

The Journey of Faith and the First Words of Jesus

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[0 : 00] Let's turn together to the gospel according to Luke chapter 2 and we can read at verse 49. Luke chapter 2 at verse 49.

And he, that is Jesus, he said to them, Why were you looking for me? Do you not know that I must be in my father's house?

And so on. Of course it's interesting to read the beginning of this gospel, especially because of the particular way in which Luke draws together to us the story of the coming of Jesus into the world.

And when we connect that with all that God has said in the Old Testament, we see the way in which there are great promises spoken by God right down from the book of Genesis right into the book of Malachi in the Old Testament.

Promises that are waiting to be fulfilled. And we consider also that from the days of Malachi, who wrote 430 years before Jesus was born, it was a long time of waiting for God to fulfill his promises.

[1 : 14] And just as God had promised he would do, God came suddenly to the world and to the temple to announce the coming of John the Baptist and then to announce the birth of the Lord Jesus.

And we read through these stories and we see the connection between the two of them and the way in which they, particularly in themselves, were the fulfillment of God's promise, with John the Baptist being the one who came to prepare the way and Jesus was the one who came to be our saviour.

And through the story up until now, we are developing a portrait of who Jesus was and how he grew up and the things that his parents did with him.

And one of these portraits is this last section that we have in this chapter that speaks to us of another part of the story. And as we reflect upon life and reflect upon the story, we know that life is a journey.

They were joining up to Jerusalem because of the time of year, but we are ourselves on a journey. William Hague, the former leader of the Tory party, wrote in the Times this week and he spoke about the way in which we must prepare for the next calendar year.

[2 : 39] And we must prepare for a world that is dramatically better or catastrophically worse. In other words, we don't know what's going to happen, but we need to be prepared.

And in the midst of all the changes that we see in our world, we need to seek to have the journey through the coming year that will bring us to where God wants us to be and perhaps will reverse us in our thinking and in the journey that we are on, a change of direction to bring us where we must be.

We're on a journey, and where will that journey take us? And today I want us to consider the journey of faith and the first words of Jesus.

First of all, I want us to think of the mistake that is to be avoided. And the mistake that is to be avoided took place in the life of the community of faith in the close family religion of Mary and Joseph.

And that's where we have the story here. In verse 41, His parents went up to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover. They were godly people.

[4 : 00] They were religious people. They followed the Bible. And they understood the significance of the Passover. It is the Passover and the Exodus from Egypt that made up their origin as the people of God.

They have come from there. And down through the journey of the Old Testament, the people of God, time after time, remembered the Passover, celebrated the Passover to remind them that God had redeemed them and taken them out of Egypt.

And we read the directions given for that in the book of Leviticus and the book of Exodus on the first month, on the 40th day of the month, they were to celebrate the Passover.

And then from the 15th of the month, for seven days, the Feast of Unleavened Bread. It was a case of, let's remember what God has done for us to make us who we are.

And for the next seven days, let's remember what God wants us to be like. That is a life without sin. So for that whole eight days of gathering, it was a celebration of what God had done.

[5 : 17] And it was, in a sense, a commitment to what God wanted them to be and what they should be in the light of God's word. And we read multiple times in the book of Psalms, the way in which the people of God joyed going up to the house of God.

They celebrated, they sang their psalms, they rejoiced because of where they were going. And they had done their own thing throughout the past year and now it's time to gather together and to once more make their journey up to Jerusalem to celebrate this event that established them as the people of God.

And here on this occasion, the devoted parents took Jesus up with them when he was 12 years of age.

And in the Jewish household of the day, the son of the family would become the son of the covenant, the bar mitzvah, become the son of the covenant at 13 years of age.

And so just like we take our children to the church to learn about the story of the Bible, so parents will take their sons up to Jerusalem at least two years before they reach the age of bar mitzvah or the son of the covenant to learn what the things that happened at the Passover, to learn about the faith, to come to understand why the family lived the way that they do.

[6 : 55] And so when they come to the age of being sons of the covenant, when they take pressure and responsibility for keeping the covenant and for the word of God, they will understand what they are doing.

They are doing the right thing. They are doing the godly family thing. They are following the pattern that we see down through the Old Testament.

This is what the people of God do. And we read in Exodus and in Leviticus the ways in which the fathers would sit with their children teaching them what the Passover means.

It was a Q&A; session, a question and answer session, where the children would ask, what does this mean? And an opportunity was given to explain what the Passover was about.

the Passover lamb, the blood that was shed, the angel of death, the safety under the blood. It was an opportunity to tell the story.

[8 : 00] And here was a family to be admired because they did the things of God. They did them faithfully. They did them joyfully.

And they did them repeatedly. And for ourselves as a covenant community and as Christian families belonging to the church of Christ, we are doing the godly thing that the Bible requires of us.

We are doing a thing that God is pleased with. Coming to do it for the right reasons. Remembering that we're here to reflect upon, to celebrate what God has done for us.

The family doing the right thing. A godly family. A religious family. But we see that the mistake to be avoided takes place right in the midst of the admirable way in which they are living their lives.

They have celebrated the Passover and then we read in verse number 43. When the feast was ended, they had kept the Passover. They had kept the feast of unleavened bread.

[9 : 18] When the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. The feast is over. It is time to return home.

And it's when that time came that Mary and Joseph went separate ways to Jesus. They retraced their steps back to Nazareth while he stayed in the house of God.

And as we, as we read on, his parents did not know it. It's a knowledge that speaks of experience. Of learning from the things that are happening around us.

that the parents did not feel in any way that Jesus was not with them. They were with the crowd coming up to Jerusalem and now they're with the crowd going back home to Nazareth.

And they had no thought that Jesus was not with them. Not only did they have no thought that he wasn't there, but we also read that they supposed him to be in the group.

[10 : 34] They took it for granted. They took it for granted without any knowledge, without any experience, without any facts to back up their supposition.

They supposed, they took it for granted that he was in the group. Jesus was absent.

They had travelled these days' journey as a community going back to Nazareth with young people walking together and older people walking together and people walking together with their friends, a large group travelling back to Nazareth and then at the end of the first day, as will be the case at the end of every day, it was time to check in for the evening.

It was time to ensure that everyone was there that should be there. And when Mary and Joseph came to do their check-in for their family, they discovered that Jesus was not with them.

and today, that's the mistake that you and I want to avoid. It's to be busy in the things of God, to be busy in the life of the church of Jesus Christ, to be busy even in the worship of God and to take it for granted that Jesus is with us and to suppose that he's there without any facts, to confirm that without anything in their hearts that would tell us that, to take it for granted that he is there and to carry on with our journey without him.

[12 : 29] And God wants you and I today to ask ourselves is Jesus with us or not? Could it be the case that we are mistaken in thinking that he is?

Could we have left him behind whether it's at Christmas Day or Easter Sunday or any other time of the year? Is it the case that we came, we read, we heard, we saw and we left him behind?

God today wants you and I to check in and to ask that simple question. Is the Lord Jesus our Savior, our Friend, our Shepherd, our Companion?

Is he with us on this last Lord's Day of this year? Check in and see if Jesus is there or if Jesus perhaps is not there.

There's a mistake that's to be avoided. Secondly, there is a ministry that's to be appreciated.

[13 : 47] And we see the family searching urgently for Jesus. How did they respond to discovering that he's not there? There is distress, there is perhaps an element of panic, what they took for granted simply wasn't true.

And so in verse 44, suddenly the absence of Jesus overrode everything else in their lives.

They had gone the whole of that day's journey with their friends, with their families, talking about everything that happened in Jerusalem, and they had thought Jesus was there.

perhaps never crossed their minds that Jesus was not there. They took it for granted that he was, but now they discover he is not, and finding him becomes the most important thing in life.

And so it is for you and for me today. If you have checked in to see if Jesus is there and he's not there, then your response to that should be exactly what Mary and Joseph did.

[15 : 09] Your response must be to leave everything, to leave everyone, to stop everything, and to return, to retrace your steps, and to see where you are, to find the Jesus that you thought was there.

and that diligence may take you to retrace steps, not to yesterday or the day before, maybe retrace your steps to a long time in your past when Jesus was there and Jesus was close to you and Jesus was speaking to you and you knew it was Jesus speaking to you and that's now lost to you and today you have to return and retrace these steps.

Where did you go from there to where you are today without Jesus? And when you ask yourself that question God will help you to see the different points on your journey where you diverged and departed from where you should be and when you and the Lord Jesus went to your separate ways because you did not have him as the priority in your life.

The urgent searching for Jesus the retracing of steps and it is in retracing the steps that 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 answer.

They found him in the temple the place where in their world heaven meets the world the place where God is to be found.

[17 : 09] They found him in the temple courts. they found him there as the son of the covenant as the person who is preparing to take responsibility for himself in the journey of faith.

they found him in the temple. And it is there that we read the way in which he was with the teachers. He was answering their questions as he was questioning them.

And we come to find Jesus in the temple with those who are the teachers in the temple. And all of a sudden there is our own reversal because the son of the covenant this child Jesus the son of Mary and Joseph he knows more than they do.

His understanding is greater than their understanding. And instead of him sitting at their feet for him to be taught by them he becomes their equal in the teaching arena.

He is sitting with them in their midst. They are exchanging their questions. they are exchanging answers. And Jesus astonishes them because of the answers which he is giving to them.

[18 : 32] And when his parents saw him they were astonished themselves. His answers blew them out of the water. He was there as the pupil becoming the teacher.

and those who were with him appreciated the message and the answers that he gave. They are here to celebrate the Passover that speaks of their origin as the people of God.

Who understands the Passover better than the one concerning whom John said behold the Lamb of God takes away the sin of the world. who understands the Passover better than the person that Paul describes in writing to the Corinthians that Christ our Passover Lamb sacrificed for us.

How much his mind was filled with the truths of the Old Testament that overflowed out to them as he taught them things that they hadn't heard before.

astonished at the depths into which he entered and explaining to them the things of God. They were astonished.

[19 : 50] There was a process taking place. He was teaching the teachers and for the rabbis in that teaching environment there were three particular things that were really important for the teaching experience to be effective.

There was of course the subject to be taught. There was the knowledge of the teacher and there is the willingness of the pupil to be taught.

And once these three things are in place then the teaching becomes transformational. The curriculum bears its fruit. The child is instructed and grows in intelligence and understanding.

And as those who were taught by the rabbis would learn from the example of the rabbis also, so those who are learning from the teaching of Jesus will learn from his example also.

It's the appreciation of the ministry of Jesus, of his teaching. It's having the openness of mind to grasp and to bring together and to pull together the facts of what is being taught to them.

[21 : 21] Jesus was here instructed by them and he had the ability to take all that they taught him and to fill that out with his own understanding of why he was here and of what the word of God said.

And for you and for me today, we must be like those who are astonished in the temple listening to Jesus. We must be like Mary and Joseph astonished at what Jesus has to say to us and that astonishment is dependent on your willingness to accept and to receive and to my willingness to accept and receive the very things that God has to say to us.

And as we journey on through life that is key to our journey of faith being a journey which takes us to the place of safety and of security and of salvation.

There must not be any roadblocks in our listening to what God has to say today. We must not be on our narrow streets with the obstacles of the high buildings blocking our reception of what God has to say.

we must live our lives in the open space where the obstacles are removed and where there is a direct signal from God through his word to inform our thinking and to enable us to live as the children of God in this world.

[23 : 08] To enable us to do so as children and families and as parents and families. To enable us to do so in school and our teaching instruction and friends and with our fellow pupils.

To appreciate, to receive, to be ready wherever we spend life and work or in learning, whatever we are doing, that the obstacles aren't there.

And if they are there, and if these obstacles are the means of Jesus and you going a separate path in life, then it's time to move.

Retracing your steps must be going to that place where the obstacles are gone. And where, as Peter said on the Mount of Transfiguration, when God said to him, there's my beloved son, listen to him alone.

they saw Jesus only. We can be in the crowd, but if we have faith, the willingness to receive, we can be in the crowd and see no one but Jesus only.

[24 : 28] He becomes the priority. There is a ministry to be appreciated. And that appreciation depends on your heart and on mine.

and your readiness, your willingness to receive, or perhaps a resistance today to accept the very truths that God is speaking to us and that Jesus is speaking to us from his word.

So there's a mistake to be avoided, there's a ministry to be appreciated, and thirdly, there's a mission to be accepted.

we could ask the question, who does Jesus think he is? It's a question of respect, and the answer is clear from this passage, he knows that he is the son of God.

And that's what I come to understand, that there is a mission that is known to Jesus, that he speaks of here, that we must accept. and as we see his parents coming to them in their astonishment, what is it that they actually do?

[25 : 47] They find fault with Jesus. Have you ever done that? When things aren't happening the way that you expect, when God is not doing what you expected him to do, or when God is doing what you find unacceptable, have you ever blamed God?

That's what Mary is doing here. Why did you treat us like the son? Why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress.

They are struggling to cope with a new thing in the life of Jesus, and because of not being able to understand what is happening, their defense mechanism is to blame Jesus for letting them down.

And sometimes you and I can do that. God does new things for us all the time. God does things that change things for the better, as we noted from William Hague.

God can do things that can be catastrophically worse, but do we blame God because of the new thing that we cannot understand?

[27 : 15] The blaming of God that blocks the channel of communication, that stops my appreciation of the word of God. I need to ensure that when things do go wrong, that my response to that is to look to myself and to hear what Jesus is saying, so that what is new becomes accessible to me, and what is new becomes the very thing that is at the center of my life.

And what does that news thing, what does Jesus say to them? why were you looking for me? As if Jesus himself were astonished that they didn't understand that this is where he should be.

Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my father's house? there are two things in the words that Jesus speaks here that remind us of the mission of God.

Did you not know that I must? When I read the word must in the gospels, it speaks to me of a necessity that's bound up entirely with what God has purposed to do.

Jesus must do this because he came to do the will of God and God in sending him has said to him, this is what you shall do.

[28 : 50] There is a necessity that arises from the way in which God has designed that Jesus would work in the world. There is the must of the necessity of the will of God.

And everything that Jesus did from the time in which he was born, growing up his life here in the temple here, I must be here, I must go this day and the next day and then go to Jerusalem.

The Son of Man must suffer many things. It's all about fulfilling the word of God. The Son of Man must enter into glory. The Son of Man must sit at the right hand of God in heaven.

There's a necessity that belongs to his journey as someone who's here to do the will of God. And that necessity is entirely built up with the family business, the family plan, the family project, what God the Father has purpose to do.

I must be in my father's house. house. Your father and I, says Mary, were distressed because we could not find you.

[30 : 15] But Jesus makes it quite clear how he sees himself. I must be about the business of my father's house.

And that business is the business which he came to complete. When he came into this world to die for the sins of the world, it was, says Isaiah and Isaiah 53, it was the will of the Lord to crush him.

And Jesus in the garden going to fulfill the mission of God. And in this pictorial way, God placing the cup of wrath into his hand, take this cup from me.

Nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done. The mission of God is such that I must drink this cup and drink it to the dregs. And in his commitment to the will of God, he arises from the garden.

The cup that the father has given to me, surely I will drink it. And he goes off purposefully to Calvary's cross. This cup is a new covenant in my blood.

[31 : 35] And so he gives his life as a ransom for many. It's a mission that we must accept.

The journey of faith is not complete. And indeed, the journey of faith in the sense of the genuine faith of the Bible, the journey of faith has not yet commenced until we embrace Jesus Christ, the child in the manger, the Son of God, until we embrace him as the one who has fulfilled the commission of the Father, who said on the cross, it is finished.

and with a loud voice, he gave up his life, his spirit to God. That's where we must close this year.

We must check out of 2025 and check into 2026 and ensure that as we check out of this year, Jesus is with us as our personal saviour.

And so as we check into the next year, if in God's good providence we see it, as we check into it, we will know that we will be safe and we will be secure because the Lord is our shepherd.

[33 : 08] He will be our guide. No matter where life will take us, though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we will fear no evil because he is with us.

And so today let's hear what God is saying. Let's ensure we take note of the mistake that's to be avoided. Let's ensure that we go on a life appreciating the ministry of the gospel where we learn about Jesus and let's ensure that we don't stop short of embracing in our hearts that Jesus who loved me and gave himself for me and let's ensure that we go forward confident in our faith and on our journey of faith that our faith is in him and that by faith we have peace with God and that we enter in to that grace of Christ in which God has made us able to stand.

May God bless his word to us. Let us pray. most gracious God we rejoice in you and in your care of us. We are thankful to you that we have your promise that you will never leave us or forsake us.

We read through your word and we are reminded in different places that we are a people who tend to go astray from you. But we are thankful to you that you are the shepherd who rescues and who recovers and who restores.

And we are thankful today for every way in which you have done so in the past. And help us today to know something more of your restoring power and grace. And help us to sense that you are with us.

[34 : 50] And help us to feel your love and your power and your grace in our hearts and our lives as we journey on to the rest of this day and in your good providence as we draw to the close of this year.

So hear our prayer and accept us. Having mercy we pray for Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. The Holy Psalm is Psalm number 84.

