

Who Is Jesus?

Part 3: Family, Am I Right?

Jesus at age 12 in the Temple: Luke 2:41-52

1. A number of passages in Luke-Acts show a pattern of what I. Howard Marshall calls “divine necessity,” that Jesus was bound to a mission his Father.¹ These passages are marked by the use of *dei*, “must”:
 - 2:49: Jesus **must** be in the Father’s house
 - 4:43: Jesus **must** preach the good news of the kingdom of God in the “other cities also”
 - 13:16: And **must** not this woman whom Satan has bound be release?
 - 19:5: “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I **must** stay at your house today”
 - 13:31-33: Warned of danger, Jesus says he **must** go to Jerusalem, since that’s where prophets go to die
 - 9:22: Jesus **must** suffer, be rejected, be killed, and rise (also 17:25; 24:7; 24:26, 44; Acts 17:3)
 - 17:37: They asked him, “Where, Lord?” and he replied, “Where the corpse is, the vultures **must** gather”
 - 22:37: He **must** be counted among the lawless

Often Jesus appears to have been aware of the Father’s to-do list, as in the passages above. Jesus shows in his inaugural teaching in Nazareth (4:17-21) his awareness he is fulfilling prophetic scripture (see also 18:31; 22:37). Others of these “musts” are outside of Jesus’ control, though he is aware of them. Even tween Jesus had an awareness of his mission, requiring him to violate parental obedience. As Marshall puts it [*Luke*, 128],

Jesus’ reply [in 2:49]... suggests the establishment of a break between himself and his parents, although this will be modified in v. 51. There is thus a tension between the necessity felt by Jesus to enter into closer relationship with his Father and the obedience which he continued to render to his parents.

We often think of *Mary’s* emotional experience of discovering her oldest son missing. What would it have been like for *Jesus* to deliberately choose to stay behind in festival Jerusalem, teeming with travelers from distant lands, far from his home, without his parents’ permission? What does Luke, the only writer to include this account, want us to understand from it? What does this tell you about who Jesus is and what he’s like?

2. Luke shows that this divine necessity extends beyond Jesus to include others such as Judas, JtB, Peter, Cornelius, Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch, and many others. As Marshall says,

Yet again, the thought of divine necessity is complemented by the way in which God Himself leads the church. It is not so much that the church follows a prescribed line of action as that God Himself shows the way which it ought to go; He pours out the Spirit upon the Gentiles as a sign that He accepts them, and Peter can only say, “If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed, who was I that I could withstand God?” [Fn. 1, p 112]

So also Paul can say in Eph 2:10 that we are “created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do” (see also Eph 1:9-11; 3:9-11). Sometimes these “good works” will be the godly life of a believer, and at others they will be specific actions which we, like Jesus, *must* do for the sake of the Lord who died

¹ I. H. Marshall, *Luke: historian and theologian*, pp. 106-111 (IVP Academic, 1970). This word occurs 18 times in Luke and 22 in Acts. Similar passages are found in Mk 8:31; 9:11; 13:7.

for us. Can you think of a time when you or someone you know felt drawn to a particular “must”? What divine necessities might God be calling you to now?

Jesus and his family: Mark 3:[7-19], 20-35 [Mt 12:46-50; Lk 8:19-21]

3. Read Mt 12:46-50 and Lk 8:9-21. Does Jesus’ response to inquiries from his family seem in any way unusual to you? Now read Mk 3:13-30 in a translation other than the NRSV². Does this affect your reading of Jesus’ response?³
4. Are there any good reasons why Matthew and Luke would have omitted the material in Mark 3:13-30? How might this sort of omission affect our ability to discern the sort of person Jesus was from the gospel accounts?
5. If it is hard to turn away family in our culture, it was ten times harder in Jesus’, where family ties were everything. Yet Jesus predicted that “Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; and you will be hated by all because of my name” (Mt 10:21). How would Jesus’ response here have spoken to first-century Christians facing ostracization? Have you experienced this?
6. At the start of his ministry, Jesus is a collection of contradictions: The eldest and so the breadwinner, but without a father; recognized early for his ability to handle scripture, yet born a child of shame out of wedlock; wildly popular, but from the north in Galilee, not Jerusalem. He is suddenly the recipient of fame, garnering attention from Jerusalem, but instead of parleying this into a rabbinic career, he chooses disciples who have been passed over (as indicated by their careers), one of whom, Levi, not even fit for polite company.
 - a. What does it tell you about Jesus that he chooses these disciples?
 - b. Discuss Anne Kennedy’s devotion on this passage (below).
7. In Mark 3 we see a range of responses to Jesus which hints at what he will face. Some label Jesus as crazy, drunk, or possessed. For others, as we will see, Jesus is a source of food or healing. Still others see the wisdom of his teaching and follow him. What other historical figures evoked such a range of responses?

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Fun fact: The 2nd cent. *Panarion* of Epiphanius records that the authors of the Gospel of the Ebionites asserted that Jesus was not human on the basis of his statement that his true family are those who do the will of the Father. (*Gospel Parallels* p. 64, fn.)

Further fun fact: Jesus first recorded words were those in which he told his parents he needed to be about his Father’s business.

Be still and know that I am God,
be still and know that I am God,
be still and know that I am God.

In thee, O Lord, I put my trust,
In thee, O Lord, I put my trust,
In thee, O Lord, I put my trust.

² The Greek has no explicit pronoun here. The “they” is implied and can refer to either his family or others. NIV, NASB, and ESV leave the translation ambiguous, while NRSV inserts “people.”

³ Note that erratic behavior was sometimes attributed to demonic possession (Jn 7:20; 8:48; 10:20, “Many of them were saying, ‘He has a demon and is out of his mind. Why listen to him?’”). The scribes argued differently that Jesus’ success as an exorcist was due to allegiance with Beelzebul.

276. Starting Over (Anne Kennedy, *Nailed It*)

“And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, ‘He is out of his mind.’” (Mark 3:21)

Jesus is such a disappointment—not just now, but then also. The thing we want Jesus to do most is to congratulate us on who we are. He was supposed to come and confirm all our doings and feelings. So it turned out to be pretty upsetting for Jesus to come and, well, right away, pick twelve men—backward, contentious, morally dubious men—to stand in the place of Israel. Instead of saying, “Good job Israel,” through the picking of these twelve he says, “You Have So Utterly Failed That I Am Starting Over, and this group of disreputables is better than the lot of you.”

So his family, probably justifiably from a human perspective, thinks he’s insane and comes to try and take him home. Because it’s hard to do something more provocative than what he’s just done. Frustration, disappointment, and now a little fear, taint the mixture of emotions swirling around.

So you’re in good company when you run up against the brick wall at Jesus’ disapproval of you, and your disappointment in him for not giving you a shiny gold star of congratulations. Don’t try to take him by force to do your will. Let him be who he is—God—the judge of you, and not the other way around.

Leader's Intro:

These passages are important for understanding better Jesus' self conception and what it meant to be an agent of God in the world.

Jesus at 12: It's fascinating that only Luke includes this. I. Howard Marshall's observation of Luke's use of *dei*, "must," is central. By age 12 (13 was when he would officially enter the world of Jewish adulthood), Jesus already had a sense of what God was requiring from him. Sometimes God would require things which needed to supersede normal obligations, and this is an excellent example. Even at this age, Jesus felt the tug from his heavenly Father, who apparently wanted him to stay in Jerusalem a little longer. It's all too easy to read the adult Jesus' mindset into this account. Imagine what it would have taken for a 12 year old to remain in a city packed with pilgrims, knowing he was disobeying his parents in doing so, even knowing that it would terrify them not to find him. Imagine yourself running away for a day or two at this age. It speaks volumes of the difficult position Jesus was in and his determination to do what he was called to do.

We can't pass this passage by without asking whether there are "divine necessities" which we are called to. Consider a spectrum with, on one end, the believer who feels called to divine appointments daily, and on the other end, the believer who is a "free agent," who does what he feels best at all time, sincerely seeking to follow Jesus but without any sense of direction beyond that. God wants us to be so in tune with him that as free agents we naturally are drawn to those tasks and ministries which God wants for us. However, there is value to asking questions like, "is this a situation where I have a higher calling to obey?" and "what is God doing in this place, and how can I contribute?"

Jesus sends his family away: If we want to know what Jesus is like, we must understand deeply the situation in which he was placed, and how he responded. This passage is very helpful in that regard. Jesus again feels the tug between mission and family. To read Matthew and Mark, Jesus is just making a theological point about his spiritual family. Mark gives us background which Luke and Matthew choose not to mention: his family appears to have considered him imbalanced and wants to rein him in. It's not clear whether this was because they were sincerely worried for him or they perhaps wanted elevated access to the newly famous itinerant rabbi. Kennedy usefully points out that in Mark the cause and effect seems to be Jesus is famous-> he names a list of unlikely disciples-> his family decides he's nuts-> the teachers of the law accuse him of demon possession (which isn't as weird as it sounds given that they considered erratic behavior a symptom of this). In other words, Kennedy is pointing out that the family and the teachers of the law are reacting to his choice of the 12!

Also worthy of note: this passage arguably is a Mark sandwich, with the "divide house" saying in the center. For Mark, the "house divided" is both figurative (Jesus as both opponent and empowered by Satan) and literal: the house refers to the families split by the gospel, but also the family of God, consisting of those who do God's will.

Finally, note that in this passage "whoever does God's will" matches both Mt 7's repeated emphasis that disciples are those who put Jesus' teaching into practice *and* the NT use of the term "faith." Recall "faith" is typified by Abraham, whose central characteristic is that when God called, he acted. He had doubts, but when he had to go to a foreign land, he put one foot in front of the other and did so. *That* is faith. Knowing this dispels apparent problems with Mt 7 and questions of salvation. Salvation isn't about the pile of works, but it is about a heart which leads to acts of love.

It also sheds light on Mk 6:5-6's, "He could not do any miracles there, except to lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. He was amazed at their lack of faith." Think of the number of miracles which occur in the gospels where faith is not present, as when the lame man at the pool of Bethesda is healed, or the feeding of the 5,000. When Jesus is amazed at lack of faith, it's not simply lack of confidence or belief. It's lack of willingness to act. He found in his homeland, I would suggest, people who were willing to listen to his teaching (to a point) but didn't want to take seriously Jesus' Lordship. This is unpacked in Luke 4 where he speaks in the synagogue in Nazareth. They speak well of his words, but as he says, when they ask why he's able to heal elsewhere but not in his home town, he points to the widow of Zarephath and Naaman the Syrian. But Elijah only healed foreigners because only foreigners were obedient. We have all been warned of trying to domesticate Jesus. At the end of the day, the diagnosis is easy to perform: are we walking as Jesus walked? Or as we only saying positive thing about Jesus ("Lord, Lord") but not sacrificing to follow?

Things to think about. This passage ought also to shed light on the wedding at Cana, and Jesus' sharp reply to Mary, "what to thee and to me," the same phrase the Gadarene demoniac says to Jesus. Jesus, knowing he must not preference his family, creates a gulf.

Those of us who grew up in Christian homes may not have experienced a family split over Christian belief. Likely we know someone who has. In our culture, it is also likely that at some point we will come up against the cultural expectation that we pursue professional success. While there's some cultural understanding of balancing career and family, the person who passes up career advancement for the sake of lay ministry will puzzle those around him or her.

Make sure the extra questions below are addressed.

Extra questions and observations:

Jesus at 12:

- ❖ Can you think of a practical reason why Jesus wouldn't warn his family he was staying behind?

Jesus and his family:

- ❖ Are Mary and the sibs looking for preferential treatment or just trying to protect Jesus from going off the rails?

Luke 2:41-52

⁴¹Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover. ⁴²When he was twelve years old, they went up to the festival, according to the custom. ⁴³After the festival was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. ⁴⁴Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. ⁴⁵When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. ⁴⁶After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. ⁴⁸When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you."

⁴⁹"Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"^[a] ⁵⁰But they did not understand what he was saying to them.

⁵¹Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. ⁵²And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.

- a. *Or be about my Father's business*

Mark 3:7-35

⁷Jesus departed with his disciples to the sea, and a great multitude from Galilee followed him; ⁸hearing all that he was doing, they came to him in great numbers from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, beyond the Jordan, and the region around Tyre and Sidon. ⁹He told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, so that they would not crush him; ¹⁰for he had cured many, so that all who had diseases pressed upon him to touch him. ¹¹Whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and shouted, "You are the Son of God!" ¹²But he sternly ordered them not to make him known.

¹³He went up the mountain and called to him those whom he wanted, and they came to him. ¹⁴And he appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles,[Ⓜ] to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message, ¹⁵and to have authority to cast out demons. ¹⁶So he appointed the twelve:[Ⓜ] Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); ¹⁷James son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder); ¹⁸and Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Cananaean, ¹⁹and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

Then he went home; ²⁰and the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. ²¹When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, "He has gone out of his mind." ²²And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, "He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons." ²³And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? ²⁴If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. ²⁵And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. ²⁶And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. ²⁷But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered.

²⁸"Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; ²⁹but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin" — ³⁰for they had said, "He has an unclean spirit."

³¹Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. ³²A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers and sisters[Ⓜ] are outside, asking for you." ³³And he replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" ³⁴And looking at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! ³⁵Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."

Notes:

1) Young Jesus

- a) Jesus didn't ask permission, presumably because he wouldn't have gotten it
- b) We are used to thinking about what it was like for his *parents*, but what was it like for Jesus? To know that he is doing something which is going to inconvenience and panic his parents and his entire tribe; to know that he is going to have to face down their anger and justify his actions; to have to find some place to stay; he must have felt very strongly about the importance of doing this.
- c) Note that Jesus isn't *teaching* in the temple, he's listening and impressing them with what he says
- d) This says a lot about Jesus' self awareness. He knows that he is not just Mary's son, he's the Son of the Father, and if the Father wants him to be in the Temple, he needs to be in the Temple.
- e) Notice that v. 50 explicitly tells us that M&D didn't understand what Jesus had told them. Marshall: "They are perplexed at the revelation of what divine Sonship implies, and for the moment they cannot take it in. There is a secret regarding Jesus' relation to the Father which even not even they can fully understand."
- f) Q: What's the main point of this story? Why did Luke include it when no one else did?
- g) Age 13 is when he would enter the religious community.
- h) They would have been traveling in a large caravan for safety (Marshall).
- i) These are Jesus' first recorded words.
- j) Marshall: "His earthly parents should not have been anxiously seeking him, for they should have known where to find him. But the words of Jesus are difficult. His parents were bound to look for him when he was lost (for how would he have found his way back home?), and it was hardly right for a boy to leave his parents in this way without telling them what he was going to do. But these points are not taken up. Jesus' reply, though gentle in manner, suggests the establishment of a break between himself and his parents, although this will be modified in v. 51. There is thus a tension between the necessity felt by Jesus to enter into closer relationship with his Father and the obedience which he continued to render to his parents. The concept of necessity is frequent in Luke (18; Acts 22; Mt 8; Mk 6)." "...it expresses a sense of divine compulsion, often seen in obedience to a scriptural command or prophecy, or the conformity of events to God's will. Here the necessity lies in the inherent relationship of Jesus to God which demanded obedience." **So Jesus was compelled by the Father to stay, though we don't explicitly hear the Father's voice here.**
- k) Look up descriptions of the youth of other famous people.

2) Jesus and his family

3) Jesus at Nazareth