

## **“Honey, Where’s Jesus?”**

Luke 2:41-52

Every parent’s worst nightmare is being out in a public place and losing track of one of your kids. All of us have been there. Sometime back, I was made aware of a website—People of Walmart.com. If you find yourself feeling bad or in need of a boost, feel free to indulge. I guarantee you that you will discover that your problems aren’t that bad.

The “People of Walmart” is a website where former employees, all anonymous, share their stories of the remarkable stupidity that they have encountered while working in the world’s largest department super store. And yes, the stories are all true. Consider one such story from an anonymous person:

*“I used to work customer service desk at WalMart and I have had my share of horror. The customer service desk often receives lost items found in the store but one day a customer brought us a screaming lost little boy. We were able to get his mom’s name and we paged her to come retrieve him. Meanwhile this boy is still screaming his head off. After no one came for several minutes, we started to page every minute or so for about fifteen minutes. This kid does not stop yelling the entire time. Eventually the mother comes by customer service yelling at us for paging her so much. She had decided that she was going to finish her shopping and check out before she picked up her kid. She yelled some angry words at us as she was leaving. Some people shouldn’t have kids.”*

And just when you thought that western civilization could not sink to greater depths, you discover there’s a website called People of Walmart...

That’s one extreme. But there are also extremes in the other direction. Have you ever heard of ‘helicopter’ parenting? It is a term that really became popular

within the last few years. According to the urban dictionary, a ‘helicopter parent’ is a parent who takes an overprotective or excessive interest in the life of their child or children.

Helicopter parenting refers to “a style of parents who are over focused on their children,” says Carolyn Daitch, Ph.D., director of the Center for the Treatment of Anxiety Disorders near Detroit. She’s also the author of a book entitled, ***Anxiety Disorders: The Go-To Guide***. She says that these parents “typically take too much responsibility for their children's experiences and, specifically, their successes or failures,” Dr. Daitch says.

Ann Dunnewold, Ph.D., a licensed psychologist and author of the book, ***Even June Cleaver Would Forget the Juice Box***, calls it “over-parenting.” She says, “It means being involved in a child's life in a way that is over-controlling, over-protecting, and over-perfecting, in a way that is in excess of responsible parenting.”

If you've got an ‘awol’ parent on one opposite end, and a ‘helicopter’ parent on the other, surely there must be some place in the middle. The Bible gives practical wisdom for moms and dads, teaching them how to be responsible without making an idol out of their kids.

All of us who have had kids have also had our share of parenting fails. And those of you who don’t have kids but soon hope to, let me tell you that you will also fail. You might as well go ahead and breathe a sigh of relief right now. That failure doesn’t necessarily make you a bad parent, but it simply reveals that you are human and imperfect. There is no such thing as the perfect mom or the perfect dad. If you've made an idol out of your kids, lighten up. Quit trying to live your life vicariously through them. Let them grow and mature and become their

own person. Let them make their own mistakes, but be sure to be there for them in love and grace and truth when they experience failure.

Let them play outside in the rain every once in a while, just make sure that it is not lightning...

Enough of that. This passage that we come to here in the second chapter of Luke may in fact record the most epic of parenting fails. Joseph and Mary are the parents, and Jesus is the child. How would you like this story included in your parenting biography?

They. Lost. Jesus.

Luke records the account for us here in vivid detail. It is the only story in Scripture from the childhood of Jesus, and it includes the very first recorded words of His that we have. When He was 12 years old, Joseph and Mary and their family made the yearly pilgrimage to Jerusalem to observe the Passover just like they did every year. They were there more than a week. After the festivities, they set out for the long journey home only to discover that a day into their trip, they didn't have the Lord with them. Can you imagine how that conversation went?

Mary: "Honey, where's Jesus?"

Joseph: "I don't know. I thought He was with you."

Mary: "Uh oh. I think we left Him..."

Joseph: "What?"

Mary: "I think we left Him."

Joseph, (Hand on forehead): “You mean to tell me that we forgot Him in Jerusalem...by Himself...all alone?”

Mary: “Yes.”

Joseph: “How are we ever going to explain this one?”

Fortunately, the main emphasis in this passage isn't on them losing track of where Jesus is. The main emphasis in the text is that Jesus is well aware of His identity as the Son of God, even at age 12. That's what I want us to consider for just a few minutes in our time together this morning. Open your Bible to Luke 2 and read with me beginning in verse 41.

Remember that Luke's purpose in writing his gospel account is to provide us with certainty as to who Jesus really is. He is the Savior for sinners, the perfect Son of Man who came to seek and to save the lost. The 52 verses of chapter 2 summarize His growth from infancy to young adulthood, showing Him to be perfect in every way.

### **1. His extraordinary GROWTH (2:40, 52)**

*“And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him...And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.”*

As we've already seen, the circumstances surrounding the birth of Jesus were extraordinary. He was supernaturally conceived in the virgin womb of Mary. His birth was announced by angels. And even in His infancy, He fulfilled the Law of Moses in detail. Well, Luke also tells us here that Jesus went through the normal growth process just like any other normal human child. Infants become toddlers, toddlers become children, children become adolescents

Don't read verses 40 and verse 52 too quickly, because if you do, you might miss out on some rich truth about Christ that the Holy Spirit intends to convey.

There are three words used in this chapter to describe Jesus, and each one presents Him in a particular state of physical, intellectual, and spiritual growth.

**2:16—“And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger.”**

**“The Baby”** — *word is ‘brephos’ and means infant*

It is a word that describes a helpless little infant that is completely dependent upon the care of someone else. Think about it—Jesus had to be nursed, changed, rocked to sleep, just like any other human baby.

**2:40—“And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.”**

**“The Child”** — *word is ‘paidion’ and refers to a toddler or a small child*

It is a word that refers to a child in the early stages of growth and development. It is amazing at how quickly babies grow from infancy to toddling around. Most healthy, full-term newborn babies double their birth weight by the time they are four months old, and they triple it by their first birthday.

The most rapid rate of growth occurs in the first two years of a child's life. They learn to walk, they cut their teeth, they learn language, they develop muscle strength. Jesus experienced all of that.

**2:43—“And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem.”**

**“The Boy”** — *word is ‘pais’ and refers to adolescence; a young boy who has not yet become a man*

Luke’s vocabulary in this chapter reveals a progression in maturity. He is showing us how Jesus grew like any other normal human child. If you look at what is said in verse 40 and compare with what is said in verse 52, both emphasize the growth that Jesus experienced. They both describe His growth using the imperfect verb tense, emphasizing an ongoing progression.

Luke is creating a before/after picture with a progression that is implied. By the time we get to verse 52, Jesus will have emerged from this experience much different from how He entered it.

**“Grew”** — *emphasizes His physical growth; got bigger*

The words used for ‘became strong’ and ‘filled with wisdom’ are passive verbs, which means that He didn’t have much to do with what was going on. It is natural development.

As much as we may want to, we can’t put a lid on our kids to keep them from growing. They just grow! Biology will always do its work, just the way that God has said it will.

And so the growth that is described in verse 40 is inevitable growth. This is very different by the time you get to verse 52. Luke uses different verbs to describe Jesus’ growth at this point.

**“Increased”** — *word means to advance; make headway*

The idea is that Jesus Himself is fully participating in the maturity process. It is not simply inevitable growth that is being described here, but is intentional

growth. It is the idea that He intentionally grows in wisdom. He intentionally becomes a responsible young adult.

Let me tell you something—just because you grow older doesn't necessarily mean you will grow wiser. Just because you have another birthday doesn't mean that you will automatically increase in wisdom. There are plenty of physically mature adults who have grown older, but they've not grown up in the truest sense of what that means.

The incarnation is perhaps the most profound mystery in the universe. The Son of God becoming the Son of Man. He was perfect in every way, without sin in every area. In His humanity, He voluntarily laid aside the exercise of His divine attitudes.

**Charles Swindoll** — *“When the Son came to earth to become a flesh-and-bone human, He voluntarily laid aside the use of His divine power. He exchanged omnipresence for finitude; He existed fully in one place within a finite human body. He exchanged omnipotence for frailty; He suffered the pain, weakness, hunger, and fatigue that is common to all people. He exchanged omniscience for incomprehension; He grew in wisdom.”*

Now if that doesn't blow your mind, then I don't know what will. Full comprehension of the mystery of the incarnation is beyond our little minds. It isn't a truth that we receive by rationalizing it and seeking to explain it; it is something that is received by faith.

God had to become like us in order to save us!

## **2. His exceptional WISDOM (2:41-47)**

*“And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and answers.”*

Let's take a minute and look at this episode in Jesus' life when he was 12 years old. Verse 41 says that His parents went to Jerusalem every year to observe the Feast of the Passover. According to Mosaic Law, this was something that was required of every Jewish male age 13 and older. In fact, they were required by law to present themselves for three annual feasts:

- The Passover Feast
- Pentecost
- The Feast of Tabernacles

Only the men were legally required to go, but Luke says that Joseph and Mary took their family every year. It was their 'custom' according to verse 42. It speaks of their devotion and love for the things of God.

Does love for spiritual things characterize your family and home? Parents can prioritize a number of things that their children learn to embrace. It happens all the time. What you prioritize as mom and dad is viewed as being important by your children.

Jesus didn't have a sin nature like us. He didn't have to be taught how to love God. Love for His Father came natural to Him. It was something that was true in His life from day one. Yet the will of God saw to it that He be raised in an environment where the things of God were made priority.

The trek from Nazareth to Jerusalem was a difficult one and it stretched some 80 miles or so. It would have been made in three or four days. Families would travel together in caravans for practical reasons. Now, we know that this is the way that Joseph's family traveled based on what we are told in verse in 44.

The family stayed in Jerusalem for the entire feast, which would have lasted around eight days.

As Passover began, intense activity would have filled the city of Jerusalem that would have been crowded with thousands of worshipers. Because of the volume of people, all 24 divisions of priests were required to be on hand so that sacrifices could be constantly made.

**Kent Hughes** — *“A full contingent of priests attended the temple. Their first task of the day was to take the leaven that had been gathered by candlelight from each home and ceremonially burn it. Next they prepared for the ritual slaughtering of the Passover lambs. By midday all work stopped, and a holy air of anticipation rested over Jerusalem. At about 3:00pm the sacrifice began.”*

It would not be unreasonable to assume that Joseph would have taken 12 year old Jesus into the temple with him so he could observe the sacrifice. If so, then let me tell you what was involved. Once the gates were closed, a shofar would have been sounded and Joseph, in concert with hundreds of other men representing their families, would have slit the throat his family’s lamb. The priests on hand would catch the blood in a basin and douse it against the altar there in the outer courtyard. The Levites would have been singing the ‘Hallel’ Psalms (113-118) while all of this was happening.

Once the lamb had been slaughtered and its blood drained from its little body, Joseph would have then taken back to where the family was residing. At sundown, the lamb was roasted whole and eaten by the family with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. It was a solemn reminder of the price of Israel’s redemption from Egypt.

The feast of unleavened bread lasts eight days, after which the family sets out for the long journey home. Joseph and Mary's dilemma is this—Jesus ain't with them...Verse 43 says that He stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents were unaware of it. They assume He is with some of the relatives in the back of the caravan.

After a day's journey, they began searching for Him among their relatives and acquaintances.

"Cousin Benjamin, have y'all seen Jesus lately?" No, we sure haven't. "Uncle Judah, is Jesus with your group?" No, He's not with us. "Aunt Rachel, has Jesus been through here?" No, haven't seen Him.

When they don't find Him anywhere in the group, they return to Jerusalem. Finally, after three days they discover Him in the temple, sitting among Israel's teachers, listening to them and asking questions. Notice what v. 47 says:

*"And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers."*

**"Amazed"** —*means to lose one's wits*

The idea is that they were beside themselves at the depth of His understanding and answers. The Greek translation of the Old Testament uses this same word to describe a person's response to an act of God. In fact, Luke will use this same term in his writings to describe people's reaction to supernatural activity such as resurrection and the work of the Holy Spirit.

### **3. His exclusive OBEDIENCE (2:48-52)**

*"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?'"*

Did you ever have your mom or dad say something along these same lines to you? When they find Jesus in the temple, they are no doubt relieved, but they speak to Him the same way that any parent would speak to their child after having searched for three long days.

**“Astonished”** — *hit with a blow; struck with amazement*

The idea is that their breath is taken in a sigh of relief.

Like any worried mother, listen to what Mary says, “Son, why have you treated us like this? We’ve been searching all over the place for you!”

**“Son”** — *a word typically used by a superior to address a subordinate; teacher/student, master/slave, parent/child*

She responds the way any of us would. However, Mary forgets just ‘who’ exactly she is addressing. She oversteps herself in two ways. On one hand, she implies insensitivity on Jesus’ part, reprimanding Him for intentionally causing her pain. On the other, she refers to Joseph as His father.

Notice how Jesus responds:

*And he said to them, ‘Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?’ And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. 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. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.’*”

This marks the first time in redemptive history where any person ever refers to God as personal Father. In no way is this a sign of disrespect. In genuine humility and perfect respect, Jesus subtly reminds Mary of His identity and His purpose. That was something that she of all people should have remembered

because it had been revealed to her. And yet Luke says in verse 50 that “they didn’t understand the saying that He spoke to them.”

Let me tell you, we often do the same thing, don’t we? We assume that God should do one thing in our lives, and when He does something else, we question His love and care for us. When He doesn’t answer our prayer, when a loved one gets sick, or when we’re passed over for some promotion. No, He doesn’t always do what we want Him to do—but He always does what is right.

In what has to be one of the most amazing verses in the Bible, look at what verse 51 say:

*“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.”*

God in human form willingly submitting Himself to the authority structures divinely put in place in His life. This is Philippians 2 being played out for us to see.

**Philippians 2:5-8—“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”**

**D.A. Carson** — *“It was not nails that held Jesus to that wretched cross; it was His unparalleled resolution, out of love for His Father, to do His Father’s will—and it was His love for sinners like me.”*

Application:

- Obedience is the TESTIMONY of Jesus Christ

Perfect obedience, perfect humanity, perfect deity, and perfect sacrifice. In every way, Jesus perfectly obeyed the Law of God and therefore qualifies as our Passover Lamb. His determination to be about His Father's business, while submitting Himself in obedience, this is His unique testimony. It alone qualifies Him to be my one and only Savior who is able to save me and make me righteous.

- Obedience is the KEY to spiritual growth.

I think that there are some very practical lessons that we can learn from this passage as it relates to our obedience. Jesus grew in every way. Not just inevitable growth, but intentional growth. I don't know about you, but I don't want to just get older this year...I want to grow wiser. I want to grow in my faith. I want to grow in my love for Christ and for those He came to save.

- Obedience is the RESULT of new identity.

Jesus could submit to Mary and Joseph as His earthly parents because He knew exactly who He was. He understood that He was the Son of God, that God was His Father, and that He had come to serve and give His life a ransom for many. It was this awareness that produced a profound sense of submission to God the Father and to others.

The wonderful news is that because of Christ's obedience, He has brought many sons to glory!

**1 John 3:1-3—“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called the children of God...Beloved, now we are the children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him**

**as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”**

If you are not a Christian, then I urge you now to turn from your sins and trust in Christ as your Savior. Surrender to Him now as your Lord and Master. By faith, receive His free offer of forgiveness and salvation so that you can become dressed in His righteousness. And for the rest of your days, follow Him as His submissive, obedient disciple.

*“Father, we thank You for the perfect obedience of Your Son. Christ was made to be like us in every way, yet He was without sin. In perfect obedience He went to the cross and paid the price for our redemption as the Passover Lamb who died in our place. Now, He is our risen Lord who is coming again to rule and reign forever! May those who have yet to receive salvation and eternal life do so even now. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”*