

More About Jesus, Week 34: Jesus cared for his family

by Paul Hammons

When we look at the life of Jesus, we often see paradoxical aspects of his behavior and teaching, which reflects the fact that he was a real person - not an invention or a legend created after the fact to fit the image of a savior, but a human being with depth of personality and character, whose behavior doesn't always fit neatly into a single category.

Jesus' relationship to his family is a prime example of this. Jesus' family certainly was not his primary focus while he was teaching and preparing the disciples for his death and resurrection. One of our most lasting impressions of Jesus' family life might be from Matthew 12, when his mother and brothers wanted to speak to him while he was teaching in one of the villages in Galilee:

But he replied to the man who told him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." - **Matthew 12:46–50 (ESV)**

He even advised his disciples, *"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple"* (**Luke 14:26**).

That might sound as if Jesus didn't value family. But the gospels provide glimpses into Jesus' own family interactions that tell a different story - particularly in John's gospel.

In **John 2:12**, we learn that Jesus was accompanied in his earliest ministry by his mother and brothers, indicating that even while he fulfilled his responsibilities in the work of the kingdom, he was also mindful of his role as a widow's oldest son, watching over the household.

And while his brothers did not believe in him and appear not to have traveled with him in the later part of his ministry (**John 7:3-5**), Mary remained with him and the disciples for at least some of that time. She was with him in Jerusalem when he was taken by the Jewish leaders, and she stood at the foot of the cross as he died (**John 19:25**). His last command before dying was to entrust her care to *"the disciple whom he loved"*:

When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home. - **John 19:26–27**

Jesus cared deeply for his family, even though he had a higher calling on this earth. We learn that after his resurrection, he appeared to James (**1 Cor. 15:7**), who was most likely one of his unbelieving brothers. In doing so, he most likely led James not only to repentance and salvation, but to become a vital part of the early church's work (Acts 15, Galatians 2:19). Jude, another of Jesus' brothers (**Jude 1, Matthew 13:55**), converted as well.

Jesus' concern for family is also reflected in the commands he passed on to the disciples, which included responsibility to a believer's parents. While Jesus taught that devotion to God had to outweigh those duties, he also emphasized that true devotion to God must result in care for mother and father, and condemned the Pharisees for not reflecting that truth in their own lives:

For God commanded, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.' But you say, 'If anyone tells his father or his mother, "What you would have gained from me is given to God," he need not honor his father.' So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God. - **Matthew 15:4–6**

Even in his early years, Jesus exhibited a respect for the command to "honor Father and Mother," when we read of his parents returning home from a feast in Jerusalem only to discover later that the 12-year-old Jesus had stayed behind. When they found him in the temple, he responded to them (**Luke 2:49**), *"Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"*

But we also read that *"he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them"* (v. 51). In this story, we not only see Jesus' willingness to obey his earthly parents, but we also see his desire to serve and glorify his Heavenly Father.

Jesus' example teaches us that the most important relationship we have in life is with our spiritual family - a relationship that will extend into eternity with the Lord. But that doesn't minimize or negate the call to care for our physical family as well. It is a reminder to honor God's created institutions: church and family.