

This King: Like Father, Like Son

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[0 : 00] Let's pray. Father, as we've just read and sung, give us understanding, Lord, that we might obey you with all our hearts.

We pray that you would direct us in your paths, for it is there we find delight. We ask that you turn our hearts towards you and your Son, the Lord Jesus, and not towards ourselves or to our own selfish interests.

Turn our eyes from worthless things and instead help us to find the deepest treasure of all, which is your Son, Jesus. So, Father, we pray again that you would help us to long for you, for it is in you we have life.

All this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Now, have you ever had the experience of thinking that you know someone? Only to discover that you didn't know him or her as well as you thought?

Now, confession time, I've had more than one person say that about me. I'm not sure why, but given that I score as an INFJ on the Myers-Briggs personality test, that's the rarest personality, apparently people with my personality type are considered quiet but complex, with a rich inner life that people often don't realise from afar.

[1 : 28] But anyway, I've had people come and tell me that they were so sure that I'm a science nerd, only to be shocked when I tell them that I've been bad at maths and science all my life, and I'm more of a humanities guy.

After all, my first degree is in English literature. Different friends at different seasons in my life have also told me that they had me pegged as this really serious person.

But once they really got to know me, they were taken aback by how unserious I really am. But certainly, I'm sure we've all had that experience, even with family.

I still remember in my teens, playing Chinese chess with my cousin, when my father sat down to observe us playing, and suddenly started recommending moves, which made clear that he was a master of the game.

And I was shocked, since my father had never really shown any interest in board games before. By the way, thanks to his suggestions, I trashed my cousin.

[2 : 39] Thanks, Pa. And in today's passage, we find this experience as well. You see, Jesus' parents are going to discover that they don't know him as well as they thought.

Now, usually our parents know us better than almost anyone else on earth. And Jesus' parents are no different.

Jesus' disciples might have spent three years with him, but his parents would have spent many times more. But when we go through this passage, one of the things that jumps out at us is how often Luke highlights what Jesus' parents don't know.

First of all, in verse 43, they don't know that he's not with them. And then in verse 44, when they realize that, they don't know where he is.

And when they discover him, verse 48, they don't know what in the world he's doing with all those learned people. And not only that, verse 48 again, they don't know why he does what he does.

[3 : 54] They don't know and understand Jesus as well as they thought. And so in this way, Luke is asking us too, do you perhaps not know Jesus as well as you think you do?

You could have spent an entire lifetime in church, had a Bible ever since you could read, sat in over a thousand sermons, and been in and around lots and lots of Christian things.

But that doesn't necessarily mean that you know Jesus that well. The well-known Christian journalist, Philip Yancey, begins his book, *The Jesus I Never Knew*, by recalling the image of Jesus he had in his childhood as someone who pats the heads of little boys and girls and gives advice like, now kids, you must be nice to your mummy and daddy.

And he recalls being comforted by such an image. But as an adult, he was soon confronted by people claiming that Jesus was like this or like that.

And he realized that he needed to go looking once again for the real Jesus. And that's what Luke invites us to do this morning.

[5 : 22] He invites us to search, not for the Jesus of our imagination, but for the Jesus of biblical revelation. And to do that, he invites us to ponder upon this rather unique episode in Jesus' life.

Now, one of the most interesting things about the biographies of Jesus by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John is that they have almost nothing to say about the early childhood of Jesus.

We have stories about his birth and his infancy, as we've been hearing over the last few weeks.

And of course, we have plenty of material about his adult ministry.

But we have almost nothing in between. But there is one exception, and it is Luke alone who gives it to us, which is this very passage we've just read today.

And in this passage, Luke shines a spotlight on a 12-year-old Jesus in a way that would help us know him more and subsequently marvel at him more.

[6 : 37] And to help get us into this story and to understand it, I'm going to approach it a bit like a journalist under three headlines. So let's dive in, and here is our first headline, The Disappearance of Jesus.

Last week, we were introduced to Jesus' first trip to the temple as an eight-year-old in obedience to the law. And we soon discover in verse 41 that we'll be the first of many trips.

Every year, Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. That's a testimony to the godliness of this family.

You see, while the law required the men to attend the festival, families were not required. Now, it is true that many families probably did go, so Jesus' family are not unique in that regard.

But it still shows how committed this particular family is to the Lord. The journey would have taken multiple days, and pilgrims typically didn't have to stay for the entire festival, which lasted a week.

[7 : 58] But, you will have noticed beginning of verse 43, they only leave once the festival is over. For this family, remembering the redemption of Yahweh, which is what Passover is all about, is very important.

And so, the godly rhythms of this family are evident. Here is a family wholeheartedly pursuing God. And while this is not going to be the primary point of the story, I do think there is a secondary application for us here.

Reading this should cause us to ask ourselves, what kind of rhythms are we setting in our own families? You see, the truth is, if parents are not setting the agenda, something or someone else will, whether that's the media or the culture or something else.

And it's so easy, isn't it, to lose the rhythms of faith? It's so easy just to make church for our kids optional, to not pray with them, to plunge them into activities, but not immerse them in God's word. It's so easy to pour all our energies into their studies and their sports, but to regard their knowledge of the faith as secondary, as a job best left to the Sunday school teachers or the youth leaders.

[9 : 37] But Deuteronomy 6, verse 4 to 9 tells us that God's word is not just to be in our hearts, but in the hearts of our children. And God says, as we love them and speak his word into their lives and pray with them not just once, but regularly, as we establish the rhythms of faith, we are presenting our children's hearts as a manuscript on which the Lord can write.

So here is an implicit encouragement to be a Deuteronomy 6 family like Jesus' family. It's hard to imagine a better gift you can leave to your children.

But back to the story, so far in the opening verses, it's been like any other year, but now, verse 43, there's a twist.

After the festival was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it.

Jesus is no longer a toddler, but almost a teenager. Old enough, in fact, for his vows to be considered valid according to Jewish custom.

[11 : 01] So his parents wouldn't have to watch him every second of the day. And families often travelled in groups to reduce costs and increase their protection against any potential robbers.

So it's quite reasonable that Mary and Joseph had simply assumed Jesus might be playing with the other kids in one of the caravans, as verse 44 indicates.

Perhaps they only noticed he was missing when the group settled down for the night. And now, their heart rate begins to speed up.

Sweat breaks out on their foreheads. All kinds of scenarios enter their minds. Where is he? They can't find him. And so, verse 45, they go looking for him, possibly starting even that very night. Now just imagine how frantic and exhausted they must feel. You know how when you are driving back after Gawai or Chinese New Year from your kampong and you often see how one side of the road is all clear while the other side of the road is filled with cars stretching all the way back?

[12:23] Well, given that Mary and Joseph are retracing their steps, they have to face all those caravans leaving Jerusalem. That's the situation.

But before we move on, let's pause here. For at this point, the story is inviting us to reflect.

Think again about what's happening. Jesus isn't there, but his parents are completely unaware. and the story is inviting us to ponder. Is it possible that you and I right now might assume that Jesus is with us when he really isn't?

Perhaps you've been so caught up in the business and routines of your work, so distracted by the worries and uncertainties of the day that you don't even realise Jesus has gone missing.

[13:33] He's noticed that you haven't involved him and so he's made himself absent. But you remain ignorant of that fact. And this can happen to the best of us.

I remember Joseph and Mary have shown themselves to be faithful so far. But this portion of the story reminds us that it's quite possible to be involved in church, live a generally moral life, do what we think is required, even speak up when we think that the rights of Christians are being threatened, but completely leave Jesus out.

He's got no say. so perhaps God is gently sounding a wake-up call to you this morning. Look at your life right now, your working life, your family life, your church life, your life at leisure, and ask, is Jesus present?

Does he call the shots? Or did I let him slip away? And how did I not notice? Is it because I don't know Jesus as well as I thought I did?

Such that when he's gone, it made little difference to me. And so this passage puts forth the disappearance of Jesus as the initial headline to catch our attention.

[15:16] and in doing so, he invites us to go looking for him. And that takes us to our second headline, the priority of Jesus.

The priority of Jesus. In verse 46, after three anxiety-filled days, they finally found him in the temple courts.

And what is he doing there? Verse 46 details three things. He's sitting among the teachers, he's listening to them, he's asking them questions.

Do you see what Jesus is doing? He's showing a keen interest in God's word. He's paying attention to the Old Testament scriptures.

He's looking to learn, to understand, to absorb. Now, I suspect that we often think of Jesus as if he comes into this world with a complete knowledge of God and the scriptures from the very moment of his birth.

[16:26] We can't imagine him being a curious three-year-old exploring his environment, or an inquisitive six-year-old asking his father what carpentry is like.

We don't take his humanity seriously enough. And so we say, yeah, yeah, yeah, I know, I know, I know Jesus is human, but I mean, not really, right?

It's more like he looks like a human, but really he is actually still this divine superman, not one of us. But, and we will also reflect on this a little more later in the sermon.

What we need to understand is that Jesus learns in the same way we do. He's like us. He listens. He asks questions. He is eager to discover what God is like, what God's purposes are for the world, what God is there for. He is genuinely hungry for God's word, and he's humble enough to listen and to ask.

[17:42] And the way he asks questions are so insightful and interesting that, verse 47, people begin to stop and listen and be amazed.

The way crowds begin to gather at a shopping mall when they notice something interesting is happening at the center court. Luke wants us to see Jesus as completely human, yet at the same time as someone special, as he shows insight far beyond that of a typical 12-year-old.

And Luke reinforces that by subtly showing how Jesus is like Samuel in the Old Testament. You see, I haven't yet pointed it out, but so far, in Luke chapters 1 and 2, Jesus has been presented as a new kind of Samuel.

Like Samuel, he is dedicated to God in the temple as a baby by a mother who never expected to have him. Like Samuel, his mother would sing a song of prophecy and thanksgiving about God coming to reverse hopeless situations.

Like Samuel, he is described down in verse 52 as someone who grew in stature and in favor, which is exactly, almost word for word, how Samuel is described in 1 Samuel 2 verse 26.

[19 : 19] He's a human like Samuel. And although it is not recorded in the Bible, Jewish tradition held that Samuel was 12 years old when he was first called by God to be a prophet in the tabernacle.

The word of God comes to him so that from him the word will go to all Israel. And now, Luke brings us to a time in Jesus' life when he, likewise, is in the temple at 12 years old.

And we hear him receiving God's word, shaping him in such a way so that the word of God will go to all Israel.

But of course, he is ultimately greater than Samuel. For as Simeon told us last week, this boy is going to be a light to the Gentiles and salvation to the nations.

That's going to be his mission. But to know and fulfill that mission, he still listens to the word of God.

[20 : 35] It's a priority for him. Let that fact sink in for a moment. Now, of course, his parents don't quite see things that way, at least not at first.

the parents. In verse 48, his parents are also astonished, but not quite in the same way as the crowds. They are just stunned that Jesus should come here, amongst the learned theologians of all places.

After all, don't forget, Jesus didn't just get lost. In verse 43, we are told the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem.

This is intentional. So we can just hear the note of exasperation in Mary's voice when she now asks her son, verse 48, son, why have you treated us like this?

Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you. Or as the message paraphrase of the Bible puts it, young man, why have you done this to us?

[21 : 52] Your father and I have been half out of our minds looking for you. Fair question, isn't it? I suspect many of us are asking that as well.

My goodness, Jesus, what are you up to? And this question now sets the stage for the very first recorded words of Jesus in Luke's Gospel.

And interestingly, Jesus' reply expresses genuine surprise. Verse 49, why were you searching for me? He asked. Didn't you know I had to be in my father's house?

This teenager-to-be doesn't get it. You see, think about it from this 12-year-old's point of view. He's been shaped by the rhythms of his faithful household.

He's been dedicated to God. And every year, he's been following his parents to observe Passover at the temple. Furthermore, perhaps he's even heard a little about how the angels and his own mother prophetically sang over him.

[23 : 11] surely, if his parents would put all these together, they would know he would therefore want to be where God would be.

Surely, they would know he must be in the father's house. To him, it's obvious. Why are parents so clueless?

Papa, Mama, surely, you must know? Isn't it amazing just how Jesus' first recorded words here in Luke's Gospel packed quite a punch?

He sounds exactly how you might think a 12-year-old might sound, and yet, at the same time, he talks like no one else does.

Think a little harder about what his words assume. First of all, he assumes a particular relationship with God. In verse 48, Mary talks about how she, his mother, along with his earthly father, have been looking all over for him.

[24 : 25] But in Jesus' reply, verse 49, he simply assumes that they would know he has another parentage as well. God, is his father.

But just as astonishingly, is what he assumes about the place he's in. Remember, this conversation is taking place in the temple. And sure, people talk about this place as a meeting place with God, as

the dwelling place of God.

But no one, not Moses, not David, not Solomon, would ever dare claim that this is their father's house. But Jesus almost casually just drops that into conversation.

And he's saying, my relationship with God, my father, and my listening to his word, and my devotion to the father's business, must take priority above everything else.

every other relationship must be subordinate to this one. That's why Jesus says, verse 49, didn't you know I had to be?

[25 : 46] Didn't you know this is the highest priority? I must be in my father's house. For don't forget, not only is the temple his father's dwelling place, it is also the place where his father's work is clearly seen.

For this is the place of sacrifice. This is the place where blood is shed. This is the place where sinners can once again be brought into fellowship with God.

And that is why later on in Luke chapter 19, Jesus will say to Zacchaeus, the prototypical sinner, I must stay at your house because this is the father's business.

For Jesus to go to the house of the sinner, to bring them back to the house of God. This is Jesus' priority, to come so that you and I can come home to our heavenly father too.

God is a lot to take in, isn't it? And it's not surprising, verse 50, that his parents struggle to understand.

[27 : 11] At this point, I'm sure they're thinking, I don't know my boy as well as I thought I do. And I don't think Luke is blaming them here.

He is not shaking his head as he writes this, Joseph, Mary, after all the stuff the angel said to you, and after all that time you spent with Jesus, you should have known better.

No, no, no. Verse 50 is not the headline response that Luke wants us to take away. So what is then? Well, this brings me to my third headline for today.

The treasuring of Jesus, the treasuring of Jesus. Mary and Joseph don't understand verse 50. But look at what Mary does, verse 51.

She treasured all these things in her heart. She knows she doesn't fully understand the words of Simeon from last week, or the words that her own son has just spoken to her.

[28 : 20] She knows she has to grow in understanding. And so she responds in the exact same way as she first did when the shepherds came to her when Jesus was born.

Just look back with me at chapter 2 verse 19. Chapter 2 verse 19. She treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.

She makes it her heart's desire and determination to know Jesus. She made it her highest priority. And just as an aside, let's take some time to appreciate Mary.

As Protestants, we rightly protest at Roman Catholic theology that seems to put Mary in an exalted place that Jesus alone should occupy.

But we shouldn't downplay her either. For here is a mother who has breastfed this baby, who's changed his diapers, who's cleaned up his poop, and who can say more than anyone present in this hall today that she knows Jesus.

[29 : 41] And yet here, with deep humility, she says, I can know Jesus more. I can treasure Jesus more than I do today.

And so, for the remainder of our time this morning, I want us to follow Mary's lead and treasure and ponder Christ afresh. But what should we ponder and treasure?

Well, as I've hinted at already, I think this passage wants us to ponder and treasure the humanity of Jesus. Did you notice how this passage is book-ended in verses 40, we didn't read that verse, verse 40 and 52 by statements about how Jesus grew?

they provide the frame for the passage. And actually, Luke has been very deliberate about this.

Back in Luke 2, verse 16, he calls Jesus a baby.

By Luke 2, verse 40, he's being referred to as a child. And then in Luke 2, verse 43, he's called a boy. You see, Jesus is not just the Son of God, but the Son of Mary.

[31 : 03] And like us, he has to learn to walk, he has to learn to talk, he has to learn to think, he has to go through all the developmental stages that we go through.

As the theologian John Calvin puts it, growing up gradually is part of what the Lord took on himself in condescending to our human condition.

He freely took what cannot be separated from human nature. Now, why is that so important? Well, first of all, I think it's because we need to know we have a sympathetic saviour.

And my friends, as Hebrews 4 makes clear, Jesus is not someone who cannot sympathise with our weaknesses. He is truly, completely human, with all the capacities and faculties deemed essential to humanity.

Now, the deep mystery of the incarnation, of course, is that he is all that without ever ceasing to be truly God. And yet, he knows what it's like to have parents, what it's like to go to school, what it's like to go on family outings, what it's like to experience puberty.

[32 : 33] In his human nature, he can experience physical growth, he can experience increasing wisdom, he can experience tears and joy, he can even suffer death.

I wonder, many of us know Jesus as God, but do we know him as a human being?

Do we need to grow to know him as such? For as we meditate on his humanity, we will find new depths to him in which we can rejoice in.

And so, be amazed that Jesus, who is God, is willing to be born in created time and space and go unrecognized as the creator of the universe.

Marvel that the one who demands obedience is willing to be carried as a baby into the temple and be circumcised. Worship as the one who knows every secret of this universe is willing to sit at the feet of mere humans to learn from them.

[33 : 52] That's what the Son of God did when he took on human nature. And consider that right now, today, Jesus still has the same body which he grew up in.

Yes, it is a glorified resurrection body, but it is not a completely different body. The same body that went through all the events of today's passage has not been discarded by Jesus.

He is in heaven as a man. Do you see how humble Jesus is? How highly he esteems his humanity? He sits on the throne of the most high still as a man.

So, how confident we can be therefore that he understands what we go through as a human day after day.

Treasure Christ, the human. But second of all, don't forget he is our sympathetic saviour. That is, his humanity also reveals why he alone can save.

[35 : 11] Because he is truly human in every way, he can represent us also in every way. The only key difference is he is fully obedient in every way.

He prioritised God like no one else has. He listened to God's word like no one else has. He alone, in the language of verse 52, has the favour of God.

And so, all of his life is lived for our sake as a true human being so that he can save us.

My friends, the beauty of the gospel is clothed in the humanity of Christ. Don't ever forget that. Don't forget he goes to the father's house to learn and do the father's work so that you and I can be reconciled to our father and call Jesus our older brother.

You know, interestingly, the only other time Jesus is absent for three days in Luke's gospel is on that very first Good Friday right up to the first Easter Sunday.

[36 : 28] perhaps there is a faint hint there of what Jesus will do, making himself absent so that we can enter God's presence.

And finally, it means Jesus is our exemplary saviour. Without a doubt, Jesus came to be more than just an example.

we cannot save ourselves. Only he can. We must be clear on that. But that doesn't mean he can never be our example. As he prioritises God and his word, surely that is something we can aspire to as well.

And as John Stott once said, while it is true that the incarnation is unique, there is one aspect of it that we can imitate, and that is Christ's attitude of humility.

Look again at verse 51. What did Jesus do, having said what he said to his parents? Did he boss them around, now that he's shown that he is the son of God?

[37 : 43] No. Notice, he submits to them. He obeys them. Long before he humbled himself on the cross, he was already humbling himself before others.

You know, often we say that if we want to know what God is really like, look at Jesus. That's absolutely true. But I want to remind us also that if we want to know what it means to be truly human, look at Jesus as well.

He shows us what a human being in God's kingdom looks like and humility is one of its trademarks. So my brothers and sisters, has Jesus disappeared from your life?

Then sincerely cry out to God again to help you find him. Then treasure him with all your heart, being thankful to him that he is our sympathetic saviour, the one who knows what it means to lead a truly human life and who represents us perfectly before God and seek to know him more and more, never being satisfied to have a shallow relationship with him.

Perhaps one immediate way you can do that today is by signing up for our incarnation seminar that's taking place in a few weeks' time as a way of coming to terms with this wondrous mystery.

[39 : 20] But don't ever think that we know all there is to know about Christ, not even if you've been a Christian for 50 years.

Don't take him for granted. Keep treasuring Christ. Let's pray. Father, as we let this passage confront us this morning, we cannot but just marvel at what a mystery it is that the second person of the Trinity, the Son of God, came and took on human nature upon himself even as he retained his divine nature.

That is a mystery that we could never fully wrap our heads around. But Lord, we know that this is not just an intellectual puzzle for us to ponder on, but this is a great mystery and an amazing truth that causes us to worship you because we know that it is precisely that Jesus became human, that we are safe, that we can come now into the very house of God to worship you, be in relationship with you, and even call you our Father.

So Father, we pray that if we've been taking you for granted, we repent of that, and we just want to know you more and more once again. We pray all this in Jesus' name.

Amen.