaviors were **their** traditions; not Moses' and certainly not God's Law. Now, see how He addresses His obligation *while hanging from the cross*:

Joh 19:25-27 "Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith

unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.”

This has always been a very intriguing event for me, but when you look at it in this light, it is very moving and a great example to us of how to consider our obligations to family.

It is interesting to me that these women attend Him in death in this way. His disciples by all appearances are still scattered with the exception of John, who accompanies these women. Christ accepts their service. He hasn't sent them away; He hasn't admonished them. I believe this shows our duty to one another continues until the servant's soul has passed. We should give care to how we deal with the members of the household of faith when they pass beyond the veil. Note the difference between what we see here and what He said to the scribe

Mat 8:22 “But Jesus said unto him, Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead.”

There is a lesson, in how to deal with death perhaps to study more.

See how Christ continued to fulfill His duty even in the final moments of His mission on this side of death. In closing His earthly connection to Mary, Jesus honored her. He prepared for her care in a way the Pharisees would not their own parents. He set the example that matched His words completely. I expand my analysis of this beyond that of just “honor thy father and mother” to His continuing to set the pinnacle example of brotherly love. He not only demonstrated His love for Mary, but for John “that disciple whom He loved”. I believe in this declaration “woman, behold thy son” He acknowledged and provided for the care John would need in this hour, and He set these two vessels into a deeper relationship with one another, establishing a family connection in the flesh to bolster the spiritual connection they already had as His followers.

This is simply amazing to me. How complete is the demonstration in His conversation? Even in death, He displays for us how to behave, providing what should be a strong incentive for our behavior toward one another and to keeping our service and ambassadorship true even to the end.

These are very practical things to study, and doing so yields a greater understanding not just of Christ's words, but how those words are provided real meaning when considered with the actions that accompany them. Truly, did He have his “conversation honest among the Gentiles” to encourage us to do the same.

Rom 15:13 “Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.”