

MATTHEW

12:1-50

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Taught by Simeon Forder on Sunday morning, 23rd February 2025 @ Deal Christian Fellowship

Reading: Romans 10:5-13

Introduction

Last week in chapter eleven, we read that, after Jesus had commanded His twelve disciples, that He departed from the place they had been to teach and preach in their cities. And while He was doing that, we read that John the Baptist then sent two of *his* disciples to Jesus, wanting to know if He was indeed the Messiah — even though John had been sure that He was. And there was a great reminder for us in Jesus' response (where He showed John that all He was doing was a fulfilment of Scripture), that, likewise, any time we doubt who God is, or what He is doing, we too should turn to our Bibles, and remind ourselves of all that God has said and done.

Now, following the words Jesus spoke to John's disciples, He went on to speak to the crowd gathered there about John the Baptist, and noted how just as he had been rejected, so Jesus had been rejected too — and He rebuked the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum for their unbelief, given most of his miracles had been performed in those places — a contrast to those He gave thanks for next, that had accepted Him.

Overview of chapter twelve

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- **v1-14** — Jesus challenged about the Sabbath
- **v15-21** — Jesus, the humble servant
- **v22-30** — We are either for or against Jesus
- **v31-37** — The unpardonable sin, and fruit of our decision
- **v38-45** — Self-righteousness isn't an improvement
- **v46-50** — Jesus' earthly family visit Him

As we read chapter twelve, we'll find in the opening verses that Jesus now heads toward a synagogue, but en route is challenged by the Pharisees (the religious leaders of the day) over the Sabbath — the day of rest — and His disciples' actions on it. Then, in from verse 15 to 21, we'll see Matthew quote from the book of Isaiah, showing that Jesus served God in humility, before (in verses 22-30) he records how Jesus once again called out the Pharisees for their evil thoughts toward Him.

In verse 31 on we'll read how Jesus continued to teach; next, speaking of the unpardonable sin, and fruit of our decision, before (in verse 38 on) we'll see Him rebuke the scribes, before (in the final 5 verses) we'll read how his earthly family visited Him, and wanted to speak with Him.

Chapter twelve

So let's jump in. We read in verse 1:

Matthew 12:1

At that time Jesus went through the grain-fields on the Sabbath. And His disciples were hungry, and began to pluck heads of grain and to eat.

And this was something that the law of Moses made provision for, back in Deuteronomy chapter 23. We read there:

Deuteronomy 23:24-25

"When you come into your neighbour's vineyard, you may eat your fill of grapes at your pleasure, but you shall not put any in your container. When you come into your neighbour's standing grain, you may pluck the heads with your hand, but you shall not use a sickle on your neighbour's standing grain.

So the intent was that generosity would be shown, but that it wouldn't be taken advantage of. That, if someone were hungry (as the disciples were) they could freely eat that which they could pick with their hands as they passed through their neighbour's vineyard or field. But they *weren't* to make a special trip there with a Tupperware box or carrier bag and collect an unreasonable amount of grapes or grain! So, taking note of that, may we be generous, but not take advantage of each other's generosity!

Here, the disciples were acting in accordance with the law in that regard. But we read on:

Matthew 12:2

And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, "Look, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath!"

So the Pharisees tried to find fault with Jesus and His disciples. And the issue they picked wasn't that they took grain, but that they did so on the Sabbath, which was the-day-of-rest that God had instituted for His people. But over time the Pharisees had added rule upon rule, with an overwhelming amount of stipulations, as recorded in the Talmud (the central text of Rabbinic Judaism). So much so, that doing almost anything on the Sabbath was prohibited.

For example, a man could spit upon a rock, but he could not do so on dirt, for that would be considered planting. Likewise, a woman was not allowed to look in the mirror on the Sabbath, for if a hair was plucked it was considered harvesting. And no-one could have a bath, for if the water splashed on the floor, it would be considered as washing the floor! With 39 types or classes of laws for the Sabbath alone, it had become a burden, rather than a blessing.

And here, the disciples — in the eyes of the Pharisees — had broken the Sabbath laws in perhaps as many as four ways; for by plucking the heads of grain, it was considered reaping. By rubbing the grain in their hands it was considered threshing. By blowing away the chaff it was considered winnowing. And in all of those cases it was considered that they were preparing food. All of which were prohibited on the Sabbath.

But as self-righteousness always does — it not only condemns others, but excuses one's own actions. It sees the speck in the other's eye, but ignores the plank in one's own eye. And we read here that the Pharisees had seen Jesus' disciples in the grain fields, which almost certainly meant they were breaking their own Sabbath laws that a man should be no more 3000 feet from his own home on the Sabbath. And this hypocrisy is something Jesus would later call them out on, as Matthew records in chapter 23, noting Jesus said:

Matthew 23:23-24

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!"

But back here in chapter 12, Jesus addresses their particular complaint. We read:

Matthew 12:3-4

But He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests?"

So, first, calling their understanding of the Bible into question, Jesus points them back to 1 Samuel 21, where David, who had been anointed as king by Samuel, was currently rejected as king of Israel, and went to Ahimelech the priest to request bread for his men. But the only bread available was that from the temple, and so Ahimelech provided that to him.

Here, another king — that is Jesus — also at this time rejected by Israel, wanted *His* men to be sustained. But the overarching point Jesus was making here was, as we read in Mark's gospel account, that "*The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.*" — that the Sabbath was not to be the burden the Pharisees had made it, but a blessing. That relationship with God would be more important than rule keeping. Jesus continued, saying:

Matthew 12:5-6

Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless? Yet I say to you that in this place there is One greater than the temple.

And so second, he was noted how *far* from resting on the Sabbath, the priests actually had to work *twice* as hard than any other day, as twice as many sacrifices were offered on that day of the week. That while they were technically going against what the Sabbath required, the more important thing they were doing was serving and worshipping God, which took priority over that. Again, it was to be relationship over regulation.

And here, the disciples were spending time with Him, of whom He was speaking when He said there is one there greater than the temple. Indeed, the disciples were in the right, and it was actually the Pharisees that were in the wrong. Wanting to apply the letter of the law, they missed that Jesus was the One who not only gave the law, but the One to whom the law was designed to drive us.

And He continued:

Matthew 12:7-8

But if you had known what this means, I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

And so the third point Jesus makes is from Hosea 6:6, a verse He had quoted before back in chapter 9, making the point that God desires mercy more than sacrifice, love more than law, and relationship more than ritual. And as aside, this means Jesus had pointed to a king, to the priests, and to a prophet — all three roles He had Himself too, for He was the Messiah.

And He says if they had understood what Hosea was saying, then they would not have been throwing accusations at others based on technicalities of their *self-imposed* regulations, when in fact *God's* law did not condemn either David, the priests, or His apostles in these matters.

Matthew 12:9

Now when He had departed from there, He went into their synagogue.

And so He enters their regular place of worship. What will He find? And what would He find if He walked in *here* on a Sunday morning? What would He find is most dear to *us*? That we do things in a particular way? That we would have great coffee after the service? That we sing certain songs? Or would He find that we were most anxious about the sermon being long, or were in fact most looking forward to getting home?

The reality is, that where two or three are gathered in Jesus' name, there He is, in the midst of them. That should really sharpen us up, as to our motives, and what we hold most dear in our church services, right? *Is it His Word that He has magnified about His own name? Is it the worship of the One who saved us? Is it graciously and generously loving all those who walk through the doors here, that we might lead them to Christ, and closer to Christ?*

Here we will see the Pharisee's hearts exposed, for Matthew records:

Matthew 12:10

And behold, there was a man who had a withered hand. And they asked Him, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"—that they might accuse Him.

That is, they wanted to try and trip Jesus up — they wanted an excuse to pull Him up on His actions. And that's hard to do when someone is sinless, right?! So they, aimed to pull Him up on their laws, which said that you could do no healing on the Sabbath. And as one commentator put it:

"That's what the law always does. When you become all bound up in regulations, traditions, and religious rituals, your heart becomes cold and hardened towards people. You constantly judge them and find fault with them. Religion apart from relationship will make you a pompous, snooty, holier-than-thou Pharisee."

But Jesus spoke with compassion. We read:

Matthew 12:11-12

Then He said to them, "What man is there among you who has one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."

And how could they argue against that? It was a sound and solid argument. And as an aside we should note that Jesus very clearly, here and elsewhere, did not hold animals in the same regard as humans — yes, we *should* be kind to them, but we are not to suggest that they have equal worth as that of a human being that is created in God's image. Jesus clearly stated that human life was far more valuable than that of an animal.

That is the basis of His argument here, that if the Pharisees cared about a *sheep* in danger, then how much *more* they should care about this man with the withered hand! And having spoken with compassion, Jesus now acted with compassion. We read in verse 13:

Matthew 12:13

Then He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And he stretched it out, and it was restored as whole as the other.

I can imagine this was a step of faith for the man to do — his hand was withered, remember! — but He trusted Jesus, and his hand was healed immediately.

The Pharisees response? We read:

Matthew 12:14

Then the Pharisees went out and plotted against Him, how they might destroy Him.

And Mark's gospel account adds that they plotted with the *Herodians*, how they might destroy Him. And what hard hearts they had. No only did they have no compassion for this man, but they were angered by Jesus who did. And this marks a turning point from which the Pharisees would not turn back, as they plotted — successfully — to kill Jesus. But that's not the end of the story, and we know He rose from the dead, much to their alarm.

But the moment that would happen was not yet, for there was more of Jesus ministry to fulfil, and the date Daniel prophesied Jesus would ride into Jerusalem had not yet come. And so we we read:

Matthew 12:15

But when Jesus knew it, He withdrew from there. And great multitudes followed Him, and He healed them all.

Now, once again knowing their thoughts, Jesus withdrew from them, that there might not be any kind of uprising here and now. And we read His compassion wasn't limited to the man with the withered hand, but rather He showed it to the many that followed Him.

Matthew 12:16-21

Yet He warned them not to make Him known, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: "Behold! My Servant whom I have chosen, My Beloved in whom My soul is well pleased! I will put My Spirit upon Him, And He will declare justice to the Gentiles. He will not quarrel nor cry out, Nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets. A bruised reed He will not break, And smoking flax He will not quench, Till He sends forth justice to victory; And in His name Gentiles will trust."

So, Matthew notes, Jesus fulfilled this prophecy of Isaiah's, in that He was filled with the Spirit, and He didn't quarrel, He didn't stir up or incite the crowd to violence. And, also He fulfilled this in that He didn't and wouldn't use His power to destroy His enemies until His mission was complete. In other words, Jesus acted in complete humility. He hadn't come to lead a rabble or a mob. He hadn't come to start a coup.

And we read on:

Matthew 12:22

Then one was brought to Him who was demon-possessed, blind and mute; and He healed him, so that the blind and mute man both spoke and saw.

Again, this was fulfilling prophecy about the Messiah restoring sight to the blind (as we looked at in Isaiah chapters 29 and 35 last week), which makes sense of what we read next:

Matthew 12:23

And all the multitudes were amazed and said, "Could this be the Son of David?"

Now, this wasn't merely a query about His lineage, but they were asking themselves and each other if Jesus was the Messiah that they had been waiting for. But, we find, the Pharisees were still present, watching and listening to this unfold. Matthew records:

Matthew 12:24

Now when the Pharisees heard it they said, "This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons."

And I can't help but chuckle to myself here, for having seen Jesus miraculously heal this man, then hear the crowd start asking if Jesus could be the Messiah, I can picture the Pharisees starting to panic — one of them turning to another, going "say *something!*". And their response? "*Uh, um, uh, this must be the work of the devil!*"! And this is purely speculation, but I can picture at least one of them putting their head in their hands thinking "*it would have been better to say nothing, than that!*". And should that have been the case, they would have been right, for Jesus now dismantles that argument in front of them. We read in verse 25:

Matthew 12:25

But Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to them: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand."

So Jesus knew not only their words, but their thoughts (which is not the first time we've seen Matthew record that, which should be another warning for us, that God hears *our* thoughts too). And He says "*Look, this isn't a case of Satan fighting against himself here, for I am destroying his kingdom, and so I must be of God, and not Satan*". And He then continues:

Matthew 12:26-28

If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges. But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you.

In other words, Jesus was saying "*what you are saying is illogical. For if these specific miracles were of Satan, then why would he want to cooperate with Me and make it appear that I am the Messiah? And furthermore, if you are ascribing **all** casting out of demons to Satan, then you must apply that logic to those exorcists among yourselves who you claim can cast out demons, concluding that they are Satan's operatives too.*"

And, He further challenges them, in effect saying; *if I'm doing this in God's power, then why aren't you accepting Me for who I am, knowing that these signs confirm that I am the Messiah?!* And He continues:

Matthew 12:29

Or how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house.

And so, this third point Jesus makes, is that if He were a mere man, then Satan and his demons would not have to cooperate. But since Jesus was and is no mere man, but the Son of God, He can bind both Satan *and* those in his control. And we see a vivid example of this power of God contrasted to the limit of man in Acts chapter 19, where God had worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul, following which we read:

Acts 19:13-15

Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists took it upon themselves to call the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, "We exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches." Also there were seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, who did so.

And the evil spirit answered and said, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?"

And it's fair to say this didn't work out well for these seven men, for we read in verse 16:

Acts 19:16

Then the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, overpowered them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

So then, Jesus had dismantled this argument of the Pharisees, leaving them with the choice, which we *all* have, of whether to believe He was who He said He was, or to reject Him. Of course, *they* had their arguments as to why He couldn't possibly be God, but Jesus showed the flaws in their thinking. But so do many around us today have *their* arguments as to why Jesus couldn't possibly God, often saying He was merely a good man. But just as the Pharisees were in error, so are *any* who believe that about Jesus – and you may be familiar with CS Lewis' excellent rebuttal to those who claim that, from his book *Mere Christianity*. He wrote:

"I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronising nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."

CS Lewis

You have a choice. Do you believe that Jesus was and is God? Or do you think this is all made up? Jesus gave a clear warning for the Pharisees, and for you — He said:

Matthew 12:30

He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad.

For or against. There is no middle ground. You either accept Jesus, or you reject Him. And bringing the reality of this into focus, He said next:

Matthew 12:31

"Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men.

So what did Jesus mean by this? Well, many have taken this to mean that there are specific words you can say, or actions you can take that God will not forgive. But this is an altogether deeper matter than words and actions, for it is a matter of the heart. Sure, no-one in their right mind should speak against God in any way. No-one is wise to rebel against God in their actions either. But we have to keep this verse in context, for it starts with the word *therefore*, and as always when we see that word we should ask what *therefore* is *there for*.

And in doing so here, we should note that Jesus had just been talking about those who were either for Him, or against Him (such as the Pharisees who had clearly rejected Him). And *that* is what brings us to the unpardonable sin. Now, we know from 1st John that Jesus died for the sins of the *whole* world, and from 2nd Peter that God is not willing that *any* should perish, but *all* should come to repentance. There are no exceptions there. But what God won't do, is force you to repent. That is a choice *you* must make.

In other words, rejecting the prompting of the Holy Spirit to repent and put your faith in *Jesus* is what is unforgivable. Because Jesus paid for all your sin, but if you refuse His forgiveness, there is nowhere else to go. For as Peter noted in Acts chapter 4, salvation cannot be found in anyone else, *for there is no other name under heaven by which we must be saved*.

J Vernon McGee put this so well:

Of course, if you resist the Holy Spirit, there is no forgiveness because He is bringing forgiveness. It is like the man who is dying from a certain disease, and the doctor tells him there is a remedy for it. The man refuses to take the remedy and dies, not from the disease but from refusing to take the remedy. There is a remedy for the disease of sin, and the Holy Spirit applies it; but if you resist it, there is no remedy. That is the only way sin can be unpardonable today.

J Vernon McGee

And if you refuse Christ, there will ultimately be no way back. Jesus said next:

Matthew 12:32

Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come.

That is, it is one thing to speak poorly or disrespectfully about Jesus in the ignorance of unbelief, or to use His name as a swear word. But to reject the Holy Spirit's call to you (to repent and put your faith in Christ) is quite another, for without the salvation that brings, you will have no hope of forgiveness. So let me make clear; you don't have forever to make this decision. So don't delay!

We read in verse 33:

Matthew 12:33

"Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by its fruit.

Lest you be worried, as some are, that you may have committed the unpardonable sin, then remember that with salvation comes fruit. On one hand, if you have no desire to know God, if you have no desire to obey Him, if you have no desire to be with other believers, if you have no desire to see others saved, then you are lacking some of the vital fruit that should be present in the life of one who has truly been saved. But if you want to please God, you want to get to know Him more, if you want to see others come to Jesus as their Saviour, then that is wonderful evidence that the great work of salvation has taken place in you. And of course, we could look at much other fruit that should be growing in the life of a believer as further evidence of your salvation.

The Pharisees, though, had rejected Jesus, and had already started plotting to kill Him. And to them He now speaks again, and says:

Matthew 12:34-37

Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

Indeed, our words are more powerful than we think, for using our mouths we make our profession or declaration of faith, such as Paul writes of in Romans chapter 10, saying:

Romans 10:9-13

that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved."

What did the Pharisees make of Jesus words? Well, we read:

Matthew 12:38

Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You."

As if all the miracles He had done so far were not enough!

Matthew 12:39-40

But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

Jesus is saying here: *You want a sign? Well, you'll get one — and that is the most remarkable event in human history will take place before your eyes, as the Son of God is crucified in your place, for your sin. And then, He will rise from the dead, victorious over death, all so that you might be forgiven. But your hearts are so hard, that you won't turn from your sin, as those in Nineveh did when Jonah eventually preached to them.*

And He goes on:

Matthew 12:41

The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here.

What an indictment, that the wicked people in Nineveh will look good next to those who rejected Jesus to His face, who saw His miracles, and heard His words, but still refused to believe Him, or believe in Him. And Jesus continued further still, saying:

Matthew 12:42

The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here.

Here He referred back to the Queen of Sheba, who travelled from Africa to see Solomon, of whom is recorded in 1 Kings chapter 10:

1 Kings 10:6-8

Then she said to the king: "It was a true report which I heard in my own land about your words and your wisdom. However I did not believe the words until I came and saw with my own eyes; and indeed the half was not told me. Your wisdom and prosperity exceed the fame of which I heard. Happy are your men and happy are these your servants, who stand continually before you and hear your wisdom!"

And Jesus plainly says here that these scribes and pharisees have an even greater Man standing in front of them than Solomon was, making it all the more foolish that they rejected Him. And He goes on to say that all their laws, their customs, their good works, will matter not on the day of judgement, but what matters is whether they have truly come to Him. Let us read on. Jesus said:

Matthew 12:43-45

"When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. Then he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when he comes, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first. So shall it also be with this wicked generation."

That is, the people of Israel at this time were headed this same way. For while on one hand the nation wasn't caught up in idolatry and unrighteousness such as has plagued the nation in the past, they had now resorted to trying to keep the law by their own efforts, and had ended up in a worse place, being filled with self-righteousness. A state worse than they were in before, because they really thought that they were righteous, unlike the gentiles that they looked down on. Yet they were still in their sins.

What they had missed, was that Jesus didn't come to bring regulation, but regeneration. And there is a world of difference. And this warning here, though to these people at this time, is a very apt warning to us too. For we can try and clean ourselves up from sin. We can try and reform ourselves, or others, by walking away from drugs, or drunkenness, or sexual immorality. And of course it is good and right to leave such wickedness behind. But cleaning up our act will not excuse us for our past sin. What we need is the regeneration that only comes through faith in Christ.

And we must remember this in our outreach too, for while our town, like so many others, needs practical help, and to turn from sin, what it needs most is to turn to Christ. For good works will not save. Only Jesus can do that.

Now, Jesus had been very direct with the Pharisees; indeed Matthew has already recorded that from this moment they plotted with the Herodians to destroy Him. He had certainly ruffled their feathers to say the least. And in it's in that context we read:

Matthew 12:46-50

While He was still talking to the multitudes, behold, His mother and brothers stood outside, seeking to speak with Him. Then one said to Him, "Look, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, seeking to speak with You." But He answered and said to the one who told Him, "Who is My mother and who are My brothers?" And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and 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."

What was it that Mary and Jesus' earthly brothers wanted to talk to Him about? Well, that is not recorded for us here, but I think it reasonable to conclude that they were concerned, for He here He had publicly called their understanding of the Bible into question, He had showed up their hypocrisy, and He had called them a brood of vipers! Such words could have led them to stone Him. And perhaps they wanted to give their counsel to Him. Perhaps.

But before they could speak with Him, Jesus points to His disciples and stresses that they were closer than family. Wow! What a statement. But it's the same today — when you know Jesus as your Saviour, He should be more dear and precious to you than *any* earthly relationship you have. And when you are a believer, those closest to you should inevitably be other believers — for you have far more in common than you do even with your unbelieving friends whom you have known for years.

That's the difference a relationship with Christ makes. Something that rules and regulations will never produce. And praise God for the blessing upon blessing that comes from that wonderful relationship!

Application questions

So then, let me ask you three things in light of that chapter:

- Are you more focussed on rules and regulations, than relationship with Jesus?
- Have you come to Jesus as your Saviour? (not just come to church!)
- How much are you praying for other's salvation? (and not just that the world would be nicer!)

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