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Luke 2:39–52

3rd Message

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LET GO AND LET GOD

SERIES: THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

The Gospel of Luke is a rich tapestry of Jesus' life and ministry, intricately woven with stories that present a complete picture of Jesus: both his full divinity and full humanity. We are at the beginning of this story, the upper left corner of the tapestry – if you will. Last week we learned about the “Last New Beginning” – the birth of Jesus Christ. We now come to Jesus' childhood, the adolescent years on the cusp of adulthood. It's a stage of life that we can all relate to because we've all been kids once. I remember all the heartache I gave my parents as a child, and now I'm receiving these “gray hair moments” back from my own children. In spades! Some years ago, my wife and I were shopping at a mall. My wife was looking at clothes, so it was my job, as the dutiful father, to keep track of the kids. At one point, literally in the blink of an eye, I lost sight of them. Fear struck my heart as my mind flooded with all the awful things that can happen when kids are missing. I frantically searched for them everywhere, calling out their names. I finally found them in the center of a round rack. They were calm, gleefully playing with each other, oblivious to my anguish and worry. I wrapped arms around them, so relieved and grateful. I promised myself that I would never let them out of my sight again. As you may have guessed, this incident happened again, more than once!

Can you imagine Jesus ever putting his parents through this experience? “Of course not,” you say, “he is God, he is perfect, he wouldn't subject his parents to worry and grief!” Well, he did! In Luke 2:41-52, we see a snapshot of Jesus as a child, the earliest account of his youth, the first time we hear him speak and interact with his parents.

Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, 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, and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. 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.” 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. (Luke 2:41-52)

Let's look at this story a section at a time, starting with the prologue, which sets the stage.

Prologue

The story occurred during the Feast of the Passover. The Passover commemorates God's deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt, and it also anticipates the time when the coming Messiah was once again to deliver God's people from oppression. So the Passover was a very significant time for the Jews. Since Joseph and Mary were devout and God-fearing, they went to Jerusalem every year to fulfill the Law, to worship, honor and obey him.

Story

Our story begins the year when Jesus went with his parents to Jerusalem at the age of twelve. Luke tells us that the family stayed in Jerusalem for the whole week of the Feast, then returned back home. This is where the story takes a dramatic turn. The child Jesus remained while the parents went ahead in their journey for a full day.

Please don't think Jesus' parents were irresponsible. The family's journey to Jerusalem would have been in a large company of relatives and friends. In those caravans, it's common and natural for the children to be mixed with other families. Joseph and Mary would naturally have assumed Jesus was with other kids during their day of traveling back to Nazareth.

Of course, when they realized Jesus was not accompanying them, Joseph and Mary began to look for Jesus within the caravan, but without success. Then they headed back to Jerusalem on their own and searched more. Finally, after three frantic days, they find him calmly sitting with the teachers of the Law in the Temple, listening, asking questions and answering in reply. What a scene this must have been!

This scene shows me the sharp contrast between the parents and Jesus. In this passage, the parents went, returned, searched, found not, went back, searched some more—all frantic action verbs. Jesus, on the other hand was sitting, listening, asking, answering, understanding—quiet, contemplative and at peace. This is similar to the Martha/Mary contrast in Luke 10. Mary found it is better to be still at the feet of Jesus, listening and finding peace with Jesus, than to run around frantically without him. Let's apply this to our own lives. Rather than running around, filling our days with busyness, we ought to slow down to be in Jesus' presence and find peace with him. You've heard it said, “No Jesus, No peace. Know Jesus, know peace.” Once you slow down and rest in the presence of Jesus, you will experience the “peace of God that surpasses all understanding” (Phil 4:7).

Climax

The climax of the story occurs in the conversation in the temple. After three worry-filled days, Mary finally finds Jesus. She cries out in anguish, “*Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress.*” Mary is saying, “What’s wrong with you, child! We’ve been worried sick about you! You could have called, or at least texted us where you were!” (Well, I would have said that; Mary wouldn’t have said that). This is a natural reaction, one that every parent can relate to. Mary’s words may have sounded like she was scolding Jesus, but they are really filled with relief and gratitude, just as I felt when I found my kids.

Jesus’ response seems enigmatic to me. He doesn’t answer her directly, but rather responds with two questions: “**Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?**” At first, Jesus may sound a bit insubordinate. I don’t think he was disrespectful. I think he was just trying to explain what they should already have known. He asks, “Why did you frantically seek me everywhere? Why didn’t you know to come here right away when you found I was missing? Don’t you know where I’m supposed to be?”

Jesus’ second question is especially enlightening, as it shows his developing understanding of who he is and what his mission will be. This question is, “**Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?**” It is also translated as “Did you not know that I must be about my Father’s business?” In Greek, the word-for-word translation is: “Did you not know that I am bound to be among the ___ of my Father?” There is simply the article *tois* – “the.” There is no word following *tois* in Greek, so translators have added “house” or “things” or “business.” I think all of these terms make sense in this context.

Even at age 12, Jesus understood his unique relationship to God, his identity as the Son of God, and his mission in life: to be in the Father’s house, to be doing the Father’s business. His mission begins here at the temple, the place where God’s law is taught, commandments kept, and sacrifices made. Jesus will return to the temple at the end of the Gospel story to offer himself as the final and complete sacrifice, completing the mission of the Messiah to deliver the world and fulfilling everything that the temple foreshadowed. This is where he is supposed to be; this is what he was supposed to do—his Father’s business in his Father’s house. Jesus declaring his identity and ministry is the climax not only of this story but of the whole Gospel story!

Did his parents understand Jesus’ remarks? Luke tells us that they did not comprehend these words, but Mary kept these sayings in her heart, to treasure and remember. Since these are the first recorded words of Jesus in all of the Gospels, it is crucial that we understand what he said. We all should treasure in our hearts all of Jesus’ words; we should think about, mull over, apply and obey the truths of Jesus.

Resolution

Luke ends the story with Jesus returning to Nazareth with his parents. Luke graciously adds the detail that Jesus was obedient or subject to his parents. Jesus was not insubordinate; he honored and loved his earthly parents for who they were and for what they did in his life. Even as the fully divine Son of God, Jesus was also fully human; he was the obedient 12-year old boy who abided by the fifth commandment, “honor your father and mother.” Jesus was fully human and fully divine.

Epilogue

The epilogue of the story is in verse 52, which transitions us to the next panel in the tapestry of Jesus’ life in Luke Chapter 3. During this transition, Jesus grew in all areas of his life—in wisdom, stature and favor— as he moved toward adulthood and embraced the ministry as the Savior of humankind.

Applications

This story is dramatic and profound; it can be read at so many levels. I’m going to examine it from three perspectives.

Perspective of Jesus:

Let’s first view the story from Jesus’ perspective. He was beginning to understand his identity and embrace his mission in life. In the process, Jesus realizes that he brought great distress to his parents, and also that they misunderstood him. How does that apply to us? When we embrace our identity as God’s children and as we walk the path He wants us to follow, we may similarly be misunderstood by our loved-ones and cause them great distress.

I did not grow up in a Christian family, so when I accepted the Lord in graduate school and began to live out my faith, I know my parents did not understand. I joined two Christian fellowships and poured my life into my newfound identity while academics took a back seat. I know this change in focus caused pain in their hearts. Perhaps you can identify with me, facing the disapproval of parents because of our faith. At some point in our lives we all have had to make difficult choices that others do not understand. We may experience this tension between our secular commitments and our commitment to God; this tension is part and parcel of our Christian walk. God calls us to set our priorities on Him, differently from those who do not know God. As we do, expect to encounter misunderstanding as Jesus did, and even cause distress.

Perspective as Seekers of Jesus:

The second perspective I want to consider is for all of us: are we seeking and finding Jesus? Seeking and finding Jesus frames the entire gospel story. Here at the beginning of Jesus’ life, we see Mary searching for Jesus and finding him in the temple. At the end of Jesus’ life, we find another Mary—Mary Magdalene—also anguishing for three days and then seeking Jesus at the tomb. Our Lord appears to her and asks, “**Why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?**” (**John 20:15**). If seeking and finding him frame Jesus’ life, how much more should these be the focus of our lives as well!

Are you seeking Jesus? If you are not yet a follower of Jesus, for whom or what are you looking? Please realize that anything you find in this world can only give you temporary relief from the emptiness and ache you feel. I know; for the first 25 years of my life I searched for something to fill the emptiness in my heart. I realized that no job, fame, fortune, or friends could give lasting satisfaction or true peace. I finally sought Jesus and found true peace and meaning in Him. No Jesus, no peace. Know Jesus, know Peace. I pray this for you, my friends, that you will seek and accept Jesus into your life as well.

Parent’s Perspective 1: Listen and Learn

To parents, let me suggest this: let’s listen to our kids and treasure their words in our hearts as Mary did. The more we listen to them, the more we will understand whom they are, what they are passionate about, and what they are feeling and thinking. We may not understand them at first, but let’s hear them out, and their

choices may become clear later. Listening to them also often teaches us lessons we need to learn about our own walk.

Last year my wife was on the phone talking with our oldest daughter who is a junior in college. She described how exhausted she was and how she had a chemistry midterm that afternoon. My wife then found out she stayed up until 3am the night before talking with someone in her dorm. My wife was incredulous! Her maternal instincts kicked in and she started lecturing her about getting enough sleep. “Why did you stay up all night chatting with some friend instead of sleeping or studying?” My daughter responded calmly, “The person I was talking with is involved in a religious cult. I spent all night sharing truth about God and Jesus with this person.” She was about her Father’s business, and all we could see was her chemistry test. What a lesson for us as parents! How often we are driven by the “tyranny of the urgent” and miss the opportunity to do the Father’s business for eternal impact! Listen to our children. We will then understand more of their passion and gifts, and in the process we may learn spiritual lessons for ourselves as well.

Parent’s Perspective 2: Letting Go and Letting God

As Mary observed Jesus maturing into his ministry, she had to learn to let him go, to relinquish him even as he suffered. This is the lesson we must learn of letting go. As parents, we always want to protect our kids from danger or from making mistakes. Our natural tendency is to control and to plan out their lives for them. However, we also need to encourage our children to own their own faith and make their own decisions to follow God. As they walk their path toward adulthood, we parents must be willing to let them go. Our kids have to make their own choices; some of their choices may get them into trouble and they will experience times of darkness. And we have to let them go through those dark valleys. It’s during the dark times when the light of God shines most brightly that our kids will experience God most intimately. So we have to let go, get out of the way, so that our kids see and hold on to God and not us.

My wife and I have been praying about this stage of life for years, knowing that it is inevitable. And now, this stage is upon us as we have sent two to college and have the third in high school. In the last two years, we’ve had to ask ourselves some tough questions. Are we willing to let go if our child starts hanging around people we would not choose to be her friends? In our culture, where education is so highly valued, what if our child decides not to go to college? Are we willing to accept that? Are we willing to let our child go 3,000 miles across the country?

We were faced with this exact situation this year as we were deciding whether or not our son Kevin should attend MIT for college. My wife, Carlin, struggled with this the most. She did not want him to go. She did not care about the prestige of the college. She was more concerned for his well being. She felt MIT would be too challenging, too far, too cold, too foreign, too expensive, and too nerdy for our son. But Kevin really wanted to go; he was convinced that God opened a door for him. Through much prayer over a course of a month, God changed Carlin’s heart 180 degrees and she gave Kevin the blessing to go. She surrendered him to God. Now Kevin is happy, mom is happy, and I’m happy... just broke! We’ve seen God’s hand in this whole situation and how Kevin is just thriving there. He and some friends are even thinking of starting a Bible study in his dorm.

Why is it so hard for us to let go and trust God? The root cause is fear; fear of the unknown, of the unfamiliar, of the unseen. Parents

throughout the ages have felt this fear, but in these days, we have to battle fears that previous generations of parents never had to contend with. We worry about what our kids are doing on the Internet, who they are “friending” on social networks. We worry about cyber-predators and bullies and pornography. We fret over how well they perform in school and on SATs, how they can compete in this high stress world, how they can find a job.

So how do we cope with fear? First, we have to hold on to the promise that God loves our kids more than we do and has a plan for them. Jeremiah 29:11 says, “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” God also tells us in Isaiah 55: 9, “My ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” Even if his way seems mysterious to us, we trust in his promise for our future. How much more must we claim and cling to that promise for our children as well. He will care for them, nurture them, and walk with them.

Next, we continue to uphold our children in prayer, as it says in Lam 2:19, “Pour out your heart like water before the presence of the Lord! Lift your hands to him for the lives of your children.” I’m so grateful for the many people who have prayed with us for our children all these years. During that time, God has rescued our kids in ways we as parents could never have done. Let’s go before the Lord on our knees often.

Finally, 1 John 4:18 tells us “there is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear...” God’s love is perfect; he demonstrated that perfect love when he let his own Son die on the cross for us, to give us life. When we accept this gift of perfect love, then our future is secure, death and sin have lost their hold on us, and our fears are overcome. The perfect love of the Father will sustain us through fear, pain and disappointment. May His perfect love envelop all of us as we learn to “Let Go and Let God.”

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