

December 29th, 2024

Luke 2:41-52

How could they? How could Mary and Joseph possibly lose their Son? What kind of parents are they? Actually, they were very good parents, and we shouldn't blame them at all for this. Mary and Joseph, being the devout believers in God that they were, took their children to Jerusalem every year to celebrate and remember the Passover. Typically entire villages or extended families would go together, the men would walk in a group, the women would walk in a group, and the children would walk in a group, all in this great traveling crowd. In some ways, it's remarkable that they realized Jesus was missing as soon as they did- and when they did, they looked everywhere and went back to Jerusalem- I can't think of anything more distressing than this kind of situation as a parent- and then their distress turns into shock as they see what Jesus is doing, and his explanation for what he's doing- which goes into this question- out of all the possible accounts of Jesus' childhood, why did Luke include *this* one in his gospel? Because this account teaches us some crucially important things that you need to know if you are going to understand Jesus. It's this: **Jesus is Shocking. 1. He is shockingly great. 2. He is shockingly humble.**

**1. Jesus is Shockingly Great.** In Jewish culture, boys were expected to take on adult responsibilities not at 18 like today, but at age 13. That's why they have Bar Mitzvahs at age 13. Therefore, the year they were 12 years old was a crucially important year. That year was when the boys were expected to closely follow, emulate, and shadow their fathers so they could learn their trade and work. This was the year when Joseph would have taught Jesus the work of carpentry and craftsmanship. This was also a year of not only intense vocational training, but religious training. Joseph would take time teaching Jesus about the Bible, Synagogue, the Passover, and what it all means. As a son, it was Jesus' duty to closely follow, learn from, and obey his Father and go about his Father's business. You can see this when Mary adds "your father" into her scolding of Jesus. She's essentially saying, "Jesus, how could you do this to your father- especially now? You are supposed to be closely following your father, learning from him, serving your father!" And Jesus says, "That's what I was doing." Literally, he says, "didn't you know that I had to be about my Father's business." And Mary and Joseph are rightly astonished by this- and we should be too.

Now, maybe you're thinking, "yeah, he called his Father, so what?" That's because we have grown up as Christians or in a western culture deeply influenced by Christianity, so even unbelievers will think of God as a "Father," but you must understand- that is not something you see, really ever, in other religions. The Old Testament, for example, hardly ever refers to God as "Father." Is there sometimes? Yes, and you'll find other religions talk about God as a Father in the sense of he's a creator or the source of all things. But what you will never, ever see in the Old Testament, and what shocked Mary and Joseph is a human being calling the creator of the universe, "my Father." Later on when Jesus did this, the religious leaders wanted to kill him for it because he called God his Father and therefore made himself equal to God. They were right,

that's exactly what Jesus is doing. Right here, Mary and Joseph's twelve-year-old son is claiming to be God himself. He is saying to them, "You are not in charge of me. I don't have to obey you. I have a special, incomprehensible relationship to your God because I am, in my essence, your God. I'm older than you. You did not create me. I created you." I think if your twelve-year-old said that to you, you'd be shocked too. You've heard me say this, but it's too important not to say: Jesus is not simply a good teacher. He is the true God of all creation, he always has been, and even when he was twelve, he knew. How did he know that? Hard to say. But he knew. And he wasn't shy about saying it when he needed to. Jesus is shockingly great.

**2. Shockingly humble.** And yet, Jesus is shockingly humble. Consider what Luke writes about Jesus- he grew, and he grew in wisdom and knowledge. Hold on- isn't God all-knowing? Didn't Jesus know everything already? Yes, absolutely. And yet, when Jesus became a human being, he knowingly and purposefully didn't make use of his divine power, glory, or knowledge. I think the people that can understand this the best are stroke victims. I know some of you here have suffered a stroke before, and know how frustrating it is to know what you used to be able to do, but you just don't have the ability to talk, walk, move, and function like you used to. It's maddening. But Jesus chose to do this on an infinitely higher level. Jesus, the all-knowing God of creation lowered himself so low that he had to learn, or perhaps re-learn, his own Word. The Scriptures- the Bible- he had to relearn the teachings and the Words that he himself told the prophets to write down. Jesus had to relearn his own word. And he did it with more energy and focus and excellence than anyone else! Notice this- he wasn't teaching in the temple. Luke never says that. He was asking questions. He was learning his own word from men who he created. And yes, everyone was amazed at the insight and answers of this boy- it would be like a middle-schooler today showing up at NASA headquarters and debating about the latest advancements in space-engineering and keeping up with the world's experts. That is how seriously Jesus took God's Word and how devoutly he studied it. And when his mother confronted him, he seemed genuinely confused why they wouldn't understand that this is where he needs to be. He's learning from and about his Father, who he has purposely made it so that he has to learn about him.

And then look at what he does. He returns with his parents and the word in Greek literally means, "submit." Most teens and pre-teens think they are smarter and wiser than their parents, but Jesus actually was. And he gladly submitted to their authority- the sinless Son of God submitted to the parental authority of sinful parents. Have you ever obeyed a coach or teacher or boss that you knew was wrong and you did what you were told even though you knew more than that person? I guarantee you had something to say about it afterward- Jesus didn't. He did it with joy. Why? Why did Jesus become so low? Why did Jesus limit himself? Why did he submit himself to the Father, is equal, and submit himself to the training and teaching of the Rabbis when he himself could have said, "Well, I would know better than you because I wrote it," and why did he submit himself to the authority his parents when in reality he is their creator? Why?

Because that was what God expects from us. Humility, submitting ourselves to each other in love and choosing to serve each other over ourselves and let's be honest, who has done this the way Jesus has done it? Who? No me. And yet he did it perfectly and because he knew the punishment that he demands for those who do not, and he came to pay it. Jesus, even when was a boy, looked at the Temple and knew that he truly was the Temple of God, the thing that shielded sinful men from the blinding glory of God so they could be in his presence. He knew as we walked the streets of Jerusalem that years later he would do so again with a cross on his shoulders. And he knew as he celebrated the passover lamb, whose blood was shed to set free from the death the sons of Israel, that he was the true Passover Lamb whose blood would free all of us from the death we deserved. That's why he did it. Even as a boy, Jesus knew he was our substitute, and gladly submitted himself, all for us.

**Application- Deeply Convicting Truths.** I have to confess, as I prepared for this sermon, I found myself to be deeply, deeply convicted about my own life and attitudes of my heart. Firstly, I was convicted by Jesus' love and devotion to the Word. Please don't misunderstand me- I'm not saying this to shame anyone for not coming to a service or bible class, I'm just saying this because I myself was convicted by the energy, joy, and wonder that Jesus has as he learns from and devotes himself to the Bible. What a pitiful fool I am as I sit in my office, with the Bible at my desk, God's entire Word, everything I could ever, ever want to know or need to know about God, the words which Jesus himself studied to get to know the Heavenly Father more deeply and intimately, all there, and I look at it and say, "well, I really need to answer these emails and prepare this sermon, maybe I'll get to reading my Bible today like I should," and then I say, "No, I have to get in the Bible today" as if it's chore. Shame on me for my blindness, my apathy, my arrogance, and then the fact that I get to study this word with other Christians and that I would dare look at that opportunity and privilege as something that I "need to get done." What? If anyone had the right to say, "there's nothing these Scriptures can really teach me," or "I know all this," or "There's not much these people are going to teach me that I don't already know," it would be Jesus, and he studied the Word with sinful human beings and thought it worth his while. It's worth our while too.

The second thing that convicted me was how Jesus views his authority figures in his life, both religious authority and domestic authority. Again, if anyone had the right to say to those Rabbis, "everyone listen to me, I know more than you," it would be Jesus. But he didn't. He submitted himself to them- and yes- he asked questions and engaged with them, likely when they said something that wasn't quite right about the Bible. People were amazed. And if anyone had the right to tell his parents, "I know more than you," it would be Jesus, and he obeyed his parents and submitted himself to their authority. God have mercy on me for my arrogant view toward the authorities that God has put in my life to bless me. To the kids here, if Jesus himself obeyed his parents, what does that mean you should do? And consider our attitude to our religious authorities- the WELS- our synodical leadership. I'm guilty of this too- having an arrogant view

of how the synod should be run and thinking, “those guys don’t know what they’re doing.” And I understand how frustrating some of you are by some decisions. But if anyone knows how flawed religious leaders can be, it’s Jesus. And he submitted himself and gladly learned from them and submitted to their leadership. We can too and thank God for the good that they do for us. Yes, we can and should ask questions, but we should have the same respect and love for our leaders as Jesus did his.

I told you, Jesus can be shocking, and so are his rules. But even more shocking is what he was willing to do, how low he was willing to submit himself to his equals and those under him, even under authorities that ended up killing him, with perfect patience and humility and joy, because he knew even as a boy, that it would gain him you. That’s shocking, but in a good way. Amen.