

Jesus as a Child

LUKE 2:41-52

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Over the past several weeks, we have been looking at requests that were turned in by various members of this congregation during our Wednesday evening Bible classes just over a month ago. We have two more lessons in this series, and both are requests that have come in from two of the children here at this congregation. One of our young women has asked for a lesson on the childhood of Jesus, and that is an excellent question! When we look at the entire New Testament, we find that virtually all of the information we have about the Lord comes from the last 3-½ years of his adult life, starting at the age of 30. We have the story of his conception and birth, but other than that, we have pretty much nothing, until the age of 30, with the exception of one small story covering just a few days when the Lord was 12 years old. And that is where I would like for us to focus our attention this morning. The story is told in Luke 2:41-52 (p. 1599).

In the religious world, sometimes authors will refer to the “lost years” or the “hidden years” of Jesus’ life. And as you can imagine, there has been some wild speculation concerning what Jesus was like as a child. And I know that as human beings we are curious, and we think we need to know. And yet I would suggest that the Bible was not written just to satisfy our curiosity! Instead, the Bible was written so that we can know what we need to know. Therefore, all we need to know about the Lord’s childhood is found right here in Luke 2. Notice, please, Luke 2:41-52,

Now His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when He became twelve, they went up there according to the custom of the Feast; and as they were returning, after spending the full number of days, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. But His parents were unaware of it, but supposed Him to be in the caravan, and went a day’s journey; and they began looking for Him among their relatives and acquaintances. When they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem looking for Him. Then, after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers. When they saw Him, they were astonished; and His mother said to Him, “Son, why have You treated us this way? Behold, Your father and I have been anxiously looking for You.” And He said to them, “Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father’s house?” But they did not understand the statement which He had made to them. And He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and He continued in subjection to

them; and His mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

As we answer the request from one of our young women for a lesson on the childhood of Jesus, I want us to focus in on this passage, because this is all we have. What we have here, then, is very important. And as we study, as we keep our Bibles open, I want us to go home with some very practical ideas that we can apply to our own lives.

- I. **But as we go back to the text itself, I would point out first of all, that throughout this entire paragraph, Mary and Joseph put a CLEAR EMPHASIS ON SPIRITUAL MATTERS THROUGHOUT THE LORD'S CHILDHOOD.**

And really, this emphasis on spiritual things goes all the way back to when the Lord was just a baby (and really, even before he was born). But just thinking about when the Lord was a baby, look, please, back at verse 22. Notice, even in verse 22, Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to Jerusalem ***"according to the Law of Moses."*** In verse 23, we find that this commandment was ***"written in the Law of the Lord."*** In verse 24, we find that the sacrifice offered right after the Lord's birth was done, ***"...according to what was said in the Law of the Lord."*** In verse 27, Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the temple ***"...to carry out for Him the custom of the Law."*** And even when Jesus was a very small child, we find in verse 39 that, ***"...they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord."*** We are not surprised, then, when we come to our text for this morning, roughly 12 years later, and we find that this tradition has continued.

According to verse 41, the Lord's parents ***"went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover."*** As I understand it, the custom at that time was for all adult males living within 15 miles of Jerusalem were expected to come in and celebrate the Passover. However, we know from looking at a map that Nazareth is roughly 65 miles north of Jerusalem. In other words, Joseph went above and beyond the bare minimum – not only by making such a long journey every year, but also by bringing his wife and children. Today, we don't think very much about driving 65 miles. We will drive that far just to get to Miller Park, right? Miller Park is just about the same distance from here as Nazareth was from Jerusalem. You want to go to Miller Park with me this afternoon? How about if we walk it together? Google Maps tells us that we can leave this building right now, we can take the Glacial Drumlin State Trail, and on foot, that journey will take almost exactly 24 hours (23:59). We add, though, that the journey from Nazareth to Jerusalem was through the mountains, we add a bunch of children, we add a few nights for camping along the way, and we are talking about a significant journey. And yet the Bible tells us that Joseph and Mary made this trip ***"every year"*** (verse 41). This was their custom. This was their family tradition – not just doing the minimum, but going above and beyond what the Law of God required.

I would invite you to turn over just a few pages to Luke 4:16, where we have another very interesting statement. We fast forward 18 years (from the time Jesus was 12 to the time he began his ministry at the age of 30), and 18 years after today's passage, Jesus goes home – notice Luke 4:16, ***"And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read."*** Very interesting! Jesus grew up with the tradition of going to the synagogue every Sabbath Day. Joseph and Mary, therefore, took Deuteronomy 6 to heart. Their focus was bringing their son up in the Lord. It was important for Jesus to be well-rounded. It was important for him to learn how to earn a living. But one thing we know: Mary and Joseph made sure that Jesus learned the word of God. This was a priority.

There is a practical lesson for all of us here this morning who are parents who still have children living at home. As parents, we must be committed to putting our children in a position where they will respect and appreciate the word of God. The Lord's Day is to be a day to look forward to, the high point of the week. If your children are very young, perhaps you can have a family meeting to discuss ways of making Sundays more enjoyable. We know that children usually grow up to have the same priorities as their parents. And so, if we use Sunday mornings to sleep in and go to ball games and go on school trips, then our children will most likely grow up with those same priorities. I do not say this to be legalistic, but I say this based on what I have personally observed over the past 20 years. Children establish priorities based on watching their parents, and if our children have our priorities, then chances are our grandchildren will also have those priorities as well.

Several years ago, I mentioned how the chorus teacher at our son's middle school had a policy that the grade for the entire semester hinged on each student's participation in the fall and spring concert. From the beginning of the year, we started getting notices – your student will participate in the concert, or he will receive a failing grade, there will be no excuses. Well, both of those concerts fell on Wednesday evening. At that point, as a family, we could have very easily said, "Well, this is what the school expects, this is just the way it is, so I guess we need to miss Bible class on those two nights." As you know, however, that is not what we did. Instead, we contacted the teacher and explained that we have a religious commitment and that our son would be unable to attend on a Wednesday evening. Well, she wrote back and told us that we need to back off on our commitment just a little bit so that our child would receive a passing grade. As you know, our answer was "No," and at that point, we remembered the non-discrimination policy that was printed right inside the front cover of the student handbook at that time. At least for those of you in the Madison Metropolitan School District, I want to share that policy. It is still on the district website under the heading, "MMSD Policies and Procedures: 4039; Academic Accommodations for Religious Beliefs," and here it is:

The District shall provide for the reasonable accommodation of a pupil's sincerely held religious beliefs with regard to all examinations and other academic requirements. Upon determining that there is a need for an accommodation under this Policy, the pupil's school will provide a reasonable means by which a pupil exercising his/her sincerely held religious beliefs will be permitted to make up an examination or other academic requirements at another time or by an alternative means without prejudicial effect. Under no circumstances shall a teacher deduct points or lower a grade on a test, assignment or other class requirement merely because a student has requested and received an accommodation pursuant to this policy.

Well, we got back in touch with the teacher and the principal, we referenced that policy, and we suggested that our child would be more than willing to attend another chorus concert in the area and write a report on it, but that we would not be present at any school activity taking place at 7 o'clock on any Wednesday evening. Shortly after that, we got a response from the school, approving that plan. And on our end of it, we attended one of Jordan's concerts at the high school over in Middleton, our son wrote a report, and we all learned quite a bit through that experience. Well, that was in 6th Grade. The same thing happened in 7th Grade and in 8th Grade. In 8th Grade, though, we had a blizzard on the day of the concert, and he was finally able to attend as it was moved to Thursday! I say this to let you know that something similar has happened with our daughter at a different middle school. We got the same letter threatening a failing grade if she didn't attend the Wednesday night concert. Very kindly, we referred back to that policy and set up an alternative plan. We've done that last year and this year, and this past week our daughter came home and relayed a message from her chorus teacher: Because of our family's objection, her middle school would now be moving the concert from Wednesday to Thursday, so that she can participate next year.

Now, I don't say these things to brag, and I certainly don't say these things to imply that if you miss church for a school concert that you and your family will burn in hell forever – but what I am saying is that the Madison Metropolitan School District is not responsible for the spiritual health of my family. The Little League coach is not responsible for the spiritual health of my family. The school ski trip supervisor is not responsible for the spiritual health of my family. Instead, as a Christian father, that responsibility falls on me. And if anyone threatens either of my children with a failing grade unless they miss an assembly of God's people, I will go to war over that. Most of you know that my wife works for the district. Most of you know that both of us have volunteered extensively – my wife in various classrooms, myself as a trained belayer at the ropes courses over here at Kennedy and also at the school forest down in Verona – we respect teachers, both of my parents taught in the public schools, my father-in-law teaches in a public school, we choose to send our children to a public school – but when there is a conflict between anything in this world and God's kingdom, the decision we have made in our family is that God's kingdom will come out on top.

And I believe we see this same emphasis in the lives of Mary and Joseph. They went above and beyond the minimum. They put a priority on bringing Jesus to the synagogue, they brought him to Jerusalem (even when it was not required by God's Law), and this is a tradition that continued throughout the Lord's earthly life.

II. So, we learn a lesson as parents (to emphasize the spiritual in our families), but there is also something to be learned from Jesus himself, and that is: JESUS, AS A 12-YEAR OLD YOUNG MAN, ALSO TAKES ON RESPONSIBILITY FOR HIS OWN SPIRITUAL GROWTH.

Up to this point, the responsibility had been primarily on his parents, but now, Jesus steps out on his own. Now, he starts getting his information from a source other than his own parents. He goes beyond the teachers at his local synagogue. At the age of 12, Jesus takes the initiative to ask questions, to come to his own conclusions. At the age of 12, his faith is now becoming his own. We can almost see his mind processing all of this new information. He is soaking it in. Some people have the idea that Jesus was teaching here, that Jesus was setting the leaders straight. And yet that does not seem to be what is happening here. Notice verse 46. Luke says that Jesus was *"...sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions."* The Son of God was learning. The Son of God was taking responsibility for his own spiritual growth. He realized that he was responsible for learning God's law, not just because his parents were teaching it, not just because his parents were taking him to the synagogue and the temple, but because he wanted to learn it on his own. He was taking responsibility for his own spiritual future.

And what a lesson for those here this morning who are roughly this same age! Parents are responsible for leading the way. Parents need to get their children to Bible classes on Sunday morning and Wednesday evening. Parents need to encourage Bible study in the home. But at some point, children need to take on the personal responsibility of learning God's law on their own. Early on, children must answer to their parents. But over time, children have to transition to answering to God directly. And this is the transition we see happening with Jesus in Luke 2.

I would point out that this transition can be rather stressful sometimes. We think of a relay race, where a runner passes off the baton. That handoff is critical. That handoff is the most stressful part of that race. And that is what we see here. Notice what Mary and Joseph went through here. They get partway home (they get from here to Johnson Creek), and they suddenly realize that Jesus is not there, then it takes another day of travel to get back to Jerusalem, and then it takes them a day to find him once they get to Jerusalem. They were separated for three days. Sometimes I wonder: Where did Jesus sleep for those two or three nights? Where did Jesus eat? I don't know, but as a parent, I can only imagine what Joseph and Mary were going

through. When I read this passage, I sometimes think of the Home Alone movies. How could parents ever leave a child behind by accident? Well, it does happen! In ancient times, it was common for the women to leave earlier with the children, and the men would come along later and catch up along the way. Mary and Joseph probably both thought that Jesus was with the other, and when they camped on that first night, I'm sure a little bit of panic set in. But the point is, Jesus took responsibility for his own spiritual growth and development. So to the children here this morning: Your parents are responsible for getting you here to this building, but you personally are responsible for being engaged with what is going on here. You are responsible for looking up the Scriptures during the sermon. You are responsible for paying attention in Bible class. You are ultimately responsible for your own spiritual growth. We see this in the Lord when he was only 12 years old. Jesus is our example.

III. As we go back to our passage in Luke 2, we find another basic area where Jesus serves as an example, and that is: As a child, JESUS WAS OBEDIENT TO HIS PARENTS.

When the Lord was busted (so to speak), we find in verse 49 that the Lord gave a brief explanation, but his parents really did not understand. Again, to the children here this morning: Have your parents ever failed to understand something that you have tried to tell them? Sometimes, as parents, we just don't get it. We are old! Life is different now than it was back then! If you have ever tried to explain something to your mom and dad and they don't seem to get it, I can tell you: Jesus knows what you're going through! But did you notice how Jesus reacted? Mary and Joseph do not understand. So notice in verse 51 how the Lord reacted to that. Did he throw a fit? Did he slam the door to his bedroom? Did he sulk in the corner? Did he snap back with some sharp or cutting remark? No! Instead, in verse 51, Luke says, ***"And He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and He continued in subjection to them; and His mother treasured all these things in her heart."*** You know, sometimes we think we know better than our parents. But think about this: Jesus really DID know better than his parents! God chose to be born into a human family, and when he was a teenager, he also chose to submit himself to those human parents. What an awesome example! If there has ever been a child in the history of the world who had a right to pull rank on his parents, it was Jesus, and yet he chose to listen. He chose to put himself under their authority. How difficult that must have been! He made this decision because that is what God's Law told him to do, ***"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right"*** (Ephesians 6:1).

As we try to apply this to ourselves, as we apply this to the children here this morning – after all, you are the ones who asked for this lesson – but as we apply it to ourselves, I would just briefly ask: Have any of us ever had perfect parents? I think about my own parents, and looking back on my childhood, I can say that I am very impressed. From my point of view, my parents made some very good decisions along the way. They made some serious sacrifices for me and for my younger sister. But were my parents perfect? No, they were not. On the way home from church one night, when my sister bit her own arm to the point that it bled, and then cried, and then blamed me, I got in trouble for that. In my opinion, my parents blew it on that decision. But generally speaking, I would say that most parents I know probably deserve an "A" for effort. Most parents are pretty much doing the best they can. This morning, then, let us recommit ourselves to honoring, and respecting, and obeying our parents, as we should. We learn in this passage that Jesus continued to honor and respect his parents, ***"...He continued in subjection to them."***

IV. **As we come near the end of our time together this morning, I would point out one more idea that will hopefully encourage the children who are here today, and that is: JESUS GREW UP!**

We don't have time to go into this in detail, so I emailed most of you a great article on verse 52 last night, an article written by Wayne Jackson. The rest of you have it in your cubbyholes, and there are extras on top of the cubbyholes back there (for our visitors this morning). But in verse 52, the Bible says that, **"...Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men."** He increased in wisdom. In other words, Jesus got smarter. He developed intellectually. He also grew in stature. In other words, Jesus got bigger. He got physically stronger over time. He grew up. He took care of himself. And then he also grew in favor with God and men. Growing in favor **"with God"** means that Jesus grew in his understanding of God. He grew closer to his Father in heaven. His faith developed over time. When Luke says that Jesus grew in favor **"with man,"** he means that Jesus grew socially. He learned how to get along with other people. He developed the ability to make friends. He developed the ability to be kind to people. As an adult, Jesus is described as being a **"friend of sinners."** He developed the ability to make friends as a child. He never overlooked anybody, but he treated others just as he would want to be treated. He **"...kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men."** He grew in a balanced way – intellectually, physically, spiritually, and socially.

Conclusion:

Have you ever wondered why Jesus didn't come to this earth as an adult? I guess there may be a number of reasons, but as we close, I would suggest that Jesus was conceived and born and grew up so that he could understand absolutely everything that we go through at every stage of life in a very personal way. And that ties in to the request that led to this morning's lesson. The children here this morning want to know about Jesus as a child! Jesus, having been a child himself, knows what it is like to grow up. He knows what it means to be misunderstood by your parents. Jesus knows what it means to grow, and learn, and obey.

As Carl read in our scripture reading this morning, from Hebrews 5:8-9, **"Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation."** Jesus learned obedience, and because he learned obedience, he became a Savior to all who obey HIM. This morning, then, we invite everyone who hears these words – whether here in this room today or on the Internet over the coming days and years – we invite you to obey the words of Christ. The Bible teaches that we must believe in Jesus, we must repent of our sins, and we must be immersed in water for the forgiveness of sins. If you have any questions, let us know. But if you are ready to obey the good news right now, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com