

Being about My Father's Business

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[0 : 00] I want to begin with a story, and I wonder if you know this story. It's the story of Robert Wood Johnson. I don't know if you've ever heard of him.

You probably haven't. Robert Wood Johnson, he lived a long time ago, and when he was about 16, he started working in the local chemist. He enjoyed that sort of business, and as was the case back then, when you had a job when you were 16, you basically had that job for life.

Robert Wood Johnson, he enjoyed working the chemist, and while he was there, he invented a line of bandages and surgical dressings, and along with his two brothers, James and Edward, they started this business, and it was going very well.

And with the onset of the first two world wars, obviously there was a huge demand for their product. Eventually, Robert, brothers, Robert, James, and Edward, they took their company public, and they never looked back.

They bought up pharmaceutical companies and laboratories, loads of different ventures, but all the while selling their line of bandages and surgical dressings. In 2019, it's still a family-owned business.

[1 : 05] The company's global sales are around \$100 billion, and they have 132,000 employees. This little family business is, of course... Good.

I was worried it was a bit too obscure, but I might have made it too obvious. When people say they're in the family business, we usually think about a farm or the local cafe, perhaps even the mafia.

We don't expect a huge global brand whose products are in every household in the world. And our passage today is about family businesses.

You see, it's the curious story of Jesus being left in the temple when he was 12 years old. It appears only in Luke's gospel and nowhere else in the Bible. I was having some trouble with it this week, so I went to a commentary.

One scholar, who is actually quite a trusted scholar, he said this. This is a lesson here for small Christian children. When Jesus was lost in Jerusalem, he didn't get into any mischief that many 12-year-olds do.

[2 : 09] Instead, he spent his time with respected teachers in the temple. So kids listening at home, if you're tempted to go to Westfield and hang out and be a nuisance, just call up Andrew Price and hang out with him instead.

Do we think that that's what this is about? No. No. It's a very curious passage, but I think the key, or I think it's about family businesses, and the key is a play on words when Jesus is found by his mother.

Look at verse 48. Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you. Why were you searching for me? He asked. Didn't you know I had to be in my father's house?

Or, as the footnote says, about my father's business. Your father's been looking for you. Why? I'm already with my father in his house. You see, this is a story about the tension between two fathers or two households and their businesses.

It's about loyalty to earthly father Joseph and heavenly father God. Look at verse 41. Every year, Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover.

[3 : 24] You see, that's what you did if you were in Joseph's household. But one year, verse 42, when he was 12 years old, they went up to the festival according to the custom.

While his parents' house returned home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. But they were unaware of it. It does seem strange, doesn't it, when you read this story, that they could miss their child for a whole day and not know where he was.

But remember, all of Joseph's household were together. Verse 44 mentions relatives and friends. They were all traveling in one huge family caravan, probably like our house on Christmas Day. You know, it's hard to know where the kids are because there's such a huge amount of people and lots of commotion. Verse 45. When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him.

After three days, they found him in the temple. And everyone in God's house was amazed at Jesus' understanding and answers. But everyone in his own house, they weren't so impressed.

[4 : 31] His mother said, Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you. And the translation here where it says anxiously searching, I don't think that does his parents any justice.

You see, I was anxiously searching for my car keys last week. But Jesus was missing for three days. The correct translation of anxious here is a deep mental trauma.

And I think that's how you describe what it's like to lose your child in public. Have you ever lost your child in public? Yeah, a few bad parents, Nolly.

Have you ever been lost as a child in public? There's a few people with scars. Yep. A few years ago, my wife Rachel, when she was at Westfield, she lost RJ at David Jones.

And after a while, the David Jones staff, the security guards were all looking for him. And it went on and on. And Rachel was traumatized. I think that's the right word.

[5 : 36] She was traumatized. Tears and everything. The security guard said, please describe what he's wearing. We'll look on the security cameras. And my wife was just beside herself. And after about 20 minutes of this, RJ bobbed out and went, surprise!

Surprise! I guess he was... It's terrible. It's shocking. I blame the parents. He was hiding in the racks of clothing and he thought it was a game.

And of course, his mum sort of hugged him and smacked him in equal measure. Jesus, too, he's in big trouble with his parents.

Verse 48, son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you. Why were you searching for me, he asked. Didn't he know I had to be about my father's business?

It's the tension of two households. There's the earthly day-to-day of Joseph of Nazareth. They lived in Nazareth. Carpentry was their business.

[6 : 39] Annual Passover pilgrimages. That was their custom. But there's also God's family business. And even at a young age, Jesus has already begun to at least think about or prioritize or take his place in the family business.

And this is our second point. There's always a lot of conjecture about what God's business is. That is, what is God's work on earth? What should the mission of the church be?

But so far in Luke's gospel, there's a clear emphasis. So slide, please. My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God, my savior.

Zechariah, he says that God has raised up a horn of salvation for us. He says again, God is going to give us salvation through the forgiveness of their sins.

And today in the town of David, a savior has been born to you. He is the Christ. Actually, even in our own passage today, in chapter two, three times we're told it's the Passover festival.

[7 : 48] Passover is the celebration of God's rescue of his people. Why are you still in the temple and not on your way home with us? Well, it's Passover and I'm the savior.

Where else would you expect me to be? See, God is in the business of salvation. It's important to note, though, the fact that the sun still rises, the fact that the earth still turns, the seasons still operate.

That is also God's work. A care for the poor and the widows, a care for our planet, for issues of social justice. That, too, is God's work in the world.

But so far in Luke's gospel, there is a singular emphasis on salvation. And it's centered everywhere this boy Jesus goes. Old man Simeon, when he meets Jesus, he says, my eyes have seen your salvation, which you've prepared in the sight of all the nations.

We should spare a thought for poor old Mary. Not only did she lose Jesus for a few days, but this is a very blunt way for a mother to find out about her son's priorities in life.

[8 : 58] And priorities is a key word for us today as we think about applying this passage. Because as Christians, we, too, experience the tension of two households.

We've got our own earthly day to day, our own family businesses. We also have a concern for God's work, too. I guess the challenge for all of us, me included, is how do our lives show a priority of one over the other?

In other words, how does God's family business relate to my family business? In this passage, it isn't tough to understand what is being said, but it's very tough to apply.

It sounds like we're saying it's an either or. So either you're serving God or you're serving yourself. Either you spend all your time and money in church or you're just being selfish, which, of course, is not the case, is it?

And so I want to show you a really important nuance in verse 51. It says, Then Jesus went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them.

[10:11] You see, even though Jesus is about his heavenly father's business, he still went down with his earthly family to Nazareth. We know that Jesus in his life was thought of as a carpenter because that was his father's business.

And he was obedient to them. Clearly, also, it is necessary. It is godly for us to sort out earthly day to day household affairs.

We have to go to work, earn a living, pay our bills so we're not a burden to other people in the church. We have to take care of our families. We have to take care of our health. We have to rest and relax.

Otherwise, we'll be burnt out and no good to anyone, least of all to God. Scripture commands that we look after our earthly responsibilities. A lady in our church contacted me this week to say that she won't be able to make it to church for a couple of months because her mother has fallen ill. And she has to move in with her mother and look after her. And on the surface, it seems like that doesn't seem very spiritual. She's not here in church. She's only looking after an elderly lady.

[11:22] But this lady has made the right decision. It is godly and right to look after earthly concerns. Even Jesus, he was obedient to his family and went about earthly responsibilities to them.

And obviously, this is a tough application when we start talking about one over the other. We all, in some ways, fail to prioritize salvation business.

We don't need to bash one another up here today. This passage, it says that Mary didn't understand what Jesus was on about. We all have blind spots when it comes to priorities in life. Verse 51 says that Mary treasured up all these things in her heart. And I think that is the application to spend some time treasuring up or pondering family business, God's family business versus our family business.

Let me encourage you to spend time in prayer asking the Spirit's guidance for your priorities in life. You might need to bring others into that conversation, your spouses, your pastors, your Bible study leaders, trusted Christian friends.

[12:37] Have a conversation with them about how you think through salvation concerns and earthly concerns. For my family, we're pretty busy young children who are trying to lose themselves and get away from us.

I think we're up at 6 o'clock and we've got the kids down to bed by 8 o'clock. There's a lot of Henderson business that God has to contend with.

Sometimes for us, all we can manage is kids' Bible time and the weekly Bible study group. For our family, when it comes to big decisions about money and holidays and things like that, my wife is very helpful, actually, because sometimes I can be a bit inwardly looking.

So in lots of decisions, my wife, Rachel, she'll say, hang on, how does your decision serve the gospel? Gospel ministry, is this the best thing for ministry?

So she's really helpful because I've got blind spots where these things are concerned. Perhaps you're not able at this moment to prioritise other people's salvation.

[13:43] Perhaps it's ill health or something else going on in your families. If that's the case, please prioritise your own salvation. Even if you have to take a break from other things, please make sure you nurture your own walk with Jesus.

If you're going to miss church or come off the roster or reduce your financial giving or no giving, sometimes that happens for seasons in life. All the while you're doing that, make sure you nurture your own salvation.

And in that way, you're always about salvation business, regardless of what's going on in your life, even if it's your own salvation. Please read your Bible.

Please pray. Please prioritise church attendance in 2021. The online services this past year, I think they've been okay, haven't they? They've been quite helpful.

But they're only a Band-Aid, actually. Please don't use online church services because of a lack of priority when it comes to physically getting in the car and coming to church.

[14 : 51] Actually, online church services are only for those who've got a high priority on meeting together. Because even if they're sick or away on holidays or something else comes up, they're still desperate to do anything they can to be part of what we're doing here in the room.

That's the point of online church. Here is a good New Year's resolution straight from Scripture to prioritise our father's family business just like his son.

You don't have to quit your daily routines and go to Bible college. Although for some of you, that's exactly what you should do. You don't have to stand on a street corner and shout the gospel at people.

Although speaking more about Jesus, that's probably what some of you, that's exactly what you should do. Here in this, I guess you could say this temple, we're so blessed.

There's so many servants. Our rosters are looking pretty good. People keep giving and serving and working. So many of you, when I ring up, half my job is asking people to do things.

[15 : 53] So many of you are dependable and loyal and hardworking and sacrificial with your time. We're so thankful to God for you. You need to know even the most mundane duties play a role in other people's salvation.

Even the most plain Jane activities you do around here, they play a role in saved people remaining in the family.

We thank God for your service. But a passage like this, it's always right to challenge ourselves about God's family business and how that meets my family busyness.

A regular, honest health check about our priorities, that is the challenge today. And there are many ways for you to play your role in salvation here in Doncaster.

Of course, there's much more to say on that sort of topic, isn't there? We probably should have done a question time. But please do chat about this as we finish today. I need to finish now.

[16 : 59] And so let's finish on a positive. I started talking about Johnson & Johnson, that company. It started out like a small family business but ended up this huge global player.

We aren't all lucky enough to have a family business that grows and is worth a fortune. But if we're Christians, we're already employed in God's company, as it were.

The Johnson & Johnson family business, it's about 140 years old. It's worth billions. It has thousands and thousands of employees. Its products save people from cuts and abrasions.

But God's family business saves people's souls in Jesus. Salvation business, gospel ministry, it starts out small. It might only look like you and a few brothers.

But actually, his business was from the beginning in its origins. Its future plans are eternal. Its reach is global. Its value beyond price. Its team more numerous than the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore.

[18 : 05] And if you're a Christian, we are given a job for life. Johnson & Johnson, it's a good company. It probably looks the same as lots of other companies. God's kingdom, the church that he grows, doesn't look like anything else on earth.

That's what that first Isaiah reading was about. The kingdom that Jesus will build looks nothing like anything else in the world. There are so many ways for us to prioritize God's work.

Salvation business here in Doncaster, at home, at church, at uni, family, friends, in the community, with time, money, efforts, marriages.

There are so many dimensions with which you can prioritize salvation business. Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.

Why were you searching for me? He asked. Didn't you know I had to be about my father's business? The salvation of souls in Jesus. So let's pray that we would be like Jesus.

[19 : 11] Father God, we thank you that you tell us the truth, that you challenge us at times, even though it's tough. And Father, please help us to think through and to prioritize your family business versus our family busyness.

Help us not to bash ourselves up about things or try to be martyrs about things. Help us to think through how one relates to the other. And Father, please, would you save souls in Jesus. Please, would this church always be about your business. Please, when the master returns, when Jesus comes back, would he find us busy with salvation business. And we ask it in his name. Amen.