

I Must Be in My Father's House  
Luke 2:39-52  
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CenterPoint Church

Luke 2:39-52

*"For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart."*  
(Hebrews 4:12)

### **Introduction: Missing Children**

A question for the parents here: have you ever lost one of your kids? That is one of the scariest feelings you can have. I remember as a little kid we lost my twin brother on vacation. I remember walking up and down the beach searching for him because we couldn't find him anywhere. I was terrified, I panicked because the adults were panicking. Of course, he was back at the beach house in some corner that everyone overlooked. The scary feeling of losing a brother is nothing compared to the feeling of having lost a young child, though. What makes those times strange is that one side of your brain is trying to remain calm and not panic with the other side is freaking out running through the worst-case scenarios of your child having been abducted.

I remember being in the middle of a church Christmas party where I was showing a slideshow of the whole year, when someone whispered to me, "Your daughter is missing." She was about five years old at the time. We stopped the slideshow and everyone fanned out throughout the building and the parking lot. No one could find her. We were meeting at a community rec center and so the thought crossed my mind that, "Oh, she wandered away and someone took her." Thankfully, she ended up being in a corner somewhere and someone had confused her for another family's child. Another time, we were at a friend's wedding and we were all dancing and eating during the reception when we started looking at each other and saying, "Where is Wesley?" We were in a hotel ballroom, so again, the worst-case scenario is that someone has taken him. We were panicked, we looked all over, had the DJ announce his name. Finally, he crawled out from under one of the tables, where he had hidden because he thought we were going to force him to dance, and as a 10-year-old boy, he was not going to be dancing. Thank God that we found our kids and never actually lost one of our children, but I think my wife still has nightmares about those times.

Today's passage is the only story we have from Jesus' life between being a baby and being a 30-year-old man, and it's a story about Him being lost by His parents. When we talk about Jesus' life and humanity, we talk about the fact that He experienced everything that we experience other than sin. And we usually mean that He was hungry and tired, He was tempted, He had the full range of human emotions. But the full range of human experience includes being lost by His parents as a child. Of course, like both of my children's experiences, He wasn't actually lost. And in fact, He was doing some important things. Let's look at verses 41-46 first, at the time when

#### **I. Jesus was Lost and Found (vv. 41-46)**

*<sup>41</sup> Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover.<sup>42</sup> And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. <sup>43</sup> And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, <sup>44</sup> 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, <sup>45</sup> and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching*

for him. <sup>46</sup> After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.

We continue to get a glimpse into the piety and obedient religious observance of Joseph and Mary. Just as they took Jesus to be circumcised and dedicated at the appropriate times in last week's passage, so this week we read that they went to Jerusalem every year for Passover. If you lived within a certain distance of Jerusalem, you were required by law to attend. Passover was one of three annual festivals celebrated in Jerusalem; the Feast of Tabernacles and Pentecost were the other two. This was family reunion week too, it sounds like, since they travelled with their relatives in a large group, though that might have been for safety's sake.<sup>1</sup> The population of Jerusalem swelled from its usual 20-30,000 to well possibly 180,000 with all of the pilgrims in town.

Jesus' age of 12 is significant because at age 13 He would become a full member of the synagogue, similar to the modern custom of bar mitzvahs.<sup>2</sup> Actually probably more like our custom of communicant classes for the children in our churches in that 10-14 yr. old window to prepare them to join the church on their own, no longer just considered members because their parents were. So, Jesus was a year away from that, a time when most kids would be observing and hoping to be prepared for the following year. But Jesus was not an ordinary child, was He? As we'll see in the passage, Jesus was more than ready to be a member of the synagogue. Anywhere they were worshipping His Father, He wanted to be.

How do you lose one of your kids in a foreign city? How do you not make sure to get a head count before you head home? Maybe they had some protocol that Jesus had always followed and they figured they could trust Him to be among the extended family in the return party. Every movie or TV show that talks about looking for a missing child reminds us that the first 72 hours are critical, after that you assume the child is gone for good. The panic must have been setting in, can you imagine looking for your missing child for three whole days? We were panic-stricken after thirty minutes! Thankfully, someone thought to look in the temple and there He was.

The next five verses show us Jesus' dual sonship, as He had allegiance to both

## **II. Jesus' Earthly Parents and Heavenly Father (vv. 47-51)**

*<sup>47</sup> And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. <sup>48</sup> And when his parents 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." <sup>49</sup> And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" <sup>50</sup> And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. <sup>51</sup> And 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.*

Jesus will spend a lot of time in His later ministry answering people's questions with His own questions. And He started that practice in answering Mary's question "Why have you treated us so?" with His question, "Why were you looking for me?" But it's more of an accusation: How would you not think that I would be here in the temple? I *must* be here, He said, not I *choose* to be here or I *like* to be here. This is part of His calling.

When I was taking Greek many years ago, my Greek teacher assigned this passage and specifically wanted to know what I would do with a missing word that got filled in by Bible translators. The

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<sup>1</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Luke* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), pp. 99-100.

<sup>2</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: Volume 1* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), p. 101.

ESV and most translations have Jesus saying, “*Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house,*” other translations say, “*I must be about my Father’s business.*” The reason that the different translations is not that there is a noun that can be translated either way, but that there is no noun. So literally Jesus says, “I must be about the ... of my Father.” But that doesn’t make sense without a noun, so everyone supplies what they think it should be. I think that there’s no noun because it is vaguely referring to anything that could be placed there: the will of my Father, the things of my Father, the work of my Father, the house of my Father, the people of my Father. Whatever my Father wants me to do, that’s what I’ll do. Think about the fact that this is the very first words we have recorded from Jesus: “I must be in my Father’s house” or doing my Father’s will. At the end of His life, He would be saying the same thing: “Your will be done.”<sup>3</sup> His life begins, ends, and is filled with obedience to His Father’s plan.

The Gospels record Jesus calling God “Father” over sixty times.<sup>4</sup> No one in the Scriptures had ever called God “my Father” before, no one dared to assume that exclusive intimacy.. If we take nothing else from this passage, we should see that Jesus knew that He was God’s Son, that God was His Father before He even entered adulthood. We would say before He became a teenager, but they would have declared Him an adult at thirteen.

His parents didn’t understand, but He went home with them and verse 51 says that He “*was submissive to them.*” There’s the tension that Jesus is submissive to His heavenly Father and His earthly Father. Does this mean that Jesus actually sinned and did not obey the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment in honoring His father and mother when He stayed behind in the temple? That’s certainly a possibility that many have advanced, but that destroys the New Testament insistence on Jesus’ absolute sinlessness. If we think about Jesus’ statement in Luke 14:26 that, “*If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters – yes, even their own life – such a person cannot be my disciple,*” I think there’s a real clue that He was simply honoring God first above His parents. When we study that passage, we’ll talk about how we should honor our parents like the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment says, but compared to our love and obedience to God, it should be a distant second allegiance. It’s the same kind of insistence that Jesus had when His disciples urged Him not to go to Jerusalem because He would die there – Jesus knew that He had to go to be obedient to His Father.

Let’s look at the bookends of this passage that show

### **III. Jesus in Favor With God and Man (vv. 39-40, 52)**

*<sup>39</sup> And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. <sup>40</sup> And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.*

*<sup>52</sup> And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.*

These verses describe Jesus growing in all ways – physically, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually. Maybe Joseph and Mary kept a growth chart, notching his height at different ages on the wall like we do. Jesus was like any other child who grew up and adjusted and figured things out at different ages. But He did all of that without sinning, still retaining His divinity. How much did Jesus know about His unique mission and role in God’s plans for humanity, and at what age? We don’t exactly know, but the language in verses 40 and 52 seem to indicate that Jesus grew in wisdom and understanding gradually and that He had to study and ask questions just like anybody

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<sup>3</sup> Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke, Vol. I* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009), p. 112.

<sup>4</sup> Hughes, p. 106.

else. No doubt, there were things that He was puzzled about earlier in life that cleared up as He studied the Scriptures and as the Holy Spirit revealed things to Him. What I think is fascinating is that Jesus probably could have started His public ministry in His early teens, if He was already smart enough to “astound” the teachers in the temple and to “astonish” His parents. But He waited for God’s timing, until He was around the age of 30. He continued to study and to work as a carpenter, awaiting the time when He would leave the carpenter’s shop and begin calling His disciples, teaching, and healing.

I spent some time talking last week about how we should honor the contributions of our elderly, this week I want to remind us that teaching and discipling our children and teens must be an important priority for families and the church. We don’t expect our kids to be wowing theologians like Jesus did at age 12, but we also should not underestimate how much our kids can understand and learn at a young age. We certainly don’t need our kids to astound and astonish us, but they need a serious grounding in the Scriptures and some basic theology so that when the world throws doubts and different worldviews at them, they have thought through their faith enough to stand firm. I’ve seen too many kids go off to college without enough of a biblical grounding and they abandon their faith when people ask them questions they can’t answer or charge Christianity with objections that Christian apologists have been answering for centuries.

How many of you have seen the new Pixar movie, *Soul*? If you haven’t seen it, let me sketch out a little bit of the plot without really giving away much. There’s a jazz piano player, Joe Gardner, who is very frustrated because he hasn’t gotten to pursue his musical dreams full-time and is stuck as a Middle School band director. I would have actually enjoyed a movie that just stuck with that premise and followed him as he auditioned and practiced, I love jazz piano. But then the movie moves into the spiritual realm (which you find out in the trailer). Somehow Joe lands in the place where preborn souls are waiting to be born, and he talks his way into being a mentor for one of these souls. And the main premise is that each soul has to find their “spark,” what is going to be their life’s work, their mission, the things that will bring them happiness and passion before they’re allowed to be sent to earth to be born. I’m not going to tell you more because I just want to think about that premise. Obviously, that’s some serious poetic license that souls exist before they’re born and that they have to actually choose what they want to spend their life’s work and activities beforehand. It’s a way to wrestle with the nature vs. nurture debate, I suppose, coming down firmly on the “nature” side. Essentially, kids are already prewired to like certain things and it makes sense when they pursue something they love and know what they want to do with their lives.

Here in our Scripture passage, we have this child who seems to be pre-wired to pursue one mission in life. He’s found His “spark” because it’s part of who He is. His life will be lived in helping, loving, and leading others, but more importantly it will be fulfilling His Father’s will for His life. More than any other human being who ever lived, Jesus was absolutely fixed in His mission and life’s work. He didn’t get to the age of 30 and realize then that He could start gathering disciples and preaching to the masses. He had a divine, built-in sense of God’s will for Him throughout His life. “I must be about my Father’s business.”

### **Conclusion: The Kid Who Understood Passover Better Than Anyone Else**

Let’s not lose sight of the setting of this whole passage: it’s the Feast of Passover. And as we learned this past summer as we worked our way through the book of Exodus, Passover was a yearly remembrance of what God had accomplished back in Moses’ day when He took the lives of the Egyptian firstborn sons but passed over the Hebrew sons. When Jesus’ family was in Jerusalem, at around 3 pm in the afternoon of the Day of Passover, the lamb that they had brought would have

been slaughtered. Then that night, Joseph, Jesus' father, would have taken his family through the Passover liturgy as the family ate the lamb after it had been roasted. It was a seder, which means "order." There were blessings, prayers, songs, and the recounting of the 10 plagues that God sent to Egypt. Four cups of wine were drunk as the father talked about God's deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian captivity. Those cups had names: 1) the cup of remembrance, 2) the cup of salvation, 3) the cup of redemption, and 4) the cup of nationhood. There was a fifth cup, called the cup of ultimate redemption (also called Elijah's cup), that was not drunk because it was the cup that awaited the new Messiah.<sup>5</sup>

At the end of Jesus' life, He would celebrate that same Passover meal in a room with His disciples – in Luke 22:15 He says, "*I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.*" He would act in the role of the Father, taking His children through the Passover liturgy. But what His disciples would experience that day was the beginning of something new. Jesus expanded the Passover liturgy that He had been celebrated all His life and the Hebrew people had been celebrating for over 1,400 years. He started talking about how His own body would be broken for them and how His blood would be poured out for them. The meal that had been centered around a lamb without defect who had been slaughtered in a symbolic way to have God's wrath pass over them, and then eaten, was suddenly given a new focus. There was a new Lamb of God without defect who would be slaughtered on their behalf, but this was not an animal, but a person. Jesus had been telling the disciples that He was headed to His death, and now He tells them that His death is a new covenant, a new agreement between God and man. Just like the lamb in the old Passover and old covenant, Jesus the Lamb would be slaughtered in order for God's wrath to pass over His people. And the meal where they ate and drank often in remembrance of His sacrifice on the cross would be called Communion or the Lord's Supper. How beautiful that that is where we are headed today, to the table of the Lord.

→ Walk to Communion Table

When Jesus died on the cross, what hour of the day was it? 3 pm, the time when the lambs were slaughtered for Passover. In a striking parallel to today's story about His being lost to His parents, Jesus was lost to the world for 3 days after His crucifixion, but on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day He was found and brought back to life because He was going about His Father's business.

Benediction

Ephesians 6:23-24 - "*Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.*"

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<sup>5</sup> Found at <https://www.cufi.org.uk/israel-and-the-bible/jesus-in-the-passover-an-explanation-of-the-jewish-roots-of-christianity/>