

Part 9: Finding the Son, Knowing the Father

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Today we are returning back to our study through the gospel of Luke. For those who have joined us in the New Year let me quickly bring you up to speed as to what you've missed.

The gospel of Luke is one of the four accounts of the life of Jesus Christ we have recorded for us in scripture. It is called a gospel because it gives us good news of what Jesus has done, but the gospel of Luke is not different from the gospel of Jesus, it is simply an account of reasons why Jesus' life is in fact-- good news.

It was written by a man named Luke who was first and foremost a historian. He set out to piece together an orderly account, interviewing many eyewitnesses, traveling amongst the early church, and reconciling many voices. But the reason he wrote was not simply to introduce the life of Jesus to the world, though by the end of his second book, the book of Acts, that is indeed what has happened. Instead Luke wrote to those who claimed to believe in the gospel and yet due to external circumstances or internal doubts, are beginning to waiver in their faith.

He wrote this, as we saw in Luke 1:4, so that you, dear believer, "may have certainty regarding the things you have been taught." In an anxious world, with ever changing identity markers, here is God's work through the Holy Spirit to bring you confidence in who you might be by stressing who Jesus is and what he has done for lost and lonely sinners.

But today, the historian Luke gives us something that our modern hearts long for--an exclusive story. Out of the four gospel accounts, here Luke gives us a story which shows up nowhere else. In this we learn not only the tenacity of Luke to search out accurate details (most likely from Jesus' own mother), but we learn much about who Jesus is and how he perceives himself.

Where the other gospels begin with Jesus' birth and then fast forward to Jesus' ministry as an adult, today we get the exclusive story of Jesus' boyhood. Today we encounter a 12 year old Jesus. How many 12 year olds do we have in here today? Well, know that Jesus was like you, in every respect. That's what the author of Hebrews tells us. But he was unlike you in one key respect. That's the one thing Luke wants us to see today. Not only was Jesus the son of Mary and Joseph, but he was the son of God the Father.

This might seem disappointing to you given the exclusivity of this story. Here we have the first and much anticipated words of Jesus in Luke's exclusive tell all and the big news is that Jesus is the Son of God. I'm guessing regardless of your background with the church this idea is not new to you. We have heard before that Jesus is God's own son, or that God exists in part as God the Father.

But it's this reality which Luke finds as significant enough to be the only story included from his research. And while it might not give you any information you might not already know, what it does do is tell us the significance of what we do know.

We are beginning a portion of Luke's gospel where he unearths Jesus' messianic identity and purpose, and the first thing he wants us to see is the relationship Jesus has with his Father. This will be our main point today. Today we will see **We cannot understand who Jesus is apart from his relationship to the Father.**

What might seem simple and obvious is of profound importance not only to Jesus' own identity and mission, but to our own lives as well. As we look at this passage today we are going to examine Jesus' sonship in three perspectives. First we are going to see **Jesus' sonship from the perspective of the gospel**, then by way of application we are going to see specifically **Jesus' sonship from the perspective of parenting**, and lastly and most broadly we will see **Jesus' sonship from the perspective of salvation.**

To set the stage for us today, I want to read the whole of our passage for us once more and then we will circle back around and examine it in more detail: **Luke 2:39-52.**

As you've heard this passage now for the second time this morning, I imagine that you are picking up the tension that seems to build throughout. There is an innate tug and pull between Jesus and the relationship he expresses with his heavenly Father, and the relationship we encounter between Jesus and his human parents. But it's because of this tension that we must slow down and examine our first point today: **Jesus' sonship from the perspective of the gospel.**

If the good news Luke wants us to have certainty regarding is what Jesus has done, he opens up his book by stressing who Jesus is. To not know who Jesus is with clarity is to not have clarity on the gospel which Jesus came to accomplish.

Who is Jesus is one of the most important questions when it comes to the hope we have in the gospel. Is Jesus a good teacher, is Jesus a god sent from heaven, is Jesus half god and half-man. While it might seem trivial at first, the answers to this questions shape the goodness of the good news.

It's a question, which as we talked about last week, many of the early creeds and confessions aimed to answer. In the first few hundred years after Jesus lived, many people failed to understand the tension Luke paints in this text, and today we still wrestle with it—Especially if you've ever talked to a Muslim, a Jehovah's witness, or even a modern theologically progressive Christian.

To use some superhero analogies, some people saw Jesus as a hero like Thor. He was the son of a god, who came to earth and interact on behalf of humans, yet despite having the appearance of a human he was not human. He was a god. This stressed Jesus' divine sonship, but not his human sonship.

Perhaps the more common heresy today is believing that Jesus was a hero like Batman or Ironman. He had all the tools, and fulfilled the hero role in a way which was unparalleled. But behind the mask he was simply a human and nothing more. He might have had a bit more cash in his pocket, but he was just like everyone else. This emphasized Jesus' human sonship, but denied his divine sonship.

But here, Luke holds together both realities of Jesus in the tension we need.

We see two aspects of Jesus in this text which shape our understanding of who he is, which as a result shapes the hope we have in him.

First we see that **Jesus was a real boy with real parents.**

What we already know about Jesus at this point is that Jesus was born by Mary while she was still a virgin. We read this in **Luke 1:34-35**. So Jesus' origin was unlike any boy. He was born apart from the work of a human father. He was born of woman, and of the Holy Spirit. Yet, what we see here is that despite this unique origin story, Jesus was not less than a real boy.

If you're familiar with the story of Pinocchio, Jesus is entirely unlike him. If you remember Pinocchio was a puppet who was magically enlivened to live and move like a boy. But when he would say, "I'm a real boy!" his nose would grow indicating that he was lying and he was in fact, not a real boy.

But did you notice how Luke built this out. Look at what Luke says to begin and close this portion of scripture: **Luke 2:40, 52**.

Jesus grew. Luke makes it clear he grew in a number of ways. He grew in stature (that is in size), he grew in strength, he grew in wisdom, and he grew in the favor, or the grace, of God.

Why did he grow in these things? Because that's what boys do. Jesus, the eternal second person of the Trinity, took upon himself even the constraint of time itself when he took on flesh.

We also see that he grew in favor with God. Now this is pretty astonishing and this is where we must have a good sense of theology to understand this well.

While in eternity past, the Son of God always enjoyed the pleasure of the Father, it wasn't until this Son of God was born as Jesus the Son of Man that he had to obey as a human, in the flesh. Look at how the author of Hebrews puts it in **Hebrews 5:8**. While the eternal Son of God only joyfully worked in unison with the will of the Triune God in glory, he had to for the first time obey God in the flesh as human.

Which meant that every day Jesus woke up as a human boy, and every day when he refused to sin against God the Father, he was proving himself faithful pass the test of perfect obedience which could only be passed as a human. Why? Because it was humans who needed a perfectly obedient substitute.

So as Jesus faced increasing trials, the Father's favor and pleasure grew all the more as Jesus proved himself faithful where Adam, Abraham, David and you and me proved ourselves unable to be faithful.

And this real boy had real parents. Here we meet Mary and Joseph both trying to parent and care for their son.

And the beautiful hope for anyone who has ever been a parent is that even though Jesus has real parents, those parents lost the messiah.

Now in fairness, Luke makes it very clear that this was no one's fault. The Passover Feast was the largest festival of the Jewish year and family clans would caravan to and from Jerusalem together.

It was common in those caravans for the women and children to go in the front of the group, and for the men to follow in the back of the group. Jesus at this point in time is in the wonderful in-between stage.

At the age of 13, Jewish boys had their bar mitzvah which set them apart from boy to man. But it was common at the age of 12 for parents to begin to allow their sons to participate in Holy Days like this as a

sort of trial run for the following year. Which meant while at the feast Jesus probably at times hung back with the younger kids, and at others went with the older boys.

Given this freedom it would have been easy in the caravan for Mary to assume he was having a coming of age moment with his dad in the back and for Joseph to assume he was playing with the other boys in the front.

But what Luke wants us to see is that in the midst of all of this, Jesus stayed behind while his parents left.

And because Jesus was a real boy with real parents, he was really responsible to honor and obey them. This is pretty astounding to think about. Jesus was the eternal son of God, and yet despite this divine identity he needed to bear with weak and limited parents in an honorable and obedient way.

If there's one thing which often keeps children from obeying their parents it's the thought that their parents just don't understand them and don't know what's best for them. But here in clear display, Jesus' parents very clearly do not understand or know what's best for him and yet at the end of this moment of potential conflict Jesus responds in verse 51 with sinless and continued submission to them.

So kids who are in here, I want you to take note of your big brother Jesus. Jesus in this story knew better, but because he trusted his heavenly Father, he submitted himself to his earthly parents even when they didn't get the full picture. In so doing he wasn't placing his trust in his parents which will at some level disappoint, but instead he placed his trust in his heavenly Father who would never disappoint.

He knew the truth the apostle Paul quotes in **Ephesians 6:1-3**. This honor and obedience given to earthly parents is part of the plan of your perfect parent to work for your joy. And here Jesus, who had every right to say, "You're doing it wrong," trusted in God and at the end, willingly submitted himself to them.

This helps us understand the tension in this text. Because Jesus was sinless it wasn't Jesus' sin which introduced the drama, instead it was his sonship. He was both the son of Joseph and the son of God.

This is where we see that in light of being a real boy with real parents, ***Jesus understood his divine identity and his divine mission.***

Read with me again **Luke 2:46-50**

As Mary and Joseph loaded up the camel, Jesus stuck around the temple to hear the scriptures read and discussed. He did this because Jesus knew that he needed to be there. His own answer to his parents was that he "must" be there. Why? Because he knew who his Father was.

This is very important for us to understand because we see Jesus growing in wisdom here. Jesus didn't come out of the womb and invent the first electric car because he was God eternal. In fact look at what Paul says in **Philippians 2:5-7**.

To a degree that we cannot fully understand, when Jesus took on flesh he accepted aspects of the limitations of the flesh. The Son who never slept needed sleep. The Son who was omnipresent became

confined to one place at a time. The Son who created the trees had to be taught by Joseph how to cut one down.

While Jesus gave up in the flesh the free exercise of some of his divine attributes, he could give up knowing his Father.

Even as Jesus was an infant held in the arms of his adopted father, he had an awareness of his heavenly Father. Jesus knew the Father from birth because Jesus could not any more stop knowing the Father than water could stop being wet.

You see I could have died when my son was born, he could never know me but he would still be my son because he was born of me. But since Jesus, as the Son of God, was not born by God, but instead eternally proceeded from the Father, his status of sonship had nothing to do with biological beginnings, but instead a relational awareness of his union with the Father.

This is important because as we will see in Luke 3, John the Baptist chastises the people of Israel because they think they know God as their Father but they don't really know him.

But Jesus knew God the Father because he was God the Son. It is most likely Jesus faithful understanding of his Father which leads to his amazing responses amidst the crowd. To know and understand God as Father is to understand the whole scope of God's revelation in scripture. Over this portion of Luke's book the relationship between the Father, the Son and the Spirit becomes the basis for everything which follows.

It was not necessary for Jesus to know the cure to cancer for him to be our redeemer. It was not necessary for Jesus to have nail proof skin to be our savior. It was not necessary for Jesus to be adored in the flesh by the kings of the world for him to be our king. But it was necessary for Jesus to be exclusively aware of his relationship to his Father if he were to walk in faithfulness as our substitute.

The most important thing Jesus wanted us to know in the book of Luke, the first thing out of his mouth is an admission, and the tension which would follow, that he was the son of man and the Son of God.

To give an historical example of this. I'd like to hold up one of the most storied identity statements in human history: "My name is Inigo Montoya, you killed my father, prepare to die."

This statement is very helpful for us because we understand his identity, he is the son of his father. But more than that we also understand his purpose-to avenge his father.

Jesus' statement is not only one of identity, but it's actually one of purpose which reveals his divine mission.

Look back at **Luke 2:48-49**.

So if you'll notice if you are reading in your own Bible there's a little footnote after the word "house" and that's because in the Greek there is no word "house" in the sentence. In fact in the most literal sense it reads: "Do you not know that I must be in my Father's." Translators have added the word house since he is in the temple, and it's not out of place for that to be the case. But the heart of the Greek

actually comes out in some other translations a bit better when he says, "I must be about my Father's business."

Because Jesus understood his relationship to his Father, he understood his purpose in light of that. He came to the Father's house because he knew he needed to fulfill the Father's purpose. He knew that he was to continue to grow in wisdom and favor and perfect obedience because this was why he was sent. He was sent to be the substitute savior for those who didn't know the Father.

And it's actually this distinction which introduces the tension into this scene. As we saw it wasn't Jesus' sinful disobedience to his earthly parents which brought the tension into this text, it was his obedience to his heavenly one that brought the tension.

Jesus' statement wasn't one that rebuked his parents for caring for him. Instead it was a statement of what his parents should have expected from him.

You can imagine the jarring nature of this event for Mary and Joseph. For what was probably the first time since the events surrounding Jesus' birth, here the nature of Jesus' identity and purpose pressed against the ordinary life Mary and Joseph had settled into. It brought a strain that was most likely absent for the past decade.

As the book of Luke goes on, we are going to see Jesus say that for all who follow him this radical allegiance to God the Father will at times strain relationships between families and friends. It's not because following Jesus makes you seek out conflict but it's that it provides a greater obligation and motivation than that of other human relationships. To live for the purpose of God is not to live for the purpose of the world.

Jesus' authority was the will of his Father and following this will at times conflicted with the normal will of his parents. As tense as this moment was we see Mary's response to it. Look at **Luke 2:51**.

She treasured these things up. What are the things? It is specifically Jesus' words. The message of Jesus being set to the business of the Father was a joyful but weighty realization for Mary. Jesus as the working, and committed son of God was a new thing for Mary, but even in her lack of full understanding, it was a marvelous thing for her.

This is where in closing I want to press the application of this passage a bit more. First, and briefly I want to show its application in parenting.

Parent or not, life in the church means that it is always good to think in this perspective because God might use you to come alongside the efforts of other parents in the body, or God might so choose for you to be parent in the future. And here we see **Jesus' sonship in the perspective of parenting**.

And the primary perspective of this is that of parenting humility and trust. Mary's treasuring at the end of this is so significant. When Luke includes these little moments he's begging us as the readers to assess why she treasured it. What was so beautiful to captivate Mary's heart?

If I were Joseph, or if you were Mary, I would perhaps have a sense of frustration and bitterness at the end of this. Here God had so chosen to entrust you to care for the savior of humanity, and despite your

best attempts to keep him safe, he didn't do something as simple as look around and see where his parents were.

Then when you found him, he didn't praise you for finding him and saving him, but instead he was dumbfounded that you didn't know he'd be with his other Father. If our parenting goals are ease, simple obedience, and a stress-free family life there's immense opportunity in moments like this to become frustrated and disappointed.

But Mary treasured these things because she understood the weighty privilege of allowing her son to follow the calling of his heavenly Father.

Parents, we parent our kids into the plan and purpose of God, not the plans and purposes of what seems most pain free or safe for us.

There will perhaps be moments as your kids grow up where their desire to obey the plans of God might disrupt the plans you had for them. Perhaps you always wanted them to follow in your career path or live in your town forever, but they feel that they can best serve the mission of God pursuing this job in this place to meet this need.

My wife often told my son that he could pick any career except for military, police or fire. Why? Because as a good mother she wanted her son to be safe. But this raised a question in Sarah and I that would we rejoice if God were to call our child to be a missionary or evangelist, or disciple maker in the Ukraine? In Iran? In Mexico?

Would we rejoice if at the end of the day we get to enjoy our grandkids less, get a bit less financial aid in retirement, or a bit less regular communication but we see at the same time our kids living for the glory and purpose of God their king?

Parents, are you parenting your kids like God by parenting them to God. Giving them a vision for life that's bigger than blood of kin but instead surrendered to the blood of Christ. Would you be bold enough to treasure that?

We love John's words in **3 John 4**. But are we willing to trust our children with their heavenly Father when it means giving up more as their earthly father? Are we humble enough to say, "See his plan, see his glory, and be free to give your life to his business."

May we see that our parenting of our children ought not to be to protect them from all which is hard but instead to support them in all that his heavenly. Mary didn't know the depth of what Jesus meant. But she knew the privilege of giving her son to his heavenly Father.

It's this sense of security and wonder which leads us into our final point this morning, **Jesus' sonship in the perspective of salvation**.

Because Jesus was a real boy, with real parents, who he really loved, and because the author of Hebrews says that he was made in every way like us, tempted with all the things we are tempted with, and fully able to sympathize with us, I imagine that Jesus himself felt the tension and potential pain his earthly parents felt in this account.

In his flesh, he probably knew that it would have been easier to simply go with his parents and avoid this scene. But he was so captivated, so compelled, so controlled by his need to be with his heavenly Father that all the moments of tension which followed would be worth it.

He knew that to be with God the Father is to have peace even in disquieting times. As Jesus' testing increases in the coming weeks there is no greater hope, no greater confidence Jesus draws than his identity as the beloved son of the Father.

When we follow Jesus, and we experience moments of tension, do you realize that you have access to this Father and his house? In fact, this is why Jesus set his hand to the Father's business. Look at what John says in **John 1:9-13**.

What has Jesus come to do? To win back sinners by faith to God their father. What sustained Jesus in moments of tension like this and moments of pain as deep as the cross was knowing his Father was pleased with him.

As astounding as it may seem when Jesus prays for his disciples in John 17, he prays that all of that soul restoring, joy producing, conflict crushing, wound washing peace that he had for all eternity with the Father would be shared by those who believe in him.

Can you imagine if you felt the peace that Jesus the eternal son felt in the relationship he had with God the Father? Well, through faith you can. But for those who feel far off, I want you to consider this story once more.

Because while we see most clearly Jesus' relationship with the Father, we also see a story of searching for Jesus. Mary and Joseph are searching out of extreme discomfort and anxiety. We lost our dog a few weeks ago and before we found him I tried to prepare my distraught children for the potential of going to bed that night without the dog.

Here, Mary and Joseph are in total emotional despair because they have misplaced not only their son, but the savior God entrusted to them.

For many of us there may be moments where our own lost-ness causes us to feel the same emotional despair. This perhaps increases as you turn to the familiar places of family, friends, fame and refreshment and still do not find what you are looking for.

But what we see in this text is that we can always know where Jesus is. Jesus said he must be in the Father's house and about the Father's business. Today, this Jesus is risen at the right hand of God and for all who wander, there is the hope of turning back and finding him.

Whether you feel you've walked for one day, three days, or thirty years, you can come back through repentance and know exactly where to find this king. If that's you I want to leave you with this hope this morning: **Isaiah 55:6-7**.

There is a way back to the Father, and it's through the son. So come by faith and find him here.