

When Jesus is your brother, you can't do something wrong, and then blame it on him. When Jesus is your brother, his birth story will always be more exciting than yours. When Jesus is your brother, you can expect to hear, "Why can't you be more like your brother Jesus?" When Jesus is your brother, you basically always look bad in comparison. I know that personally, because my name is James. And Jesus is my brother. Well, half-brother technically. Mary is our mother, but we have different fathers. My father is Joseph. Jesus' father...is God.

And believe me, that was tough to remember growing up. As much as our parents reminded us that Jesus was the Savior that God promised after Adam and Eve fell into sin, when you grow up playing, eating, sleeping, and working under the same roof with Jesus, it becomes easy to forget that. **When Jesus is your brother**, it's hard to believe he's also your Savior.

That's not to say there weren't plenty of people who believed in Jesus. The stories of Jesus healing people, driving out demons, and calling twelve men as his disciples had found their way back to our hometown of Nazareth. People traveled long distances just to get a glimpse of Jesus...our brother. To us, it just seemed too crazy.

But after Jesus and his disciples returned to their home base in Capernaum after a mission trip, ***"Again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat."***

It just didn't seem right. Wasn't this Jesus, the same brother we grew up with? How could this be true? Even our mother Mary worried that Jesus was working too hard, spreading himself too thin. So we trekked 30 miles to Capernaum to ***"take charge of him."*** Again, when Jesus is your brother, it's hard to believe he's also your Savior.

I'll be honest. We thought Jesus was ***"out of his mind."*** Yes, even his own brothers ***"did not believe in him."*** And although he drew huge crowds, we weren't the only ones who didn't believe.

There was also the group of religious leaders called "The Teachers of the law" or the "Scribes." These men were basically the theological experts of our day. That made them powerful in the religious community, which resulted in lots of fame, social claims, and privileges. It also resulted in an extreme lack of humility and selflessness.

Because Jesus continued drawing larger crowds, these teachers of the law felt their power and authority being threatened. They were so threatened by Jesus that some of them traveled 85 miles one-way from Jerusalem to spread the rumor, ***"He is possessed by Beelzebub. By the prince of demons, he is driving out demons."*** They claimed that Jesus was channeling Satan's power to do these miracles, hoping to drive people away from Jesus, and back to them.

But in their desperation, the Scribes forgot their logic at home. Jesus quickly pointed out how ridiculous their claim was. ***"How can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand...and if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come."*** If Jesus was channeling the power of Satan, wouldn't he use that power to advance Satan's work? Not defeat Satan by driving out his workers!

Their claim made no sense. But they thought illogical sounded better than the alternative—that Jesus really was the Son of God! They hated Jesus, because his teachings threatened their power and desires. They believed they belonged to God's family because they were "sons of Moses," who strictly enforced and

followed the laws God gave through Moses, and because they were “sons of Abraham,” descendants of God’s chosen people. They took for granted that they were God’s special children. But Jesus challenged that.

Honestly, we took Jesus for granted. When Jesus is your brother, it’s easy to see him as just another member of the family who needed our intervention. But Jesus also challenged that.

When we arrived at the house where Jesus was, the crowd was spilling out the door. So we **“sent someone in to call him. A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, “Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.”** We assumed Jesus would run out, listen to our sound reasoning, and put an end to this craziness. We were his family after all! But instead, Jesus’ replied, **“Who are my mother and brothers?”** Motioning to his disciples, he said, **“Here are my mother and brothers! Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.”** Jesus said it as a loving warning, but it felt like a punch to the gut. But it was a punch we needed to feel.

There were three groups of people at that house that day. Each assumed they belonged to God’s family. The Teachers of the Law thought they belonged to God’s family on the merits of their works. We thought had a claim on Jesus by merit of being blood relatives. And his followers believed Jesus was the Savior. Two of those groups were outside of God’s family, because neither Scribes nor Brothers understood what Jesus’ followers knew-- You can only belong to God’s family when Jesus is your brother—your brother through faith.

Do you ever take Jesus for granted, like we did? I don’t doubt that you believe Jesus is your Savior. But do you sometimes take for granted what it means to belong to God’s family? As Jesus said, **“Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.”**

What is God’s will? First, God wants **“all men to be saved, and to come to a knowledge of the truth.”** God’s will is that all people have saving faith that Jesus our brother is also Jesus our Savior! By the power of the Spirit, working through God’s powerful Word and sacraments, he has brought you to faith! But God also wants us to live that faith. As God the Father said about Jesus, **“This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.”** God wants us to listen to Jesus, and to live according to his will for our lives.

That doesn’t mean the Scribes were right. They believed they belonged to God’s family by following his law. But the reverse is true. We follow God’s law because we belong to God’s family. The Scribes were right about one thing. Satan was working that day, but not through Jesus. Satan was working through the Scribes, and us.

Satan desperately wants to keep you out of God’ family. So he works really hard to get you to take Jesus for granted. That always leads in one of two directions—either believing we belong to God’s family by our works. Or growing apathetic about our brother and Savior Jesus. Which do you struggle with?

Maybe you’ve been a Christian your whole life. You’ve never known what it’s like to not believe. Do you ever struggle with taking your faith for granted? Is Jesus at times just a part of your life, but not the most important part? Does brother Jesus get pushed down your priority list by spouse, significant other, self, boss, or children? Do you fail to take advantage of the many opportunities God gives you to grow stronger in your faith, like we failed to take advantage of being Jesus’ biological family? Do you believe in Jesus, but sometimes ignore his will for how we ought to live our lives? Living in sin as if some of God’s commands were something devilish? Or thinking that Jesus must have been “out of his mind” when he made some of those commands?

Or maybe you’re newer to the faith and the church. Or maybe you’re back after falling away or spending some time in a dark place. You’re maybe not as tempted to take your faith for granted as you are tempted to think like the Scribes. Like you belong to God’s family because you’re doing this great thing bringing yourself to

church and becoming a member of this church family. Thinking you're a part of God's family not because of Jesus, but because of the good you've done.

Whether you're more like Jesus' brothers or the Scribes, or a combination of both, we've all taken our faith and our Savior for granted. Sin separates people from our Holy God. Therefore, these sins should also separate us from God's family.

But Jesus' disciples weren't perfect either. The disciples' faith was a constant rollercoaster of belief, doubts, and lapses. Peter denied Jesus. Every single disciple abandoned Jesus when he was arrested. So why would Jesus call them his real family when they frequently took Jesus for granted and failed to do God's will?

Because as Jesus told the crowds that day, ***"I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them."*** Every sin we commit separates us from God's family. And if we're not in God's family, we belong to Satan. However, as Jesus said, ***"No one can enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man. Then he can rob his house."***

We heard John describing in the picture language of Revelation how Jesus bound Satan and chained his power. We heard God's promise in Genesis that the Savior would crush the Serpent's head. With every exorcised demon, Jesus showed his complete power over Satan. Jesus kicked in Satan's door, tied him up, and carried off all of Satan's possessions—every sinner destined for hell...so he could bring them into God's family!

Through Christ's perfect life, innocent death, and triumphant resurrection, God forgives our sin, our rebellion, and our blasphemy. Through God's powerful Word, the Spirit works to create and strengthen saving faith, so that we receive Christ's forgiveness. That's why Peter the denier became a church leader. That's why Paul the persecutor could become Christ's proclaimer. That's why we, Christ's brothers, who thought he was out of his mind and didn't believe in him, are recorded among the first believers in the early Christian church in the book of Acts. That's why I became one of the foremost leaders of the Christian church in Jerusalem. Not by our works or biological relation, but by Christ's merciful forgiveness and the working of God's powerful Word!

When Jesus is your brother, every sin is forgiven. When Jesus is your brother, the story of your rebirth is the most exciting of all. When Jesus is your brother, God sees you as perfect like him. You know that personally, because Jesus is your brother through faith. That means you're a member of God's family.