

NOTES FROM PASTOR TIM'S SERMON –8th January 2023 am

NEW SERIES FROM LUKE'S GOSPEL "God's love for the lowest"

Part 4 "Following Jesus into obedience"

Scripture references from the ESV & NKJV

Luke 2: 22 -24, 39-52 And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³ (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord") ²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, "a pair of turtle-doves, or two young pigeons"

³⁹And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favour of God was upon him. ⁴¹Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. ⁴²And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. ⁴³And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, ⁴⁴ 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, ⁴⁵ and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. ⁴⁶After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. ⁴⁸And when his parents^[f] 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." ⁴⁹And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"^[a] ⁵⁰And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. ⁵¹And 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.

⁵²And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature^[h] and in favour with God and man.

What does it mean to follow Jesus? How are our lives, as followers of Jesus, to be different from those who don't follow him? We can find out from this passage in which Luke gives us just one narrative from Jesus' early life between his birth and public ministry.

Jesus' earthly parents are shown to be very devout, following everything the law of Moses requires of them including the annual pilgrimage to celebrate the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread which followed. Mary did not need to go, yet she went too, showing us that she is a God-fearing lady who is determined to obey God in all things. Luke focusses on the trip they made when Jesus was 12 years old.

After the feast, the family, with friends and wider family, started on the 80 mile journey back. In this large group, Joseph and Mary did not notice that Jesus was not with them until

the end of the first day. It must have been a worrying time as they made the 20 mile journey back to find him. The word **astonished** (v48 above) here means panic.

When they did find him, he was in the temple, debating with the teachers of the law. In their panic, they rebuked him, receiving a mild rebuke from him in return (v49 above). Mary did not understand what he was saying, but nonetheless she treasured the words in her heart and pondered over them. This part of the narrative ends with Jesus going back to Nazareth with his parents, submitting himself to them and continuing to grow physically, spiritually and in favour with God and those around him.

On the surface, this sounds like an episode from normal family life, but v49 (above) tells us that far more is going on.

- In the same way that Mary pondered these words, we need to dwell on them too. Then we will not only grow in our understanding of who Jesus is, but also in our understanding of what it means to follow Jesus.

One of God's purposes in our salvation is to make us like his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. **As we see what Jesus is like, we will also see what God intends for us to be like and what he is making us into.**

Jesus' words in v49 (above) are the first recorded words of Jesus and they show us four aspects of Jesus that are true for all who follow him.

1. **Jesus was aware of his unique relationship with God.** (vv48-49 above). Mary refers to Joseph as Jesus' father, but Jesus speaks of the temple as his Father's house.

Jesus is aware that God, not Joseph, is his Father.

Jews understood that God was their Father in the sense that it was God who

- Brought humanity into existence at creation
- Brought the nation of Israel into existence at the Exodus.

However, none of them would have said '**My Father**' when referring to God, as that would have been seen as a claim to be equal with God. Yet Jesus, at the age of 12, is fully aware that he is the Son, not of Joseph, but of God.

Jesus' relationship to God was unique, and he knew it.

This has huge implications for us:

- It is only through Jesus and the work that he came to do that we are able to call God 'Father'

After Jesus had died on the cross and been raised to life, he said to another Mary: "**go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'**" (John 20:17) Our relationship with God had been broken by sin and Jesus came to restore that relationship, bringing us into a Father/Son relationship with God.

- When we put our trust in Jesus, we can call God 'Father', something no Jew would ever have done.

This wonderful relationship is something for us to ponder over, but with it comes responsibilities.

2. **Jesus was concerned to be doing God's work (v49b above).** Another possible translation of this verse is **'Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business? (NKJV).**

Jesus was set on doing God's work, the work that the Father had sent him to do. Luke shows us that there was a real intentionality in him, even at the age of 12. In **v43** (above), we read that Jesus **stayed** behind, with the underlying sense that this was something that Jesus chose to do. It was not that he just missed the moment to go with his parents because he was busy chatting. He intentionally stayed behind, because he wanted to engage with the teachers of the law.

Nothing and no one, not even his earthly parents, was going to stop him being in the place God wanted him to be and doing the things God wanted him to do.

Jesus was living in obedience to his true Father.

That is a feature of his life when he begins his public ministry. He will not be set on his own agenda, or anyone else's agenda. He will be set on God's agenda.

- **I must teach** - that will mean going head-to-head with the religious teachers as an adult, though the next time they will not be amazed at him but will hate him because he will expose their sinful hearts and cut across their prejudice of who they think Messiah ought to be.
- **I must suffer** – that will mean being mocked, misunderstood, hated, losing friends, being beaten physically and eventually put to death.

Yet none of that deterred him from doing what the Father required of him.

This is the Jesus we are called to follow, one who was intentionally obedient to God, despite the cost.

- This Jesus spoke what God wanted him to speak, did what God wanted him to do and went where God wanted him to go.
- This Jesus challenges us, his followers: **"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. ²⁷Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14:26-27)**

What would it look like for you to follow Christ into that kind of radical obedience to God, where the eternal God and the Lord Jesus Christ come first over every other human relationship and first over your own life?

What kind of changes to your lifestyle would you need to make?

- Are there things you are doing wrong, and you need to stop doing them?
- Are there things you know you should be doing but you are not?
- Are there people you are afraid of so that you live like them rather than as a follower of Jesus.

How would your speech need to change to be intentionally obedient to God as Father?

- Are there conversations you need to have?
- Are there people you need to talk to about Jesus?

Faith in Jesus is not just about forgiveness when we get things wrong.

Faith in Jesus means trusting him to help us live in obedience to God the Father,

in the same way that Jesus lived in obedience to God.

3. **Jesus was respectful of human authority.** Jesus' words in v49 might sound a little precocious and rude to his parents. He definitely was neither of those things, because later God the Father would say: "I am well pleased with him". In any case, Luke goes on to show us that Jesus was the perfect son to his earthly parents (v51 above).

In his humanity, Jesus submitted to his earthly parents even though he was their Lord, their creator, their sustainer and the eternal Son of God.

God has ordained authority figures for the good of our society. Parents are to lead their children, and in response, God expects children to submit to the leading of their parents. In obedience to his heavenly Father, the Lord Jesus Christ submitted to the leading of his parents.

This principle holds true for all authority.

In our culture today, social media has made it easy to disrespect authority, but:

- God has established governments to rule over society for the good of that society. Obedience to God means submitting to those governments where what they require of us does not go against God's word.
- God has determined that churches are to be led by men called elders. Obedience to God means submitting to the elders as long as they are leading according to God's word.
- God has determined that families are to be led by husbands. Obedience to God means that wives will submit to their husbands as long as they are leading according to God's commands.
- God has determined that parents are to exercise authority over their children. Obedience to God will mean children submitting as long as those parents lead in a godly way.

Ultimately leaders will submit to God and be accountable to him. Jesus shows us that as we follow him and trust in him to help us, we can submit to the authority figures God has placed over us.

We also see that submission does not mean that the person who submits is inferior.

The Lord of Glory, he who holds the universe together, whom angels worship and who is worthy of all honour, was far above Mary and Joseph, yet he was willing to submit to their parenting because that is what God had ordained.

Submission to authority means submitting to the complementary roles God has established for our good.

4. **Jesus was increasing in spiritual understanding.** Jesus had wisdom beyond his years (vv46-47 above), but he continued to grow (v52 above). In his humanity, there was a need for Jesus to grow in wisdom, just as he needed to grow physically.

When the Bible speaks of wisdom, it normally means skill for living. The eternal Son of God, who spoke the laws of the universe into existence and spoke the laws of God to his people, had to learn all the skills necessary for life.

If the eternal Son of God, in his humanity, had to grow in understanding, how much more does that apply to us. No one should assume that they understand all that they read in God's word. For some of us, growing in wisdom and knowledge might mean that we need to find ways to spend more time with God, in the midst of all our earthly commitments.

To follow Jesus means growing in wisdom, especially the wisdom of God.

How can we apply all of this in our lives? We need to take note of the following:

- a) **Obedience to God comes before all human relationships.** Jesus put his heavenly Father above his earthly parents. Doing the will of his Father was more important than the response of his parents.

We live in a culture that turns on anyone who goes against it. The danger we face is that we will keep quiet about matters that we should speak out on, in order to maintain earthly relationships. That is true when it comes to:

- LGBT and gender issues
- The roles of men and women in society
- The way children are to be raised
- The way to know God and to be reconciled to him.

These are all areas of life where what God has to say in the Bible runs counter to the message given by our culture. Are we willing to follow Jesus in this area and say to those who want us to agree with their agenda:

- **Do you not know I must be about my Father's business?** (Luke 2:49 NKJV)

Will we allow the pressure of human relationships to cause us to keep silent and so compromise our Christian faith? This is a huge challenge for our young people particularly, but it applies to all of us, since we all want to be loved and accepted by those around us.

- b) **We need to be concerned for the spiritual growth of our children.** Mary and Joseph put a high priority on ensuring that Jesus was raised in a God-fearing home.

They took him to Jerusalem where he was able to witness the Passover, and no doubt they taught him the scriptures

at home. Jesus himself sought out teachers to engage with when he was only 12 years old.

As parents, we can be

more concerned for our children's physical, educational and social growth than for their spiritual growth. Of course, children from godly homes, who have been taught the Bible, can still walk away from the faith, but we need to remember that

Our children have eternal souls that need to be fed with God's truth.

Let us make sure we do not neglect their spiritual growth in the midst of all other activities.

- c) **If we claim to follow Jesus then we need to be obedient to authorities, especially parents.** One day, those in authority will have to give an account for how they served those under their charge, but we will also have to give an account for how we responded to those God has placed over us.

Jesus sets us an example of one who willingly submitted to his parents.

If we claim to follow him, and his Spirit dwells in us, then this same submission should be evident in our lives too.

We will find it hard, because of our own sinful nature and the sinful nature of those around us, as we seek to:

- Obey God at the cost of human relationships
- Teach spiritual truth to reluctant children
- Submit to those in authority over us

None of this is easy, but when we know Jesus and are filled with his Spirit, then he will work in us to enable us to follow him into this life of obedience.

Our part is to confess where we have failed and trust him to lead us according to his will for our lives.