

## Introduction

Today I want to focus our remembering by looking at the gospel story as a whole. It is helpful for perspective and balance to return again and again to the big picture presented to us in the four Gospels. These are the “Remembrances” of Christ that give us the gospel “writ large.”

To view the whole means that we recall events from the beginning to the end of the gospel accounts. But this could be difficult given the fact that the Gospels take up approximately half of the NT. We need some way to orient ourselves within the large number of details that could be cited. We need an orientation point to avoid getting lost in the process of reflection.

One orientation point is found in the section concerned with the early childhood of Christ (another might be to discover and unpack the theme of each Gospel individually, which still gives us the gospel writ large). It is an outstanding fact that *only one event in the early life of Christ is reported with detail regarding what the Lord thought, did, or said*. It took place when Jesus was twelve years old (Lk. 2:42). You will recall that His family made annual visits to Jerusalem and on this occasion when His parents left town they mistakenly left Jesus behind. They thought He was “in the group” of “relatives and acquaintances” that traveled with them in caravan. When they discovered that He was missing, it took three days to find Him.

This account is only recorded in one Gospel, Luke (2:41-51). The other Gospels move quickly from the entry of Christ into the world to the ministry of John the Baptist who paved the way for the ministry of Christ. They “skip” from His birth to the beginning of His ministry. Significantly, there is no other record in the NT that reveals anything that Jesus thought, did, or said before He reached thirty years of age. *It is only in Luke’s Gospel that we have testimony to our Lord’s own sense of calling as a youth*. This sense of calling is sometimes referred to as His messianic self-consciousness.

Because this event stands out alone like a preface to the life and work of Christ, it seems reasonable to conclude that it gives us something central that defines who He is. As a preface it can help us find our way into and through the gospel story.

What, then, are the first words that we hear from the lips of Christ?

They are reported in the form of two questions that Jesus asked His parents when they found Him: “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” (Lk. 2:49).

It seems to me that the logic behind this question is this: “if you knew that I must be *involved in the things of my Father* then you would not have had to search for me. You would know that I would be in His temple.” There is no mention here explicitly of either the Father’s business (KJV) or the Father’s house (ESV). What we have is literally, “it is necessary for me to be in the [things] of my Father.” If He must be in the things of the Father then if His parents lose track of Him in Jerusalem they should know where to find Him: in the Father’s house of course.

By these words what does the Lord Jesus tell us about Himself?

From the very first words of Christ that are recorded, we learn that Jesus is driven by a deep sense of obligation and commitment to the Father. He is under authority, recognizes that fact, and acknowledges it openly to Joseph and Mary (and presumably to His relatives and acquaintances). The implication is that they had sufficient information at their disposal to know that Jesus, even as a youth, lived in radical submission to the Father in heaven.

*The central notion is submission to authority* (cf. the verb of necessity: *I must be* in the things of my Father). And some things are indicated about His position under authority. His submission to authority is a matter of love (He submits to the *Father*), it is unique (He speaks of “*my Father*”), and it is comprehensive (He lovingly submits to involvement in the *things* of the Father).

1) He is loved and loving in a Father/son relationship. His sense of obligation is not servile. His commitment to authority is filial as the love of a son to his father.

2) The uniqueness of His relationship speaks to the fact that Jesus is one with the Father. He is God the Son who has come to earth on a mission. Thus, the implication is that the submission of Christ to the Father is a submission between equals and is therefore the result of an agreement between the members of the trinity. In other words, Jesus at age twelve is well aware that He has come to fulfill His part in the eternal covenant of redemption.

3) “In the things of the Father” expresses concreteness and detail in a sweeping way. At first it sounds somewhat vague: “in the *things* of my Father.” But on reflection we realize that He is referring to the things of God categorically, to all the things of God. That means that His submission to authority is practical, concrete, detailed, down to earth, and thus comprehensive. Hence the translation is a good one that has, “I must be about my Father’s business.” He says in effect, “Whatever that business may be, that is what I must be about.”

If we put these three things tightly together, we can describe the Lord Jesus in a compact phrase. Namely, He is the covenant keeping Son. The pieces are all packed into this short phrase: in a filial relation He is the loved and loving Son who keeps God’s commandments within a covenantal framework. Let’s remember Him, therefore, as *the covenant keeping Son of God*.

To get you thinking about Jesus in this way I want to ask some rhetorical questions and perhaps some sub-questions.

What are the major events of the gospel story from beginning to end?

If I pause for a few moments, what events would you list? We will probably vary from each other somewhat depending on what we each mean by a major event. By a major event I mean a summary event that is not part of something larger (this still does not put us all on the same wave length). For example, someone might say that delivering the Sermon on the Mount constitutes a major event. But it is part of something larger, namely, it is part of our Lord’s proclamation of the gospel as are His miracles (He preached and taught the kingdom of God in word and deed, in sermon and miracle). So, provisionally, I want to summarize many things under the title of His preaching as a major thing that He did (of course in various ways such as parable, miracle, teaching, and healing). Preaching is an event complex (a unit of events).

So let’s go back to the question, what are the major events of the gospel story? Even with birth and childhood as prefatory, the major events of the gospel story are His birth, baptism, temptation in the wilderness, preaching/teaching the kingdom of God in word and deed (sermon and miracle), His death by crucifixion (in a complex including arrest and trial), resurrection, and ascension. In summary we have the following provisional list of seven events:

- Birth
- Baptism
- Temptation
- Preaching
- Death
- Resurrection
- Ascension

It is difficult to further outline these events but a simple time line of the gospel story is beginning, middle, and end:

#### Beginning

Birth  
Baptism  
Temptation

#### Middle

Preaching

#### End

Death  
Resurrection  
Ascension

Let's look at these events to see how they bring Christ before us. As I briefly describe each event *see if you can anticipate how they reflect the truth that Jesus is the covenant keeping Son of God.*

##### 1) Birth

His birth was, remarkably, an act of obedience. In His very coming into the world, He is keeping covenant. Remember, Jesus said "before Abraham was, I am" (Jn. 8:58). He existed before He was born (a truly striking and unusual fact). His birth was an incarnation by which the Word that was with God and that was God became flesh. Therefore He is the preeminent Son, the only Son *from* the Father (Jn. 1:14). It is all here in a nutshell. Jesus is God and He was sent by the Father as His unique Son (God the Son). He was sent to do a work that would bring light and life to sinners in darkness and death (Jn. 1:4). He became flesh and dwelt among us in order to obey the Father and make His glory known (Jn. 1:14, 18).

##### 2) Baptism

You will recall that when Jesus came to John for baptism, John was reluctant stating that he was the one who needed to be baptized by Jesus. But Jesus insisted saying, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." But how is it fitting and a matter of righteousness for Jesus to submit to a baptism of repentance? (This is what John's baptism was, Matt. 3:6, 11, a confession of sin). It is fitting because the sinless Savior identified Himself with those He came to save. He could in effect confess "*His*" sins because He took the sins of His people and owned them as His very own. His baptism was an initial testimony to the fact that He would be cleansed by means of the refiner's fire of judgment. In baptism Jesus set His head like a flint to undergo the judgment of God so that His covenant people would be spared the judgment of God.

##### 3) Temptation

By His temptation, Jesus committed Himself to obedient suffering without the use of His miracle working power (cf. bread from a stone, fall into the hands of angels, Matt. 4:3-7). He will learn obedience by suffering as He waits for the Father's appointment to kingdom glory (versus kingdom glory now by submission to the devil, Matt. 4:8-10).

##### 4) Kingdom Proclamation

It should utterly amaze us to recall the extent of our Lord's commitment to the Father's will. It was so comprehensive that He did "nothing of his own accord" whether in sermon or in miracle (Jn.8:42). He only did what He saw the Father doing (Jn. 5:19). Thus as the Father raises the dead and gives them life so also the Son gives life to whom He will (Jn. 5:21). He said, "I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me" (Jn. 5:30). Thus He proclaimed the

gospel promise of eternal life saying, “whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life (Jn. 5:24, note how hearing Christ’s word is bonded inseparably to believing God in context of the emphasized fact that God sent Him). Laying down His life is a charge He received “from my Father” (Jn. 10:18). His very words were taught to Him by the Father (Jn. 17:14). Responding to comments about His knowledge though He never studied in the way of the learned, Jesus said pointedly, “My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me” (Jn. 7:16). Remarkably, then, the entire ministry of Christ in giving the gospel by preaching, teaching, and healing was in no way His exclusive message. Every word was received from the Father’s loving will and proclaimed in word and deed lovingly by the covenant keeping Son.

#### 5) Death

In death, Jesus was maximally obedient. Although the suffering was unmistakably real and infinitely intense, He willingly submitted His will to the Father’s will. Recall the passionate account of Jesus in the shadow of the cross reported by John (12:27-28). Paraphrased we have: “Now my soul is exceedingly troubled and what shall I say? On one hand, with every ounce of self-preservation in my soul, I must say, ‘Father save me from this hour.’ On the other hand, with every ounce of determination to fulfill the eternal covenant of redemption I must say ‘Father, bring on the cross and I will drink the cup of your wrath to the last bitter dregs.’” Our Savior is the covenant keeping Son of God who came into this world to save those given to Him by the Father (Jn. 17:2, to give eternal life to the ones given to Him). The work that was necessary to complete His mission is what was accomplished when the dying Savior cried, “It is finished.”

#### 6) Resurrection and ascension

The resurrection and ascension are tied together in the marvelous interchange of Jesus with Mary Magdalene (cf. Jn. 19:25) on resurrection morning. He tells her, I have not yet ascended. Here is the risen Lord in between resurrection and ascension. What are the wonderful words that He tells her to report to the disciples? She is to go, He says, “to my brothers” (Jn. 20:17). There is a lot of good news here in the little word, “my.” He calls the representative church “my brothers.” He is our elder brother because by His death and resurrection He became the firstborn of many brethren (Rom. 8:29). He came in order to bring many sons to glory (Heb. 2:10, through His suffering). Notice how He expresses this precious good news in the message to the disciples: “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God” (Jn. 20:17). By His coming, by His obedience, by His submission to the Father’s will, and by His being about the Father’s business He has broken down the wall of alienation that separated us from God. By His life, death, resurrection and ascension He has secured a place for us in the family of God. That is why we can each so comfortably approach the throne of God in time of need saying “*my* Father.” So each of us can say, “What a wonder O Sovereign Lord, Maker of heaven and earth, you are my Father.”

Jesus is covenant keeping Son of God. He is therefore worthy of all praise, honor, and glory both now and forevermore! In light of these remembrances, let us now eat and drink at the table of the covenant.