

Great Expectations: Jesus

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[0 : 00] Now this passage, which is a small passage, are the first words that we have from the mouth of Jesus ever. He's a 12-year-old boy. It's the only reliable boyhood story we have of Jesus.

You know there are lots of fake stories about Jesus written by people who weren't there. The Gospel of Thomas and the Gospel of Peter. And the fake stories give us a vindictive little boy who uses his superpowers to kill people and to turn animals into humans and then back into animals again.

Which says a lot more about the authors than it does about Jesus. But this is the only canonical story we have about Jesus before the baptism of John. And the way Luke writes it is a stunning portrait.

And it takes us immediately out of our depth. Into the mystery of the unique relationship between God the Father in heaven and God the Son on earth.

It shows us who Jesus is and why he came. It gives us the key to our own Christian lives and to ongoing growth. Explains to us who we are and why we're here and what makes up our salvation.

[1 : 17] So we've locked the doors so that no one can disturb us for the next five hours as we look at those few things together. That was a little joke. Like all good portraits there is a frame that Luke sets up for us.

You see how well framed it is. So at the beginning and the end. So verse 40. The child grew and became strong. Filled with wisdom and the favour of God was upon him.

And then in verse 52. Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and man.

What this means is that Jesus was not born with perfect knowledge of all things. He didn't have a sort of vault of knowledge that he could tap into and draw on at any time.

Like an encyclopedia Britannica or a Wikipedia available to him. He was born and grew and increased just as every single one of us do.

[2 : 25] And one of the things he grew in was wisdom and knowledge. Stay with me. What that means is that Jesus accepts voluntarily and deliberately chooses to accept human ignorance and limitations.

He was made like us in every way yet without sin. If you've been here over Christmas and you've been reading Luke's Gospel. You'll know that by now we know Jesus is the divine son of God.

Son of the Most High. He will reign on the throne of David forever. He's called Christ the Lord. We know he's the divine son of God. But at the same time he is really and truly human.

With genuine human nature that grows and progresses. Not just physically but mentally and with every human capacity just like you and I do.

And he chooses to accept the limitations that come with being a human child of God without losing any of his divinity. And somehow within this person of Jesus he subjects his soul to human ignorance.

[3 : 35] I told you it was we're out of our depth here. And I'm just honestly really glad Jim Packer isn't here. Because I mean I'd love Jim to be here.

But he could talk to you about this for hours. This is a very lovely area of Christian theology. Now see sometimes ignorance is sinful and sometimes it's willful.

And sometimes it's pure and entirely without sin. You know it's a matter of innocence and growth. You know before Adam sinned he was ignorant and the angels in heaven don't know everything and yet they're without sin. Here is Jesus uniting himself so closely with us that he learned as we do.

And why does he do it? He doesn't do it for entertainment value. He does it for our sake and for our salvation. Somehow he chose to empty himself into human flesh.

Perfect God. Perfect man. Voluntarily taking into himself the limitations and everything that is human. So that he could be tempted in every way that we are yet without sin.

[4 : 44] And that also means that Jesus' suffering doesn't just begin when it comes to the cross and he's rejected. But he daily accepts these limitations so that he could become the perfect sacrifice for our sins.

Old Bishop J.C. Ryle says this. Let us never forget this in dealing with young people about their souls. Let us tell them confidently there is one in heaven at the right hand of God who is exactly suited to be their friend.

He who died on the cross was once a boy himself and feels a special interest in boys and girls as well as in grown up people. Isn't that great? Wouldn't you love a bishop to say something like that? So that's the frame around the story.

But what's the portrait? Verses 41 to 51. The portrait brings out two things about Jesus. Who he is. His identity. And why he is. Or what his purpose is.

And it begins with this lovely family touch in verse 41. Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover. It's a very devout thing to do. It's a long journey for them.

[5 : 58] Jesus, by the time Jesus is 12, he's got a raft of brothers and sisters. It means Joseph has to close up shop for a few weeks. They all go down to the temple. And it shows how Mary and Joseph were committed to encouraging each other in the life of faith.

Because they go up to the temple. There are all sorts of things wrong at the temple. But their marriage was obviously an opportunity for them to encourage each other. They go up at the time when Jesus is 12.

And on that occasion, they're in a caravan with a bunch of people. They lose him. And it is a parent's nightmare. Easy enough to do. Because sometimes the children, or sometimes the boys particularly, would hang out with the father's group.

Or sometimes with the mother's group. But it took them until the end of the first day of travel to realize that Jesus was missing. And so they have what every parent has.

And that is panic. So they set off back to Jerusalem. The next morning, they find him in the temple. I think the three days in verse 46 is probably from the last time they saw him.

[7 : 02] Verse 46. 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.

They're astonished. And this word understanding is an unusual word. It means insight. It's not his mastery of raw data, his facts, his knowledge.

It's his comprehension. It's his perception. So Jesus is sitting with the professional teachers. You know, the proud professorial types we meet later in the gospel opposing him.

And he's listening and asking questions. And these men, they've never heard questions of such clarity and purity and humility. That's not the way Mary sees it.

And she comes on him full of guilt and anxiety and full of her own injury. And she says to him, what do you think you are doing? You've got no idea what you've put me and your father through. We've been frantic.

[8 : 04] It's a plain rebuke. She says, I'm suffering. It's your fault. Which, I don't know, I might have done the same. And Jesus' answer in verse 49 is one of genuine surprise.

He says, why are you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my father's house? It's not a criticism. He's just spontaneously and utterly amazed. And these are the first words of Jesus in the gospels.

The first words we know from him. Did you not know that I must be in my father's house? And they concern his identity and they concern his purpose. Because identity and purpose are related, aren't they?

You can't separate them. Because until you know who you are, it's impossible really to know what you should be doing. And if you separate your identity and purpose, well, you live a divided life.

So let's have a look at this. Let's have a look at what Jesus means about his identity. His first words are a shining statement that the most significant thing for Jesus is his unique relationship with God the Father.

[9 : 08] The one overwhelming reality for Jesus, even at the age of 12, is his unique divine identity. He knows himself to be who he is in relation to God the Father.

He simply calls God my Father. My Father. Never before in Old Testament or Judaism anyone dared to call God my Father.

Yes, God had adopted Israel in a way. But this is the spontaneous and natural and instinctive answer of Jesus. And everything in his life stands under this one great existential reality that he is the unique son of God.

This is who he is at his core. That he stands in relationship with God, which is shared by no one else. And Jesus, it's almost as though everything you want to know about him is contained in his sonship.

Jesus is saying, what is the deepest and most central and defining thing you can say about me? I am God's son. This is who I am, even at 12 years of age.

[10:21] And it gave him a piercing clarity and self-understanding. That's his identity. And secondly, he also is clear about his purpose. Did you know that I must be in my father's house?

Because he knows who he is, he has a profound sense of what he must be doing. Now, I don't know if you look at these things or not, but the word house is not there in the original. It has a footnote at the bottom saying it might be business.

It's literally a must be about my father's, then you have to put a word in things, concerns, purposes. And the fact the word must, this little word must is used in Luke's gospel by Jesus for what is God's will.

You know, the son of man must suffer many things. I must preach the gospel. The scripture must be fulfilled. So Jesus is saying to his mother that the controlling purpose of my life is to please my father in heaven.

I have a deep necessity to do the father's will because he is the father of glory and of holiness and I am his son. And you can trace this throughout Jesus' life, can't you?

[11:35] You know, he says again and again things like, it is my very food to do the will of God. I have a source of nourishment every day that you can't even see.

His life is so full of gracious purpose, he can't live without doing the will of God. And I think that's one of the things that makes Jesus' life so surprising and so attractive.

You know, he can stop the whole procession for a whole day just to be with one person that nobody knew about. Or he can stand up and withstand the rage of the religious establishment because of this inner spring within him that he loves to do the will of the father, that I must do the will of the father.

So difficult to pigeonhole Jesus, you know, as a political leader or a religious radical or just a teacher or one who soothes our troubles. Because who he is and what he does arises out of God himself.

God is his father. And so for Jesus, every priority, every decision, every purpose, every day of his life is for this. For the love of his heavenly father.

[12:48] And what that means is that everything Jesus does is charged with saving love and purpose for us.

If we read through the gospel and even here at the age of 12, he has come to serve. And to take his unique sonship and extend it and live it out and give it in a particular way so that we might have the privilege of knowing God as our heavenly father as well.

And so that his purpose has become ours. You can see it again in verse 50. In verse 50, we're told that Mary and Joseph didn't understand what he was talking about.

See, 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.

A lovely statement. But you see, despite their lack of insight, Jesus chooses to return and to be submissive. This word means being obedient, under their control, doing what they say.

[13:58] He is serving. He's taking the form of a servant. The Lord of Lords becomes a servant to his parents because this is the will of God. And every part of this passage and every part of Jesus' life bears testimony to the love of the Father in the gift of Christ his Son.

You know, he enters our world. We've just come through Christmas. He enters the world as a human baby. He grows as a human boy. He accepts all the limitations and vulnerabilities and temptations that go along with that for us and for our salvation.

He comes as a servant to seek and to save the lost. He gives away all the privileges of heavenly sonship so that we might become children of God and we might receive.

He wants to hand over to us all the riches of his inheritance. And his purposes become ours, both toward each other and toward God.

And this is absolutely unique to Christianity, I don't need to tell you. You know, that God would wish to have us as his children, let alone give the life of his Son for us. And this gift of being adopted is better than life itself.

[15:14] It's a gift of being adopted by God to be a full heir with our brother Jesus. That the God who made all things and is holy forever gives his Son to make us his sons and daughters.

There is no greater gift. And what that means for us and what it means for us on this first Sunday of 2018 is that our identity at its deepest level is children of the Father who is in heaven because of our brother Jesus Christ our Lord.

And Jesus has loaded up the Christian life with purpose. I mean, we've heard some of it today in the service. You shall love God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength and your neighbour is yourself.

Or in the light of Gordon's death, comfort one another and encourage one another. Or how about this, make disciples of all nations. There's loads of purpose in the Christian life. But it all comes out of being the children of God.

And if we do these things when they don't come out of our identity, being children of God, if they do not come out of the fact that we know our Heavenly Father is pleased with us, has accepted us and taken us to be his eternally adopted children, they'll crush us.

[16:33] That's what happens when you separate purpose from identity. But you see, we love our families. We comfort one another. We seek to make disciples of all nations because this is the purpose of God for us.

We obey civil authorities. We do a thousand other things because God our Father is our highest priority. One more thing before I finish. I think what we need to see about Jesus' identity here is that it is not self...

It's not self-invented. Sorry, just let me pause. Nora, that was so well done. There was going to be a Bible drop in the second row here, but she caught it very quickly.

So when we get to choose sides in sport, Nora goes on. Nora's on my team, okay? I'm going to finish with something. Where was I? That's right.

The thing about Jesus' self-identity in this passage is he's not constructing or building his identity. It comes directly out of his relationship with God, his Father.

[17:44] He knows himself in relation with God, the Father. And it's the joy and life and glory of knowing and growing toward God, his Heavenly Father, that fills Jesus with a sense of who he is.

And I don't need to tell you this either, that this is so different from the way we think about identity today, isn't it? You know, as we're running away from God, we convince ourselves that our identity is something that we have to construct.

We have to cultivate. We have to curate our identity. We're being told that identity is a fluid thing and it's mine to discover and life is about the grand adventure of pushing the edges and creating and curating my chosen self-identity.

And if you have children, you will know that our kids are being taught that they must form their identity as they choose, that no one can tell them who they are. They have to choose their gender identity and their personal identity and their online identity and their cultural identity.

And, you know, we've got the perfect tools now, this social media, to curate our identity by taking photos of the food we eat and wanting how many likes. Yeah.

[18:52] And it's true. All sorts of things do affect our identity, not just our families of origin and our upbringing, but often the most difficult things we face in life. They stream into our identity as well. They give shape to us and we are complicated.

But if our deepest identity does not come from knowing God as our Heavenly Father, if it comes from a million other things, be they good or bad, something we desire, who our friends and enemies are, something we wish to be accepted for, if it is not God the Father and His adoption for us, there will be an unbearable weightlessness about our identity.

There will be no gravity. And if we're consumed with purposes other than pleasing God the Father, then everything I do in the end will become self-serving, even if it's trying to serve others.

My life will become trivial and anxious. But because we are made for God and by God, and because we are saved by His Son, there is nothing and there is no one who can tell you who you truly are apart from God your Heavenly Father.

Isn't that great? We are at our deepest level children of God. not just because we're human, but because of what Jesus has done for us.

[20 : 22] The only thing that frees me, the only thing that can free me to truly love someone else, or truly serve someone else, or please God, is if my identity is given to me by God.

And the only identity that has gravity and weight that can satisfy my soul is the one that God gives me in Jesus Christ, to be made children of God. So, I know this is what Gordon believed.

Bron and I visited him a week ago or so, and we'd talk about this stuff and he'd just laugh. And I think for us here in 2018, we need to ask this question.

So, if you look back over the last year, we look forward to this year. Have there been years, will this be a year where you increase in wisdom, where you grow in your sense of yourself as a child of God, the privilege of that, just the mind-blowing privilege really?

Have you come increasingly to see God's purpose for you as the top priority above everything? And I know life is complicated, but it's very simple for us as Christians in one sense.

[21 : 40] And the more and more decisions we take, we have to ask the question, what's best for the kingdom of God? What's best for Christ's glory? And that's what this passage teaches us.

So, let me close in prayer. And I can't find a better prayer than the collect that we've already prayed this morning. So, would you just bow your heads and I'll pray this. Lord, we beseech thee mercifully to receive these prayers of thy people, which call upon thee, and grant that they may both perceive and know what things they ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfill the same.

Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. Amen. Thank you.