

The Gospel According to Matthew

By

G. Campbell Morgan, D.D.

Copyright © 1929

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

MATTHEW 12:46-50

IN our last three studies we have been considering the opposition of the rulers to the King as it manifested itself along three lines of attack. The first was that of their criticism of His attitude toward the Sabbath; the second that of their attempt to account for His power; and the third that of their request for a sign.

His attitude toward the Sabbath He defended. His power, He declared to be that of co-operation with the Spirit of God, and solemnly warned these men of the peril they were running in refusing to recognize this fact. As to a sign, He refused what they asked in the material realm, and foretold the ultimate sign of His own resurrection.

We now come to a brief paragraph which at first does not seem to have any relation to this movement of opposition, giving as it does the account of the coming to Him, at this period, of His mother and His brethren.

As a matter of fact, the story is vitally and intimately related to all that has preceded it, and is the account of opposition of the most subtle and powerful kind, proceeding from an entirely different motive.

In the incident recorded, interpreted in the light of the words of the King called out thereby, we have a superlative revelation of the most subtle form which opposition to the work of the establishment of the Kingdom of God ever takes. In this story therefore we also find a revelation of the reason why the Master, in the prosecution of His work, did not depend upon purely human affection, or trust Himself to those who were united to Him merely by the ties of earthly relationship.

In order that we may understand the passage, we shall consider the significance of the coming of Mary, and the consequent meaning of the words of the King. Matthew simply records the fact that while He was speaking to the multitudes, His mother and His brethren stood without, seeking to speak with Him.

If we turn to Mark's account of the same incident, we have some explanation of the reason why they came to Him at this time. The multitudes were so eager to be near Him, and to hear Him, that He and the disciples had neither time nor room to eat bread; **“and when his friends heard of it, they went out to lay hold on him: for they said, He is beside himself”** (Mark 3:21).

It is evident that His mother and His brethren were not with Him at this time, but in all probability were in Nazareth, where the news reached them of His persistent and laborious toil, and of the fact that He was coming into conflict with the rulers of the people. The news filled them with alarm, and they came to the conclusion that He was beside Himself, and immediately started on their journey to Him, in order to take Him away, and prevent His continuing this kind of work. Between the time when this rumour reached them and their arrival, His conflict with the rulers had continued concerning His power, and evidently concerning the sign also, although Mark does not chronicle that in the same connection.

At last His mother and His brethren arrived in Capernaum, where He probably then was (Mark 3:31). Thus Mary's journey from Nazareth to Capernaum was the result of her great love for Him, and was taken because she thought He had lost His reason, and she would fain save Him from the results of His own folly.

If that was the reason of the coming of Mary, we at once have a revelation which accounts for the attitude of the King when He was informed of her arrival. It is a clear and superlative illustration of the fact that the Kingdom of God cannot be established on natural lines. His mother was, as to all earthly relationship, His nearest of kin, and yet she was evidently entirely unable to understand His method. His foes had said that the works He wrought were the result of co-operation with Beelzebub. His friends declared that He had lost His reason.

This is a startling revelation of how near hatred and love may be in the conclusions at which they arrive, when neither is familiar with the deepest secret prompting the activity of those who are working in fellowship with God.

In the light of this consideration of the significance of the coming of Mary, we may now consider more particularly the meaning of the words of Jesus.

In the question He asked, and the declaration He made, He gave fresh evidence of the fact that the supreme passion of His heart was that of the accomplishment of the will of God. Such accomplishment He made the standard of His judgment, and the gauge of His relationships. Every other interest, however near, or however sacred by all the laws of human interrelationship, He counted secondary, and without hesitation or tremor, broke with them completely when they threatened in any measure to interfere with that supreme matter.

This is not to say that He lost His affection for His brethren, or failed in love to His mother. In the last and awful hours of His intensest suffering, He still thought of her, and with tender solicitude entrusted her to the care of John.

His brethren, moreover, according to the flesh, we find eventually numbered among His disciples. But in this hour, when unable to understand Him, they sought from the motive of a true affection to hinder Him in His work, He resolutely refused to yield to their desire, and by His words revealed the fact that He counted earthly relationships as nothing compared to those spiritual relationships which were born of a common loyalty to the will of God.

Thus we see the King Himself entering into the experience to which He referred when He declared that “**a man’s foes should be they of his own household;**” and that He “**came not to send peace, but a sword.**”

It is impossible thus carefully to consider the story of the mother and the brethren of Jesus without feeling that this was a phase of opposition more subtle than any which had preceded it. In so far as it is permitted us to interpret His experience by our own, we should certainly be inclined to say that it was easier to resist the definite hostility of those who were in open rebellion, than to stand firm against suggestions which came from those who loved Him, and who, according to the measure of their light, were acting in His interest. Nothing other than the clearest vision of the will of God, and the most perfect acquiescence therein, would be equal to victory in such an hour of crisis.

The words of Jesus on the positive side are full of beauty and of encouragement for all those who share His devotion to the accomplishment of the Divine will.

Conscious of the mistake made by His mother and His brethren, He pointed to the disciples, and declared that they were His next of kin. It is a truth not easy to believe, and yet witness is borne to it in every department of life. The highest and closest comradeships are always the result of spiritual affinity. That is the basis of true marriage.

It is moreover, the ground of all high fellowship, such as that of art, or music, or literature. Those who come into communion upon the basis of a common capacity for the higher things of the spiritual life, find closer kinship than those united by ties of blood where there is no such spiritual affinity. And supremely this is true of those who are one in their vision of the Kingdom of God, in their passion for its realization, and in their devotion to the King Himself.

It is an amazing word when we think of the frailty of these disciples. Under the stress of all that lay before them, they were presently scattered like chaff before the wind; but notwithstanding all that, the history of the Christian Church has vindicated this gracious word of the King. When presently by the way of His resurrection, and the coming of the Spirit, the vision of these men was clarified, and their understanding of the true meaning of His mission was perfected, they were welded together with each other and with Him in a unity far mightier than that of flesh and blood relationship, and as they went forth to the fulfillment of His purposes in the world, like their Master they were enabled to count all the ties of human kinship as of no moment when in any measure they interfered with their loyalty to Him.

Such a meditation as this compels the inquiry as to how nearly those of us who profess to follow in His train are really related to the King.

If we not only admire, but do the will of His Father, we are, according to His own most gracious words, related to Him as brethren, sisters, mother; that is, we are His next of kin.

As we have already inferred, in the case of the disciples who were gathered about Him, His words were prophetic rather than descriptive. In measure they were even then devoted to the will of God, but He knew how they, too, ere long would falter and fail.

Nevertheless, they had made their choice, had left all to follow Him; and therefore it was possible that His power should operate in them, in order to their perfect conformity to that will. The sequel we know. That power won its victory eventually, and they became actually co-operative with Him in the carrying out of His purposes.

Through such next of kin in spiritual relationship and loyal devotion to the will of God, His Kingdom is set up.

The principle revealed in this story is one of very solemn present application. We prove our distance from Him when in the fellowship of Mary and His brethren in the days of their limited understanding, we attempt to dissuade those who are in closest fellowship with Him, from such sacrificial service as demonstrates their nearness to Him.

~ end of chapter 31 ~

<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>
