

### **Focus Text**

"When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, but finds none. Then it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when it comes, it finds the house empty, swept, and put in order. Then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there, and the last state of that person is worse than the first. So also will it be with this evil generation." While he was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him. 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 12:43–50, ESV)**

#### **1. The Unclean Spirits**

"When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, but finds none. Then it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when it comes, it finds the house empty, swept, and put in order. Then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there, and the last state of that person is worse than the first. So also will it be with this evil generation." **(Matthew 12:43–45, ESV)**

This story of the unclean spirits seems to diverge in two directions. In Luke's Gospel, the return of the unclean spirit indicates the failure of the Jewish Exorcists to bring true and lasting peace to their patients. They are only able to give some relief before the spirits return, making the affliction even worse than when it started. Jesus isn't a normal exorcist. The peace He offered was lasting because He's the Savior.

However, in Matthew's gospel, the unclean spirits represent the condition of Israel. While they may have offered temporary repentance, their spiritual condition is so corrupted that they are failing to see the signs that Jesus is the chosen Messiah sent to save God's people. This would align with Jesus's lecture that the Gentiles understand His position more than the Jewish leaders.

Jesus Christ is the only way to inherit eternal life and have eternal peace. Whether we are talking about spiritual deliverance or a lasting commitment, this all has to be anchored in Jesus. There are many who will declare that if they are "good," God will save them. Or if they just say a quick, heartfelt prayer to Jesus, they have received their get-out-of-Hell-free card. Friends, Christianity starts with a relationship with Jesus. Not church attendance, good works, tithing, or any other human effort. Jesus saves, and gives lasting peace, and we must prioritize our relationship with Him. The good works will come, and the healing will occur, but those are the result of being in a living relationship with the King of Kings, Jesus Christ.

"43–45 are placed by Lk. (11:24–26) earlier in the discourse. There they seem to illustrate the futility of the methods of the Jewish exorcists (v. 19). These seem to do the same work as Christ, but really they act against Him (v. 20); for the evil spirit whom they drive out returns, making the sufferer worse than before. In Mt. the verses seem rather to describe the condition of the Jewish nation in Christ's time. They had formerly repented at the summons of God, and their evil spirit had been driven out. But it had returned with seven others. And now the condition of the nation was such that even the preaching of Christ had no effect."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Allen, Willoughby C. 1907. A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to S. Matthew. International Critical Commentary. New York: C. Scribner's Sons.

## 2. The Family of God

"While he was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him. 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)**

Matthew then shifts the story. Jesus' family appears to speak with Him. Jesus uses this moment to teach a final lesson, bringing this heated debate to a close. One reminder, the criticism of Jesus throughout chapter twelve is that the Gentiles have responded to His message, and that His own people have largely ignored the signs that He is the Messiah. One of the common themes in Matthew is that Jesus is accepted and loved by people that the Jewish community deems unworthy and "sinners." As Jesus' family approaches Jesus uses this moment to cement the spiritual point. He asked, "Who are the members of my family?" The softball answer is the people waiting outside, the ones who birthed and raised you. But in context, we could say Jesus is asking, "Is Israel my family?" Jesus is making the comparison between His earthly family and the nation of Israel. This is when Jesus turns the conversation. The true family for Jesus is anyone who does the will of the Father in Heaven. Jesus moves the audience to a realization that, whether Jew or Gentile, nationality is secondary to obedience to God. Throughout the chapter, Jesus has been fighting with those who blaspheme the Holy Spirit and reject the signs Jesus has accomplished, even to the point where the Pharisees accused Jesus of working for the devil. Jesus is making us aware that the family of God consists of those who love and serve God. Being an Israelite doesn't make one a child of God, but following the will of God, as found in the law, the prophets, and now through the Messiah, does.

This text isn't slamming the biological family. Jesus isn't putting down Mary and His earthly siblings. Instead, Jesus is demonstrating that allegiance should not be based on birth but on life and action. The Jewish leader believed that Israel was the only nation that mattered to God, and they were automatically going to receive God's blessings simply by dint of their existence. Yet, they are rejecting the Messiah who was foretold by the prophets based on their biases. Jesus' mission is to have everyone repent and believe that Jesus has brought the Kingdom of God to earth. Those who trust this promise and turn from their evil ways and trust in His promises are in the family of God. As Christians, we honor our earthly family, but they are not automatically the authority in our lives. God is the king of our lives, and we serve Him first and foremost.

That's why every Christ follower must make their own decision to follow Jesus. No one is saved from sin, death, and judgment by their earthly family origin, but by their confession of sin and reliance on Jesus to save them. Just because someone grows up in a Christian family does not make them a Christian, because they must understand in their hearts that they need to repent and believe in Jesus and follow Him.

### **Application**

"Have You Accepted Jesus Christ?"

Sometimes we hesitate to ask this question because we don't want to offend. However, repenting of sin and following Jesus isn't a family question; it's for every single person.

Would you be willing to journal this week about the moment you repented of your sin and accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior?

If you haven't done that, would you commit to talking to someone about accepting Jesus? Amen.