

Biblical Passage

Luke 2:41-52

Memory Verse

Ephesians 6:1-3

Biblical Truth

You can honor your family while you fulfill God's purpose in your life.

Context

This week's study concludes our introduction to Christ as the Word who became flesh. This passage focuses on Jesus as a boy who, during Passover Feast in Jerusalem, remained at the Temple for several days after His parents had left for home. Mary and Joseph eventually found Him and questioned Him. He replied that they should have known He would be in His Father's house. Even as an adolescent, Jesus revealed His priorities.

Investigation

Jesus accompanied His parents, *Mary* and *Joseph*, to Jerusalem to observe the Feast of the Passover. This three-day journey was an annual, joy-filled celebration. The family traveled with a caravan of family members and other Galileans for protection against bandits.

While in Jerusalem, Jesus became separated from His parents. When they found Him three days later, He was in the Temple engaged in dialogue with the rabbis. Those who heard Him were amazed at His insight. His mother, however, revealed that she had been worried about her son. Afterward, Jesus returned home with His parents and obeyed them.

This visit to Jerusalem is the only glimpse the Bible gives into Jesus' adolescent years. It provides a picture of Jesus' commitment to His Heavenly Father's mission and His obedience to His earthly parents' authority.

Importance

This passage provides evidence of Jesus' growing understanding of His unique identity: *Jesus is God and Savior*. In this rare glimpse into this life stage, Jesus' dependence on His Heavenly Father (vv. 46-48) and His obedience to His earthly parents (vv. 49-52) provide a model for how godly priorities can be developed and demonstrated. His response to his mother questioning him is innocently honest: "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" (Luke 2:49).

Jesus clearly knew who He was and who His Father was. He had much to teach about the love of His Father and the obedience and sacrifice of following His way. According to Luke 2:47, "Everyone who heard Him was amazed at his understanding and his answers." Jesus' grasp of the Law was evidence of His divine identity. More than the average 12-year-old boy, Jesus was the promised Savior who would fulfill this Law perfectly.

The passage also touches on other key truths: *The Bible is God's Word* and *Salvation is by Faith Alone*.

Interpretation

Luke 2:41-42 Ancient Jewish Law required every adult male to take part in certain events. However, after the exile to Babylon took place in 586 B.C., Jews were scattered throughout the inhabited world. It became impossible for most to go to Jerusalem for these feasts. Nevertheless, many Jews who lived in Palestine traveled to the city for the most important of these celebrations: Passover. The Passover Feast portrayed a picture of God's deliverance of His people from slavery in Egypt. During the Passover Feast, a lamb was sacrificed in remembrance of the lambs slain in Egypt whose blood was spread on the doorposts to protect infant males from death (Exodus 11-12).

Jewish tradition held that when a boy became 13 years old he was an adult. He was then expected to carry out all the responsibilities that came with being a Jewish man and a son of the Law. The Bar Mitzvah ceremony is a modern recognition of that tradition; in it, a 13-year-old male becomes a son, or *bar* in Hebrew, of the commandment, *mitzvah*.

Jewish fathers prepared their sons for the day when they officially entered into adulthood. It was common for the father to take his son to certain religious celebrations during the year before his thirteenth birthday. This may explain why Jesus accompanied Mary and Joseph to the spring Passover Feast in Jerusalem. However, Jesus might have gone with them to the festival every year because of its importance.

Luke 2:43-45 Although the Passover festival was a seven-day event, the first two days were the most important. Many travelers left Jerusalem on the third day.

Jesus was not left in Jerusalem because of parental neglect. Jesus and His parents traveled with a group on the way to and

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from Jerusalem. That group probably included extended family—aunts, uncles, and cousins—as well as neighbors from Nazareth and the Galilean region. Often women and young children traveled in front while older boys and men brought up the rear. Perhaps both Mary and Joseph wrongfully assumed Jesus was with the other parent. Perhaps they assumed He was with another relative. Whatever the case, they realized Jesus was not with the group after a day of traveling. This might have happened when they stopped for the night. They probably headed back to Jerusalem at first light to find Him.

Luke 2:46 Luke stated that Mary and Joseph found Jesus “after three days.” Most likely, this refers to the amount of time that had elapsed from the time they realized He was missing. The time would have included a day for the return trip and at least part of another day searching in Jerusalem. They found Jesus in the Temple complex in the presence of “the teachers.” He was not only “listening to them” but also responding to questions they asked.

On the Sabbath and during the feast days, men of the *Sanhedrin* and other Jewish *teachers* often sat on benches in a circle with learners (usually adults) seated on the ground around them. These rabbis taught from the Hebrew Scriptures, expounded upon Jewish tradition, and took questions from those in their audience. One method of rabbinic teaching was similar to what is known as Socratic dialogue. Students would ask questions of their teachers; the teachers would then respond with counter-questions. This could have been the kind of teaching in which Jesus was immersed.

Luke 2:47 It was typical for the rabbis to be teaching, but Jesus was anything but a typical student. He was not yet considered a son of the Law, but Luke noted, “Everyone who heard Him was *amazed* at his understanding and his answers.” Jesus’ grasp of the Law was evidence of His divine identity. It was not just that He knew the facts of Scripture; He had an incredible understanding of God’s Word. The word *understanding* describes an ability to put the pieces together and discover the relationship between them. Jesus could see the meaning behind the facts. Isaiah’s prophecy about the Messiah was being fulfilled: “The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord” (Isaiah 11:2). Clearly Jesus’ understanding had not come from the Jewish leaders but from God Himself.

“Everyone” who heard Him was surprised at His insights. Apparently this even included the Jewish rabbis. However, within a couple of decades some of those leaders would reject Him; they would oppose Him specifically because He taught His insights into God’s Word.

Luke 2:48–50 Mary and Joseph were “*astonished*” when they discovered where Jesus was and what He was doing. They knew God had sent Jesus as the Messiah who would save His people from their sins. Still, they did not realize exactly what that meant. God’s plan for Jesus was obviously beyond what they could imagine.

Mary was clearly upset when she found her son. She asked Him, “Why have you treated us like this?” Most parents would react the same way: praying one minute that their son was OK, then scolding him out of concern and fear the moment he was found. Jesus was not fazed. To Him, the Temple was a natural place to be. He was amazed she would show so much concern for His whereabouts.

Jesus had experienced a normal human life throughout His childhood, but Scripture does not tell how much He knew about who He really was. Mary may have shared what she knew with her son as He grew, but ultimately God the Father would give Jesus greater revelation about this as He matured. Jesus’ response to His mother indicated that God had been doing so throughout the years.

Jesus’ words in verse 49 are the first words spoken by Him in the Gospel of Luke. They reveal that Jesus had greater insight into His divine nature and mission than His mother did.

Mary’s statement to Jesus emphasized His relationship with Joseph (“your father”). Jesus’ response emphasized His relationship with God (“my Father”). Jesus may have used questions to disarm Mary’s concern. Nevertheless, He seemed almost shocked that she did not remember or understand who He was.

Jesus’ response to His mother (“I *had to* be”) revealed that His obedience to God’s call must have priority over the concerns of His parents. Parental authority and respect do not suffer when a child gives preference to God. Mary and Joseph knew Jesus was profoundly unique. Gabriel’s message, the virgin birth, and the visit of the Magi amply demonstrated His uniqueness. Still, His earthly parents could not understand the scope and nature of this uniqueness at the time. Over the ensuing years, it would slowly be revealed to them.

Luke 2:51–52 Luke did not want to leave the impression that Jesus was a rebellious child. He added that Jesus accompanied Mary and Joseph home to Nazareth “and was obedient to them.” Jesus’ early recognition of His unique relationship with God did not require Him to leave or rebel against His parents. The word “obedient” that Luke used clearly communicates that Jesus continually submitted to His parents’ authority. Jesus voluntarily submitted to His parents; they could not force it upon Him.

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For Mary, these events were more that she “treasured” from that time forward. While the word used here is different from that used in Luke 2:19, the words are similar. This instance emphasized how Mary carefully and continually remembered all she had experienced at the Temple. It seems she was always thinking about the things she had experienced with her son.

Luke added a final word about Jesus’ life from that time forward. His statement probably referred to the next 18 years, the years before His public ministry began. “Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.” These words speak of His intellectual maturity that went beyond mere knowledge (“wisdom”), His continued physical growth from boy to man (“stature”), His moral and spiritual maturity (“favor with God”), and His social development (“favor with . . . men”).

Implications

Adults continually face the challenge of setting and keeping priorities in order. Among the adults you teach, there are probably serious situations that could be traced back to a misalignment of priorities. Developing priorities that honor God is essential to the Christian life. The importance of priorities begins at an early age. College students are learning to set their own priorities without the help of their parents. Parents of small children are learning to juggle life’s routine demands with caring for their new family. Adults with school-age children have the challenge of focusing their child’s attention on good grades. And adults with teenagers face the struggle of helping their children mature and gain independence while still respecting authority. As we study today’s passage, we see how Jesus was able to balance two of the most important priorities even at the age of 12. The passage shows the reward of Jesus’ focus on priorities. Jesus is said to have grown in wisdom and in favor with God and people. *Jesus is God and Savior*, and because of this He offers the perfect picture of what living by correct priorities looks like.

Many adults feel they have already waited too late to develop Christ-like priorities. Adults need to be reminded that they have a new opportunity each day to develop them. It is never too late to begin again to live a life marked by priorities that please God. Some adults go through their entire Christian life never experiencing peace and joy, but life does not have to be this way. Like Jesus, believers can experience the favor of God and people when they choose to put God first in life. They simply must make the commitment. Encourage learners that God’s Word and Christian friends are great resources to keep them on the pathway to developing right priorities.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How does God bless your time when you are willing to put Him first in your life?
- Who has the primary responsibility for the spiritual development of your children?
- What is higher on your priority list than your child’s spiritual development? What would it take to rearrange your family’s priorities?
- How do you respond when your child’s spiritual growth takes him or her in directions away from you?

FREE THOUGHT

“Obedience to the call of Christ nearly always costs everything to two people—the one who is called, and the one who loves that one.”—Oswald Chambers