

In the Father's House

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[0 : 00] We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Please take a seat. The Bible is a product of man, my dear, not of God.

Man created it as a historical record of tumultuous times and it has evolved through countless translations, editions and revisions. History has never had a definitive version of the book. The Bible as we know it today was collected by the pagan Roman Emperor Constantine the Great. Well, if you need any citation for that quote, it was, of course, Dan Brown's Da Vinci Code. Dan Brown made millions of dollars telling us that the Gospels are unreliable, that Jesus was simply a man, we can't really know anything about him, and that the Christian creeds should be given up on.

Luke's Gospel, however, as we've been reading over the last few weeks, tells us something very different. The message of Luke is that the message of Jesus is true and accurate. Secondly, that Jesus is the true man of God.

[1 : 08] And thirdly, that Jesus is the Lord from heaven. Luke's Gospel was written to encourage believers to believe that they should persist in their faith in Jesus, that the Christian faith is credible, that the slander and ridicule received by the Christian church in its early years was unfounded.

So in chapter 1, verse 2, Luke begins by talking about those who were from the beginning eyewitnesses and servants of the word. In chapter 1, verse 3, he says that after carefully investigating everything, he decided to write an account so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.

Eyewitnesses. Truth. And as we read the passage before us today, we see the signs that confirm Luke's claim. For example, there are some odd features about this story that only make sense in the light of eyewitness reporting and historical reality.

How, for example, did Jesus' parents manage to travel a whole day on foot away from Jerusalem without realising that Jesus wasn't with them? Well, the historical background helps us there. It was common in those times for communities to travel to and from the Passover in segregated groups of men and women. Women would set out earlier and prepare the campsite for the men, of course, and the men would arrive later and they'd meet up at the end of the day.

[2 : 49] And there we can see how it happened. Joseph, no doubt, assumes the boy was with Mary. After all, he's still only 12 years of age, hasn't got to 13, hasn't become a man after his bar mitzvah.

Mary, of course, assumes the same thing. Jesus is always old for his age. No doubt he wanted to be with his father and discuss some man things. It's only when they get to the camp at the end of the day they realise the horrible truth.

Jesus is not with them. Another indication of the truth of the story is the way it seems to be told from Mary's perspective. Verse 48.

When his parents saw him, they were astonished and his mother said to him, Child, why have you treated us like this? In other words, Jesus' parents meet him, but we only hear Mary's voice.

How strange. Verse 51. We get to learn what Mary is thinking in her head. Mary, his mother, treasured all these things in her heart.

[3 : 49] An echo of something we saw after the visit of the shepherds in chapter 2, verse 19. It seems that at least one of the witnesses Luke has spoken to is Jesus' own mother Mary.

And the story she is telling as she sits there in front of Luke all those years after is how she gradually came to understand and to piece together who Jesus was. She didn't really understand what the angel was telling her.

She didn't really understand what the shepherds were going on about. She certainly didn't understand what he was saying when he answered her in the temple, in this instance. But she treasured all these things up in her heart and bit by bit it came together.

After his death and resurrection, she worked out who he was. The message of Luke is that the story of Jesus really happened, that he had real parents, that he lived in a real place, a real time in history, and that he really got stranded in the Jerusalem temple, probably somewhere in AD 7 or 8. Jesus is true, and there is our first point. But of course, Luke has more to say than this. Jesus is not simply believable.

[5 : 05] He's worth believing in. And Luke goes on to show us this by proving that Jesus is the true man of God. Firstly, Jesus comes from a faithful Jewish family.

In verse 39, we learn that they did everything required by the law of the Lord for Jesus. Verse 41, we learn that his parents every year went to Jerusalem for the festival of Passover.

Now, this involved quite a level of trust in God to do this every year. It was a long and sometimes dangerous and difficult journey, especially with children.

It would mean leaving possessions behind, any valuables that couldn't be carried. It would have to be hidden or something. It was before the days of alarms and locks. And of course, it had been interruption to work and productivity.

It was an act of faith to travel to Jerusalem for Passover. Jesus comes then from a faithful family. And Jesus himself is faithful. He's wholeheartedly devoted to the things of God.

[6 : 07] At the age of 12, he's showing by his affections and interests that he's a true Jew, a true man of God.

He loves the temple. Psalm 84, the sons of Korah write, So writes the psalmist.

But Jesus is like that too, isn't he? So happy in the temple, being close to God, that he seems not to notice the absence of his parents. No homesickness or trepidation. Jesus loves the temple.

And Jesus loves the law of God, the Old Testament. In Psalm 119, verse 97, the psalmist writes, Well, here again is Jesus, isn't it?

The one who loves the law, who loves to discuss the law. And who meditates on the law and has more wisdom than those he speaks to. The old rabbis gathered in the colonnades of the temple.

[7 : 38] Verse 47, and all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.

Jesus Christ at 12 years of age. Jesus loves God's temple and he loves God's law.

Jesus is also a supreme example of a life lived in wisdom. He was filled with wisdom, it says in verse 40. He increased in wisdom, it says in verse 52.

Jesus lives and experiences what Proverbs tells us when it says that those who fear and seek the Lord will be rewarded with wisdom. Proverbs 15, verse 33.

The fear of the Lord teaches a man wisdom and humility comes before honour. Jesus is wise and he's also humble. Full of wisdom he may be, but he's quite happy to sit and listen and ask questions and learn from the rabbis of Jerusalem.

His destiny may be great, but he's not impatient to get there. Jesus is patient.

[8 : 44] Like Joseph serving faithfully as a slave in the household of Potiphar in the Old Testament.

Like the young David who will not usurp the tyrant king, Saul, even though David knows that he's been anointed by God to be king one day.

Jesus awaits his destiny in the same way. At the end of this story, he returns with his family and for the next 18 years, drops off the map.

Drops out of history. As we read in verse 51. Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was obedient to them. We won't hear anything more from Jesus for another 18 years.

So Jesus loves God's law. He loves God's temple. Jesus is wise and humble. Jesus is the true man of God. And there's our second point. Jesus is true. And secondly, Jesus is the true man of God.

Our third point is that Jesus is the Lord from heaven. We've just been talking about Jesus as a good man. As the true man of God.

[9 : 47] But there's a jarring note here, isn't there? If Jesus is so good, why does he treat his parents in this way? Imagine what it must have been like for them to suddenly find themselves a full day's journey from Jerusalem and have no idea whatsoever where Jesus was.

Imagine the pity in their stomach. Imagine their feelings of anxiety, of worry. What's happened to him? Is he lying hurt somewhere in the city?

Is he feeling afraid? Has he been kidnapped by slave traders? A real danger in those days. As they journey back, perhaps by the dim light of a Passover moon, a dangerous thing in itself, you can imagine that maybe Mary and Joseph are feeling guilty or angry with each other.

Why didn't you check on him? Why didn't you check on him? Of course they're angry and upset, distressed when they find him. Verse 48.

Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been in great anxiety. There's no apology from Jesus when Mary confronts him like this, is there?

[10:56] Why were you seeking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my father's house? Well, is this how a man of God acts? Are these the actions of a good son who honours his parents?

It's a puzzle, isn't it? In the midst of Jesus' submissiveness to them. This strange incident. Part of the answer comes to us, I think, at the very end of our passage in verse 52.

And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in divine and human favour. This little coda sentence is almost exactly the same as a verse from the story of the boy Samuel in the Old Testament.

There, of course, the childless woman, Hannah, goes to the tabernacle, the house of God in those days, and begs God for a child. She says, if you'll give me a son, I'll return him to you and he'll live in the temple forever.

And God answers her prayer. And she fulfils her promise and brings her son Samuel to the tabernacle to live. And he becomes a great priest and a great leader of Israel through the transition to the kingship.

[12:12] And there are many similarities in these early chapters of Luke between Luke and the book of Samuel. There's miraculous birth in both cases. There's the Magnificat, the Prayer of Mary, in chapter 1, verse 46, which has very, very strong similarities to Hannah's Prayer of Thanks in 1 Samuel 2.

There's the setting here in this story, the two boys at the temple. And then there's this phrase, 1 Samuel 2.26. Now the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favour with the Lord and with the people.

Luke 2, verse 52. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, or could be translated in stature, and in divine and human favour. What Luke is telling us here is that Jesus is like Samuel.

He's destined to be a great leader of Israel. And like Samuel, he's a gift from God. Mary can't keep him any more than Hannah could keep Samuel.

He's on loan. His real home is with God in the temple. If all that seems a bit complicated or subtle, Jesus spells out almost exactly the same thing in the next verse, in verse 49.

[13:32] He said to them, Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my father's house? At the very least, for a man to call himself the son of God in the context of the Old Testament is a claim to be the king of Israel.

In Psalm 2 and 2 Samuel 7, it's the heir of David's throne who is the son of God. But here also, it seems that Jesus is referring to his own origins.

Somehow he knows about Mary's miraculous conception. And he knows that Joseph is not his real father. So when Mary reminds him of his obligation to his parents, he reminds her of who his true father is.

And his higher obligation to God. Jesus is claiming, in other words, to be the literal son of God. And not simply to the throne of Israel, but to rulership of the entire universe.

So Jesus cannot be contained or constrained or limited by the expectations of his earthly parents. There will be a time when honouring his true father means turning away from them.

[14:55] At some time in the future, he'll be called on to leave them and go and preach and gather a people for himself. And then to die on the cross and forgive their sins and create a new kingdom based on forgiveness.

A kingdom of God. A kingdom of forgiven sinners. Jesus' destiny, Jesus' reality, is that he's the Lord from heaven. Jesus is true. Jesus is the true man of God.

And finally, Jesus is the Lord from heaven. Each of these truths comes with its own challenge for us, doesn't it? Firstly, Jesus is true.

If the depressing popularity of the Da Vinci Code proved anything to us, it proved that our society is hopelessly confused about the realities and historicity of Jesus' life and times.

There's a general sense that the real Jesus has been lost in the mists of history. That the Gospels are written late. Full of transcription errors.

[15:59] Biased. But Luke here is giving us eyewitness reporting. Historical detail. And we've picked one passage here in Luke's Gospel, but Luke and his other book, Acts, are full of such details.

Historical and geographical details which check out. Which seem only to have been accounted for by somebody actually being there at the time and knowing the details of that place or that time, that moment in history.

I wonder if we're confident of these things ourselves. Do we really believe that the Gospels, that Luke, is a reliable historical record?

There are so many resources to help us. Books and websites that will help us check out these things for ourselves. To arm ourselves with the facts. And wouldn't it be a great thing to do this year?

To reassure our own faith and to help others who are wondering about whether Jesus and the accounts of his life are reliable. More than ever, I think, we need to know that Jesus is true.

[17:14] Jesus is this true man of God. Well, there are challenges for us too here, aren't there? Will we imitate Jesus and follow his example?

Will we learn to love the things of God like he did? Will we love the law, the Old Testament, the Bible? Will we love the temple like he did?

Will we be wise and humble like him? I think one of the dangers for us today is that we turn away from the things that God has given us to help us know him. And we're happy to settle for a minimum of Christian knowledge, frosted over maybe with emotionalism, maybe even mysticism.

We don't want to have to think about God or study the Bible hard. We want to feel God. And we want especially the kind of things that will help us feel God.

Great music, motivating and passionate sermons. Other Christians who are just like us and easy to get on with. Maybe we would like to experience God outside in nature.

[18:25] We're tired of institutional religion, religion that seems dry. We want spirituality, true spirituality, personal and experienced, religion. Well, all those things can be helpful, of course, can't they?

It's great to be stirred up emotionally to want to praise and worship God. But I think we need to be careful that in our quest for true spirituality we don't out-spiritualise Jesus.

After all, Jesus, of all people, the eternal son of God, he's claiming, has the right to expect direct experience of God. To know God personally, independent of institutional religion.

Yet Jesus' hunger for God, for true spirituality, leads him where? To the company of old rabbis who spend their time arguing back and forth about the Old Testament. It leads him back to the temple, governed by corrupt bureaucrats who scam worshippers for every shekel they can from the temple offerings.

But Jesus still wants to be there. Where God has instituted religion, Jesus is prepared to put up with the human frailties and sins because God has given these things and he expects great things from them.

[19:46] He expects to be encouraged to experience God through reading the law. He expects to meet God in the temple. I think that's a challenge to us.

Do we think about the Bible like Jesus? Have we tried working at reading it? Do we delight to read it and discuss it amongst ourselves?

I wonder how many conversations we'll have today after the service about the Bible. Do we look forward to meeting God in his temple like Jesus did? The New Testament tells us that for us, the temple is the people of God.

Not the physical building, of course, but us as we meet together and encourage each other and build each other up and glorify God. Do we look forward to meeting God in his temple?

Do we expect great things of it? If we're like Jesus, we'll love God's temple, the church, just as he did. Finally, what of the idea that Jesus is the Lord from heaven?

[20:51] What's the challenge here? Well, here the challenge is the greatest, isn't it? There is a sense, I think, in which everybody loves Jesus. Jesus is hard not to like.

Verse 52, and Jesus increased in wisdom and in years and in divine and human faith. Everybody liked Jesus. A few days ago, I was delighted to come across a picture of the ardent atheist Richard

Dawkins wearing a t-shirt emblazoned with the words atheists for Jesus.

Even Richard Dawkins likes Jesus. But at some point, sooner or later, when we go along with Jesus, it'll become clear that he's more than just a man, more than just a good man, a man of God. Jesus claims to be the Son of God, the Lord from heaven. And if we want to be his people, if we want to follow the Lord from heaven, there'll be an earthly cost.

Maybe he'll wreck our plans and disrupt our families, like he did for Mary and Joseph. He reserves that right. Matthew 10, verse 37, Jesus says, Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.

[22 : 09] And whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Mark 8, verse 34, If anyone wants to become my follower, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

For those who want to save their life will lose it. And those who lose their life for my sake and for the sake of the gospel will find it. Jesus, the Lord from heaven, grants free forgiveness for us sinners. He offers us a new life, a life that comes from heaven and that goes on forever. But receiving this new life challenges the challenges and overturns this earthly life, doesn't it?

I wonder what costs arise in your life as you follow the Lord from heaven. Or if you don't follow the Lord from heaven, what would it cost?

Luke points great truths out to us about Jesus in his gospel. Jesus is true and the challenge is will we believe in him?

[23 : 20] Luke says Jesus is the true man of God. Can we imitate him? Luke says Jesus is the Lord from heaven. Do we dare to follow him?

Heavenly Father, we thank you that your son was true and he was the true man of God and he was the Lord from heaven. Please help us to believe in him. Please help us to be like him and to expect things from you.

Please help us to follow him, to experience you in the midst of the cost that we have to endure. We pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen.