

The priorities of Jesus

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[0 : 00] So the reading today is from Luke chapter 2, found on page 1034 in the Bibles on the seats.

Luke chapter 2, starting at verse 41. Now Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of Passover, and when he was 12 years old, they went up according to custom.

And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, but supposing him to be in the group, they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances.

And when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. After three days, they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.

And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. And when his parents saw him, they were astonished.

[1 : 20] And his mother said to him, Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress.

And he said to them, Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my father's house? And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them.

And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.

Let my advice welcome and a happy new year to you. Very good to see you all at the start of the new year. Please will you turn to that reading from the Bible we had from Luke chapter 2 on page 1034 as we continue our series of talks in these early chapters of Luke's gospel.

And why don't I then pray for us? Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we pray for this glorious truth that you have made yourself known in history.

[2 : 33] And we pray now that as we hear your words explained and proclaimed that you would indeed make yourself known through your words. And by your spirit, please help us to receive your words, to hear it, to take it to heart.

For Jesus' sake. Amen. Now, my aim this morning is for us to be fully convinced that Jesus Christ was both fully man and fully God.

And then to see the wonderful implications of that. In other words, that Jesus was one person but with two natures, both man and God. It's why, of course, in the gospel accounts, we're told that Jesus got tired and hungry.

And yet he's also the one who sustains the whole of creation. It's why Jesus says he doesn't know the day or the hour when he will return at the end of history. And yet he knows all things.

It's why he can be born a weak little baby and yet have existed from before all eternity. It's why he can die and yet he lives forever.

[3 : 41] Now, just to think about one of those things is completely mind-blowing, isn't it? We think to ourselves, well, how can those things be true at the same time? Well, it is because Jesus was both fully God and fully man.

Our key verses, I think, are Luke chapter 2, verses 48 and 49. As I read them, notice, will you, that Jesus had two fathers. So Luke chapter 2, verse 48.

And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress.

And he said to them, Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my father's house? Do you spot them, the two fathers, the contrast between your father, verse 48, Jesus'

human father, Joseph, and my father, verse 49, his heavenly father.

And those two fathers, so to speak, reflect the two natures of Jesus, both fully man and fully God. I guess the danger is that we either emphasize the one and not the other, or the opposite.

[4 : 54] Many churches overemphasize the humanity of Jesus. Jesus, the man. He is brought down to our level, so to speak. His miracles are doubted because they seem so impossible and unlikely.

Or perhaps the religious art, which simply portrays Jesus as a weak little baby, or equally weak and helpless on the cross. And if that is how you think of Jesus, then today's passage will help recalibrate.

He was not only fully man, although he was fully man, he was also fully God. But my hunch would be that for many of us, the danger is, for us, that we emphasize the divinity of Jesus, that he was fully God, and don't really think as much as we ought to about the fact that he was also fully man. And we end up with a Jesus who, while he is God, he is also distant. Perhaps whose experience of being human is in some way less than ours.

Who can't sympathize with our weaknesses. Who doesn't really know what it's like to suffer or experience temptation, because he was God. And we imagine that for him, all those things are easy.

[6 : 15] Well, again, if that is how you think of Jesus, then today's Bible passage will help us to recalibrate. He was not only fully God, although he was fully God, he was also fully man.

Now you'll see there's an outline on the back of the server sheet, which will help us to follow. Do turn to it, do take notes if you find that helpful. Many people do. First of all, we're going to think about the humanity of Jesus.

Have a look at verses 41 and 42. Now Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover. But when he was 12 years old, they went up according to the custom.

It's the time of the Passover when God's people would have gone to Jerusalem to remember the events of the Exodus and their rescue from slavery in Egypt and being taken to the promised land and rescued from the judgment of God.

And again, Luke's point for his first century readers is that to be a Christian does not mean you are un-Jewish or less Jewish.

[7 : 18] You don't have to ditch your Jewish heritage, you first century readers. Rather, to be a Christian is to enjoy the fulfillment of everything the Old Testament looked forward to.

And then verse 43. And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know. But supposing him to be in the group, they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances.

And when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem searching for him. Well, I guess it's every parent's nightmare, isn't it? We're not going to ask for confessions this morning, but I guess there are a number of us here who are parents who at some stage or another have even momentarily lost a child and the ensuing panic that followed that felt like an eternity.

And for Mary and Joseph, who we're told, verse 44, were traveling as part of a larger group, well, I guess it's just like Home Alone, isn't it? But it's on a much larger scale. There had been the awkward moment as they realized, where is he?

As one said to the other, I thought he was with you. As the other said, I thought he was with the cousins. Well, they've traveled a day already, so they spend another day traveling back to Jerusalem, and it's only on the third day that they find Jesus.

[8 : 40] Verse 46. After three days, they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.

And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress.

But here is the question. Why do we think Luke includes this in his account of Jesus' life? Yes, it's the only historically reliable recorded incident from Jesus' childhood of him growing up.

But I take it Luke doesn't simply record this because it happened. Yes, of course it happens. But remember, Luke is writing, chapter 1, verse 3, a carefully ordered account.

So he doesn't simply tell us things because they happened, but rather for a purpose. In other words, I hope that when we are reading the Bible, whether in anticipation of Sunday morning, or going to a

Bible study group, or reading the Bible on our own, I hope that we don't simply ask the question, what is the Bible saying?

[9 : 52] Now, that's the first question to ask. It's a really important question to ask. But actually, as well as asking the question, what is the Bible saying? There's a second equally important question to ask, which is the question, why is the Bible saying it?

And I take it that Luke's point here is not to remind parents with children in Sunday club to take their children at home this morning and to make sure they have them all strapped up in the car safely. Rather, his point is that Jesus Christ really was fully human. His was not a fake humanity. Back in verse 40, we read, Here in verses 41 to 45, he experienced his family life.

Verse 46, we see him listening to teachers, learning, asking questions. Verse 48, he knows what it is to cause great anguish and distress to parents. Verse 52, he knows what it is to grow up.

There was a day when his voice dropped, when hairs appeared on his chest, and when he shaved for the first time. As we read through the Gospels, we know that Jesus knew what it was to feel tired, exhausted, lonely, betrayed, opposed, anxious, and sorrowful.

[11 : 16] In Luke 4, in a few weeks' time, we'll see that he faced temptation. Perhaps you feel some of those things yourself this morning. There are plenty of people for whom Christmas and New Year is a time of difficulty and sadness.

For many of us, 2017 will be a year which will bring difficulty and sadness and hardships and disappointedness. Of course it will, because we live in a fallen world.

At which point, you see, you don't imagine that Jesus is like Superman in Clark Kent mode, and that he's just pretending to be human, but he is just faking it.

And yet, we also see in these verses that Jesus is without sin. His first priority, he puts God's first. He's in the temple, verse 49. And yet, verse 51, he honors his parents and is submissive to them. Now, the writer of the Hebrews puts this wonderfully. So, why don't we just turn on to Hebrews chapter 2 on page 1204. Hebrews chapter 2, page 1204.

[12 : 40] Now, the writer's been speaking about the fact that Jesus became a human, that he became one of us, that he became one of our brothers, so to speak.

He calls us his brothers. And so, Hebrews 2, verse 17. Because Jesus was fully human, verse 17, he was able to die in our place as our representative, just as in the Old Testament, the priest represented the people.

And to die as our substitute, dying in our place, making propitiation for sins, as the writer puts it, turning aside God's wrath. What's more, verse 18, Jesus now lives.

And so, he can help those who follow him as and when we are tempted. Look on then to chapter 4, verse 14.

Since then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God. Let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

[14 : 24] Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Jesus Christ, you see, in his humanity, being fully human, is precisely the Savior we need.

To die in our place, to sympathize with our weaknesses, yet he himself being without sin. So, draw near to him.

2017, just like 2016, just like every other year, will for each one of us, I take it, either be a year of drawing nearer to Jesus or drifting further away from Jesus.

Every year is like that, isn't it? And the writer of the Hebrews encourages us, draw near to Jesus. Sadly, it's often when life is difficult and hard that people drift away from Jesus.

And it's at that point, you see, we need to remember his humanity. He has experienced being human as fully as we experience being human.

[15 : 33] He sympathizes. He's there to help in our time of need. And yet, without sin, he is the perfect Savior that we need as well.

In other words, if you're ever tempted to do this, please don't fall into the trap of looking around Grace Church Dulwich and thinking to yourself, everyone looks successful and sorted, and therefore Christianity is for people who are successful and sorted.

Okay? So we are not that. We are simply forgiven sinners. And wonderfully, Jesus is not aloof or remote. Draw near to him. Don't drift away from him.

The humanity of Jesus. But secondly, the divinity of Jesus, the fact that Jesus, as well as being fully human, was also fully God.

In verses 49 to 51, Luke records for the first time the words of Jesus, the first recorded words of Jesus. And significantly, Jesus' voices personally, he speaks for himself what the angels and others have already spoken about him in these first two chapters of Luke's gospel.

[16:47] In a sense, they're the high point of Luke so far as Jesus reveals both his identity and speaks his identity as well as his mission.

Let's look at each in turn. First of all, his identity. Verse 49, the verse we read earlier. Now, that would have been a shocking thing to hear.

Those two words, my father. Because there's been no one at any stage in the Bible up to this point who has called God my father.

God has been called the Lord, my Lord. My God, God Almighty, the Holy One, the God of Israel. But no one has dared to call him my father.

A couple of summers ago, we spent half a day going around Buckingham Palace as tourists. It made a great day out. I guess if I had then told you the next day that we had been to visit my mother's house, I guess you'd have got the wrong end of the stick.

[18:02] Either that, or you'd be assuming that I was claiming a very special relationship indeed. Just as Jesus is here. He was either, in other words, an extremely precocious, annoying child, or he was someone completely unique in the history of the world.

Now, it's easy to miss this, isn't it? Because Jesus, of course, later on in his gospel, teaches those who follow him to pray our father. What an extraordinary privilege that is.

But because of that, it's so easy then to miss what Jesus is saying here. Not even Moses, who in the Old Testament built the tabernacle, nor David, who wanted to build the temple, nor Solomon, who did build the temple, no prophet, no king, had ever referred to the temple or the tabernacle as my father's house.

No Jew would have spoken like this. It had been a completely shocking thing to hear from the mouth of someone who was only human. David Gooding, in his commentary on Luke, writes of Jesus, the child was conscious of a relationship with God that none had conceived of, let alone experienced before.

And of course, as such, Jesus is simply speaking himself what others have spoken about him already. So turn back to Luke chapter 1, verse 32, where the angel says to Mary, he will be great and we will be called the son of the most high.

[19:48] Or verse 35, the Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the most high will overshadow you. Therefore, the child to be born will be called holy, the son of God.

Jesus is God's son, God's eternal ruler. He is God himself. In other words, you see, Luke wants us to be confronted with the big question, who is this man?

Luke is determined that we don't simply leave him in the manger, either because we only think about Jesus at Christmas and just as we've, I take it, wrapped up all our, you know, put away all our decorations and put them all away in the loft for another year.

So the danger is that mentally we put away any engagements we have with Jesus that we might have had with Jesus again for another year. Either that or because we've never already asked the question, who was this baby?

What did he grow up to do? What's the significance of Jesus? C.S. Lewis famously wrote this, a man who was merely a man and said the sort of things that Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher.

[21:01] He would either be a lunatic on the same level as the man who says he's a poached egg or else he would be the devil of hell. He must make your choice. Either this man was the son of God or else a madman or something worse.

Let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. You see, the idea that so many express that Jesus was simply a good teacher who the early church subsequently claimed to be God, the facts kind of spun over the subsequent years, simply doesn't stack up.

Jesus himself saying of God, my father. Now, I take it that's a vital thing to be reminded of at the start of a new year.

Perhaps you came to Grace Church for a carol service. Perhaps you're conscious that you face a choice to investigate the claims of Jesus or to ignore the claims of Jesus and just get on with life. Well, if that's you, I want to urge you to investigate. That's one reason why we're working through these early chapters of Luke's Gospel. These would be great talks to come to over the next few Sunday mornings.

[22 : 22] But it may be that others amongst us have choices of a different kind. Perhaps for some, if we're honest, we have been drifting away from Jesus. Perhaps we've been spiritually careless, consumed by just the busyness of life.

Or perhaps some of us have important decisions to make about work or a relationship or the future, where to get to university or choices about priorities, choices about things we're going to throw ourselves into this year.

And the decisions which you make will all depend on your view of Jesus. Whether you have a big view of Jesus or you have a small view of Jesus. A big view of Jesus, he is God's son, God's eternal ruler.

I'll commit my life to him, I'll trust him to direct my life, I'll go his way, I'll give myself to his service, I'll adopt his priorities and I can't quite see what the consequences of that are going to be but I'm going to entrust the consequences to him.

Or a small view of Jesus, I'll listen to my own instincts, I'll follow my own agenda, I'll look to myself when life is difficult.

[23 : 43] But secondly, the mission of Jesus. Those of you in JAM, I guess some of you will have a very clear idea as to what you want to do by way of a job in the future while I guess others, probably the majority, you don't.

but Jesus did. Again, verse 49, why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my father's house?

Now in the original, that phrase, my father's house, that actually reads the things of my father, the things of my father I must be, says Jesus. Here is Jesus' settled conviction that he must be about the things of his father.

That word, I must, or it is necessary, it's a favorite phrase of Luke's, he uses it at strategic points to set forth clearly the mission of Jesus.

In chapter 4, verse 43, Jesus says, I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well. In Luke 9, 22, he says, the son of man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed and on the third day be raised.

[24 : 58] I put other references on the outline as well. But you see, the point is that here then is Jesus' settled determination from his earliest years to be about the things of his father.

And of course, all this is happening in the temple. The temple was where God made it possible for people to meet with him. The temple, the place of teaching and instruction as the scriptures are read and explained.

The temple, the place of sacrifice, the means of forgiveness and being right with God. And here you see Jesus saying, I'm going to be involved in the things of my father.

I'm here to teach the truth about God. I'm here to bring forgiveness and salvation to bring people into the very presence of God. Indeed, such that people will know him as their heavenly father.

In other words, once again, Jesus is voicing publicly what others have already declared about him, that he has come to bring the forgiveness of sins and the peace with God that follows from that.

[26 : 10] It's no wonder, is it, in verse 51, that Mary treasures up all these things in her heart. as always, and I hope you've begun to notice this, especially those in growth groups, but as always, Luke wants us to ponder people's responses, either for good, as here, she treasures up all these things in her heart or elsewhere for ill.

But what about us? Will we treasure Jesus this year? His humanity, fully man, his divinity, fully God, both who he is as well as the mission that he came to accomplish.

It's so easy to treat Jesus as a kind of insurance policy. I think probably before I became a Christian, I'd have said that I was a vaguely Church of England, but I thought of Jesus as little more than an insurance policy, that when there's a problem, it's nice to know you can phone up, but apart from when you've got a claim to make, you just have filed it away in the drawer somewhere.

I guess even for those of us who are followers of Jesus, or who claim to be followers of Jesus, it's easy, isn't it, to treat Jesus effectively as an insurance policy, and to think to ourselves, well it's nice to know I've got the ticket that's going to get me into heaven.

It's nice to know the insurance policy is there for the day when I'll need it. Well let's make sure that rather than being a mere insurance policy, 2017 is a year of treasuring Jesus and valuing Jesus above all else.

[27 : 59] Let's spend a few moments in quiet and then I shall lead us in prayer. His mother treasured up all these things in her heart.

Heavenly Father we praise you that Jesus was fully man and fully God. He is indeed the one with a completely unique relationship to you.

Thank you that he is the perfect savior that we need sinless dying in our place and we praise you as well for the fact that we can draw near to him that he strengthens us in our weaknesses.

And we pray therefore Heavenly Father please help us to treasure these things. Please help us at the start of a new year to treasure the Lord Jesus above all things and we ask it in his name.

Amen.