

The God-Boy

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There is a very old account of Jesus as a boy in the temple which fashions him as more than a precocious, young student of the Torah. This extra-biblical account is called “The Arabic Gospel of the Infancy,” and it depicts a twelve-year-old version of Jesus “as instructing [all the religious teachers as well as onlookers] in the statutes of the Law and the mysteries of the Prophets, [plus] *in astronomy, medicine, physics, and metaphysics.*”¹ It’s an account which is literally too good to be true.

Made-up accounts like this one often depict Jesus as some ancient superhero. They sacrifice Jesus’ humanity in order to magnify Jesus’ divinity. This, however, isn’t what Luke does. In his gospel, Luke gives us our only biblical picture of Jesus as a boy—a real boy. He doesn’t fly to Jerusalem. He doesn’t know everything there is to know about everything. Rather, he grows in knowledge and in size and in favor with God and with people. He’s maturing like you and me.

Nevertheless, what we will see in Luke’s account is that, while Jesus identifies with you and me—while he is clearly human—he is also simultaneously far greater than we are. He is also clearly God. That revelation is at the center of this vignette. And, it’s the focus of Jesus’ first recorded words.

Let’s read this passage and see how.

Luke 2:41-52

⁴¹ Every year Jesus’ parents went to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover. ⁴² When he was twelve years old, they went up to the festival, according to the custom. ⁴³ After the festival was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. ⁴⁴ Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. ⁴⁵ When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. ⁴⁶ After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷ Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. ⁴⁸ When his

¹ Alfred Plummer, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Luke*, 76. Darrell Bock also references this apocryphal account in his commentary: *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 267.

parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, “Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.”

⁴⁹ “Why were you searching for me?” he asked. “Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?” ⁵⁰ But they did not understand what he was saying to them.

⁵¹ Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. ⁵² And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.

You know, Luke stresses a couple of things in this passage: (**1st**) He stresses that **Mary and Joseph were good parents**. They are raising Jesus to know the Lord and to know his Law. They love Jesus. They are good parents. (**2nd**) Luke stresses that **Jesus was more than a good son**. He highlights that there’s something unique about this boy—something that confronts all who encounter him.

Let’s look at each of these points.

1. Good parents.

It’s tempting here to be critical of Mary and Joseph for losing track of Jesus during their trip home from Jerusalem, unless of course you have kids of your own. Because if you have children of your own, you recognize how easy it actually is—especially in a large group of friends and family—to lose track of one of your kids. You have a false sense of security: “He’s just with his mom.” or “She’s just playing with her cousins.”

Once our family went on vacation with my mom and dad and all my siblings. We traveled to Pigeon Forge, Tennessee to visit Smoky Mountains National Park. One rainy day, we decided to visit the Titanic Museum (because nothing says I went to East-Tennessee like visiting a replica of an English luxury liner downed in 1912 by an ice burg in the North Atlantic.) Anyhow, while we were touring the museum, Natalie assumed I had our then 10-year-old son Josiah while I assumed my mom did until we all came together and realized that none of us had him. He was lost at sea. What ensued was a frantic search through the ship. And, when we finally found him, we were relieved and frustrated and emotionally at an end.

I imagine that something like this is what happened while Mary and Joseph traveled home to Nazareth with this small group of friends and family and neighbors. They just assumed Jesus was with someone else until they all came together to find, to their horror, that he wasn't.

No, friends, Mary and Joseph aren't bad parents at all. In fact, Luke stresses that they are very good parents. Just consider some of the details he shares with us, and what those details indicate about their parenting.

Mary and Joseph make a journey to Jerusalem every year for the Feast of Passover (v. 41). This was their custom or practice. This was their commitment. Now going yearly to one of the major celebratory feasts at Jerusalem was customary for devout Hebrew men. But, notice that it's not only Joseph who goes to the feast, Mary also goes each year—and they apparently bring their children too.²

I remember my parents' commitment to their church—to gather and worship with their spiritual family each week. I recall one Sunday that we walked to church in about a foot of snow because worship was important. They were good role models to me and my sisters and brother. So too Mary and Joseph!

They've faithfully instructed and taught Jesus about the Lord (vv. 46-47). It would be easy to assume that Jesus amazes those in the temple with his knowledge because he's the God-Boy. It would be easy to assume Nature trumps Nurture here. There is, however, no reason to assume this. In fact, what Luke tells us about Jesus indicates the opposite—"Jesus increased in wisdom..." (v. 52). In short, he learned. And, who do you think mainly taught this boy? Mary and Joseph did.

Parents, don't underestimate or take for granted your calling to be teachers. What you do, what you say, what you value will inform and teach your kids.

Mary and Joseph care deeply for Jesus. They love their son well (v. 48). Callous and uncaring parents don't rush back a day's journey and frantically search for another two days until they find their child. Mary and Joseph treasure their son. Luke shows us this love by recording their desperate search. These are good parents. This is a loving mother and father.

² See Darrell Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 263-264.

What a blessing for a child to have the security of being unconditionally loved. I think Mary and Joseph blessed Jesus in this way. I pray that we all can do the same for our children. I pray that for myself. I pray that for you.

Friends, Mary and Joseph were good parents, and I think most of us get that. And so, we don't know what to make of Jesus' response when they find him.

"Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" (v. 49).

We wonder what's up with this response. Is Jesus simply being insensitive? Is he oblivious to the stir his absence caused? Is he being down right rude to them? Is he being disrespectful to his parents? And, if you and I are being honest about it, his response makes us pretty uncomfortable.

A few years into my first pastorate, we had a children's ministry presentation in front of the whole congregation. Our volunteer children's ministry director led it and, as he talked, he referred to this conversation young Jesus had with his parents, noting that Jesus was being rather disrespectful to them. I was sitting just behind one of our elders. I watched him instantly sit up in his chair. If he wasn't paying attention before that comment, he certainly was after it.

What's the big deal? Well, the big deal is that our very salvation is on the line when we talk about the righteousness of Jesus. Why is Jesus an acceptable sacrifice? Why could he take our sins to the cross? Why could he hang there for us? In short, it's because he was sinless; he was morally perfect.

Nicholas Batzig puts the matter this way.

Our redemption rests upon Christ's sinless life and substitutionary death. When we see the corruption of our minds, hearts, and wills, we must look at the One who knew no sin and yet was made sin for us. When we long to know Christ in a deeper and more intimate way, it is good for us to meditate on Scripture's teaching concerning His representative perfection.³

The problem before our children's ministry volunteer was that he saw Jesus as simply a boy who had parents, rather than the only boy—*who had ever lived!*—

³ You can read Batzig's full meditation on Christ's sinlessness [here](#).

that had parents whom he created and knew and loved before the very foundations of the Earth were laid. *Mind blowing!*

Friends, I wonder if we are often guilty of the very same error when it comes to Jesus. How many of us have shaken our heads at this interaction in Luke's gospel because we don't know what to think or say? How many of us have only seen Jesus as a boy and not as the God-Boy here?

Well, let's try to take a more balanced look at this interaction between Jesus and his earthly parents in our remaining time, since Jesus was more than a mere boy with parents.

2. More than a good son.

There is an old movie called *Freaky Friday* where a mother and her daughter awake one morning having switched lives. The mother is now in her daughter's body and the daughter is now in her mother's body. And, a lot of the humor is predicated upon the mother (who is now in the body of her daughter) giving her own daughter (who is now in the body of her mother) parental commands—like: *Change clothes; that skirt is too short!* or: *Go to your room, young lady!*

Friends, something like that is taking place here between Jesus and his parents. The God of the universe has put on flesh. The God of the universe is 12-years-old. And, he has two human “parents” in this scene. *But, he's still the God of the universe!* That has not changed in the least. This is not your typical parent-child relationship. And, we have to keep this in mind when Jesus says what he says here.

Now, considering all that, notice a couple things about Jesus' statement here. **First**, notice that Luke relays this scene without the slightest indication that anyone was offended by what Jesus said to his parents. And, what's even more interesting is that theirs was a culture far more sensitive about children respecting their parents than ours is. In fact, rather than feeling disrespected, it seems that Mary was blessed by his response and “treasured [up] all these things in her heart” (v. 51). So, it seems that Luke's narrative doesn't convey a tone of disrespect. That's important.

Second, notice how it seems that Jesus is gently reminding his human parents of their peculiar relationship. When Mary says, “Your father and I've been searching for you...” (v. 48), Jesus' response becomes a subtle corrective, “Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?” (v. 49). That line is the centerpiece of this text.

It's what Luke wants us all to ponder. With these words, I believe Jesus is gently and lovingly reminding his parents whose Son he *truly* is. Now, they don't get it—just as the twelve disciples so often fail to get it throughout Jesus' earthly ministry. Nevertheless, Mary and Joseph weren't offended.

Mary and Joseph, friends, were good parents. They understood that this boy was special, even though they struggled to comprehend how special.

So, the response from Jesus is no jaw-dropper. What he says isn't scandalous. Ironically, however, Luke does document a jaw-dropping scandal in today's passage which we usually miss. So, let me highlight it because once you have seen it clearly you'll never overlook it again.

As Luke closes this vignette, he shares this little tidbit. (And, when you think of Jesus as just a boy—like any other boy—it doesn't seem the least bit significant.) Here's what Luke says.

Then he [this boy Jesus] went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them (v. 51).

Friends, this is our God. This is the One thru whom, the apostle Paul tells us, “all things were created” (Colossians 1:16). Every cell in your body holds together because of this boy. The planets orbit the Sun according to his all-powerful will. Without this God-Boy nothing that's been made would have been made (John 1:3). This is nothing less than eternal God in human flesh.

And, here's the jaw-dropper. Luke highlights that he “was obedient to them.” Obedient to his creatures—Mary and Joseph! The Creator was submissive to them! Let that sink in. Think about it. “Jesus, help your mother with the dishes.” “Yes, sir.” “Jesus, take out the trash.” “Sure thing.” “Jesus, help your brother find his sandals.” “No problem.” Friends, this is the true scandal. This is the gospel scandal.

We live in a world where wealthy people and powerful people use their wealth and their power to dominate others. They ignore the consequences of their actions. They deny they should be held accountable for them. Moreover, we live in a world where we're encouraged to write people off if they wrong us. We're told to get rid of the toxic people in our lives. After all, why should we put up with those people who have nothing to offer us and even cause us pain?

Yet, in sharp contrast to that, here is the Lord of the universe walking back from Jerusalem with two of his creatures (Mom and Dad)—who have both rebelled against his holy will in their sins; who have both ignored his rightful place as Creator and King; who've made it necessary for him to come on a redemptive rescue mission which will cost him his life—here is that God submitting to them so as to save them. *What a beautiful scandal! What a beautiful Savior! Don't miss him!*

Thank you, Lord Jesus! Thank you! Amen.