

The classic Christmas film “*Home Alone*” amply illustrates the panic of parents when they discover they accidentally left one of their children behind... all alone.

(You know)... there are times as a parent that you may face a situation which is absolutely horrifying. ... But (perhaps the most traumatic)... is a missing child. ... When a child is missing... the imagination conjures up all kinds of terrifying thoughts that are spawned by unknown mysteries. ...

When a child is missing... thoughts like these taunt the mind:

- \* *Where is my child?*
- \* *What has happened to him?*
- \* *Did someone take him?*
- \* *Is he being tortured, suffering, or abused?*
- \* *Is he alive?*
- \* *How could I let this happen?*

I don't mean to sound morbid... but such an acknowledgement will help us to understand our passage today. In this section of Scripture... we find a similar type experience for Mary and Joseph who accidentally left Jesus behind in Jerusalem... as they were returning home to Nazareth from Jerusalem. And seeing how Mary responds... you know that she must have had these thoughts.

This incident is very special because it is the only incident recorded in Scripture of the life of Jesus between His birth and the beginning of His ministry (which was around the age of thirty.) ... With it we come to the **first** recorded words of Jesus in Scripture. It is an important story... and I think Luke includes it... because it sets the theme of Jesus' life. ... However... this story presents some **controversy**... which perhaps you have noticed (in your previous reading of it.)

I was disappointed as I studied the commentaries this week – because so many of them simply ignored the elephant in the room. (They pretended to not see any problem that the story presents.)

So... today we will begin by reading the text in it's entirety... acknowledging the problem... and then we'll study the passage more closely to find direction for our understanding it.

### **Luke 2:39-40**

So far there isn't any controversy. (It will come.) ... But here we simply see that Jesus went through all of the stages of growing up. ... He lived in a home that He shared with a crowd of brothers and sisters... all of whom manifested (at times) a sinful nature. But Jesus didn't have one of those.. He was filled with the Spirit. He was always joyful... always considerate and helpful to others... always holy. He must have been known and liked by everyone for "the grace of God was upon him."

(Let's read on...)

### **Luke 2:41-52**

Do you see any problem here...? ... Mary confronted Jesus and **rebuked** Him: "*What are you doing? Why have you done this to us? We have been worried sick looking for you.*" ... The words "**great distress**" reveals the absolute nightmare Mary and Joseph experienced. It is from the word **odunao {od-oo-nah'-o}** which means "*to cause intense pain, to be tormented or distressed, to be in extreme anguish.*" ... It is the same word used by the rich man in Hell in Luke 16:24 when he said he was "*tormented.*" Jesus had put His parents through the torment of hell. ... (And) behind Mary's question is an accusation that Jesus acted selfishly.

So... here is the problem that this story presents. ... Was Jesus disobedient to His earthly parents? Did Jesus have a sinful disregard (or disrespect) for them?

Some think so. As the argument goes... Jesus must certainly have known when the caravan was leaving. ... He was bright. ... He knew the time of day. ... But he was so caught up in the excitement of Passover and the temple that he couldn't resist staying behind — like a little boy who wants to join the circus. ... So Jesus was deliberately disobedient... it is said.

Others disagree - and for good reasons. The most important of these is that Jesus was without sin — *he never sinned*. ... As Jesus later asked His persecutors: “*Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?*” (John 8:46). ... He also claimed: “*I always do what pleases [the Father]*” (John 8:29).

The entire weight of the New Testament rests on His sinless perfection. The writer of Hebrews describes Him as “*tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin*” (4:15). And again as “*one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners*” (7:26). ... Peter celebrated His sinlessness by saying, “*He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth*” (1 Peter 2:22). John categorically said, “*And in him is no sin*” (1 John 3:5). Paul affirmed that Christ “*had no sin*” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

But reading today's passage looks like Jesus **sinned** by being a disobedient son. This contradicts Christ's words and all of Scripture.

Do you want to know what I think...? ... ..Well... You will just have to wait... because I think it is best that we start at the beginning... pick up our

clues... and let that determine our direction about what is being presented to us.

### **Luke 2:41-42**

Joseph and Mary were devout Jews who observed Passover in Jerusalem every year. Three times a year the Jewish men were required to go to Jerusalem to worship (according to Deut. 16:16)... but not all of them could afford to do so. ... If they chose one feast... it was usually the Passover; and they tried to take their family with them... for it was the most important feast on the Jewish calendar.

We do not know if this was Jesus' first trip to Passover. ... But his presence now (*as a twelve-year-old*) was **significant**... because in another year... as a thirteen-year-old... Jesus would officially become a “son of the commandment” (a full member of the synagogue). Because of this... the *Mishnah* suggests that fathers should exercise their boys in the observance of the Passover “one year or two years before [they are of age]”

So here is what I think Luke is telling us: twelve-year-old Jesus... brimming with energy and excitement... was brought along for official training... observation... and being tested about the heart of Israel's religious life. (Again) the Misnah taught that Priests were to examine boys before they turned 13 on their comprehension of the Law... before holding them legally accountable for their decisions as adults.

Could this be part of what Jesus meant by His response to His parents that they should have known He **MUST** be about His Father's business...? (Possibly.) Had Joseph and Mary been distracted (in the week's festivities)

from Jesus' proper proceedings to His adulthood? (Maybe. We don't know.)

Certainly there was a lot going on all week. Celebrations began early in the morning and went late into the night – each day. Many people would then return to the streets for more celebration... or to the Temple mount and await the opening of the doors at midnight for further worship and prayer.

It is easy for us to imagine... when young Jesus finally went to sleep... the dazzling images of Passover undoubtedly danced in His awakening human soul. ... And that was not all. ... Jesus' devout family stayed for a whole week in Jerusalem. ... Jesus spent those seven days in "holy delight." Every rite spoke volumes to His soul. ... His nimble mind connected Scripture with Scripture and then with life. ... And during this time... Jesus' heavenly Father revealed more and more of the mystery of who Jesus really was.

### **Luke 2:43-45**

They were clueless to the fact that He was still in Jerusalem. ... After a full-day journey (which was about 20 miles) they realized Jesus was not with the caravan... and their nightmare began. They had lost their son.

It's hard to understand how Joseph and Mary could lose their son. ... But the Jews of that time lived in extended families... and whole caravans of relatives and friends traveled together... the women and children leading the way and setting the pace... and the men and young men following behind. Relatives and whole villages often traveled together and kept an eye on each other's children.

Joseph would think Jesus was with Mary and the other children... while Mary would suppose He was with Joseph and the men... or perhaps with one of their relatives. It is easy for us to think that Mary and Joseph had gotten so used to Jesus' being such a **good** boy – they never thought they needed to check on Him. (He was *literally* the perfect kid.)

Somehow... the pressing activities of their life... caused them to leave Jesus behind and they did not even realize it.

Now... what pastor would move on before making a comparison to *this* - and what so many Christians do today...? ... Mary and Joseph were involved in spiritual activities (they were fulfilling spiritual obligations... they were obeying God's commands)... but they **still** left the Lord behind.

The hustle and bustle of Christians today (activities at work... home... church... or school)... can distract Christians from their close walk with God. The result is they neglect their time with God... drift away from the Lord... and lose their closeness with Christ. ... In most cases... they don't even realize they have spiritually cooled and have become numb toward the Lord. ... They are saved... but they are not close to the Lord. The Bible warns us of the distractions of the cares of this world.

Satan does not miss any opportunity to distract us... even with good things that look like obedience to the Lord. Mary and Joseph just completed a great week of spiritual activities. Temptations can come not only when we are down in the dumps... but when we are on a spiritual mountain top... enjoying great victories. We can suffer spiritual defeat when we drop our guard or get distracted. Our battle with sin... temptation... and distraction will not end until Jesus comes back or we go home to be with the Lord in

glory. ... Mary and Joseph were busy... but not accomplishing anything because they left the Lord behind. - Wow, what a message for us!

Focusing on God's agenda is our highest priority! Luke is going to teach us that again with the story of sisters (Mary and Martha) in Luke chapter 10. Martha was busy with the meal and festivities of a different holiday... while Mary sat at Jesus' feet. Martha complained to Jesus that Mary was not helping her... and Jesus rebuked Martha and said Mary chose the right thing. (Now hold that thought until we come back to the exchange between Jesus and Mary.)

### **Luke 2:46-47**

Over and over again (it says in the Greek) that Jesus threw them into complete astonishment. Jesus... as the student... became the teacher. The person asking the questions... became the person answering them. They reacted as we might... if we were to hear a five-year-old give a lecture on quantum gravity and string theory... and then banter with today's leading minds in particle physics. ... The priests and leading teachers had encountered a child-savant. ... The boy theologian was making logical connections to arrive at insights that should have been far beyond any twelve-year-old mind.

### **Luke 2:48**

We can easily understand Mary's motherly concern and her reasons for reprimanding her son in front of such distinguished company. ... She obviously considered Him to have **sinned**.

Did He...?

At this point... I want to bring in Bible commentator Kent Hughes... and share his insights...

*Jesus was genuinely a twelve-year-old. Though fully God, he was also human. Choosing not to avail himself of all the prerogatives of deity, he learned in the same way we do. As a child he had to learn that two plus two equals four, and as a twelve-year-old he was still learning about every part of life—including faith and relationships. As a twelve-year-old, he did not have the fine-tuned social awareness he would have at age thirty.*

*The point is, he was capable of unknowingly causing his parents distress; but as a sinless being, he was incapable of knowingly doing it. Here, Jesus unknowingly brought anxiety to Joseph and Mary. Moreover, he unintentionally caused his parents to worry because his twelve-year-old mind was totally absorbed with the massive spiritual realization of his identity as the Messiah that had come to him that week. The combination of his authentic adolescence and the immensely absorbing revelation regarding his own person so occupied his mind that he did not imagine that staying in the temple would cause anyone alarm. Jesus did not sin in any of this. The sinless twelve-year-old Son of God was simply following the logic of the massive spiritual revelation of that week.*

Perhaps Kent Hughes is right. ... Another commentator takes a much different approach. Rod Mattoon writes that Mary (in essence) is blaming Jesus for her and Joseph's failure in leaving Jesus behind in Jerusalem.

(Further... he writes)... Mary is not alone in blaming God for one's failures. Like Mary here... most people frequently blame God for their own mistakes... troubles... and sorrows. The blaming began in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve. God held them accountable for their sin and they played the "Blame Game."



Mary and Joseph had no one to blame - but **themselves** - for their departure from Christ and leaving Him behind. They had no legitimate excuse for leaving Jerusalem without Him. Their blunder was great... and they needed to acknowledge their own fault rather than dishonoring Jesus by blaming Him for their mistake. ... The same truth holds for us. Stop blaming God for your mistakes. Take responsibility for your own actions and decisions. This is the key to turning your problems around and getting them corrected.

These are all very good points by Rod Mattoon. They are Biblical principles. But he doesn't answer the question – Did Jesus *knowingly* cause his parents distress? (Sure) maybe His parents had some fault – but didn't Jesus also have some responsibility to be where He should have been? ... (I think I like Kent Hughes answer to this question better – that Jesus had a 12 year old human nature that did not realize what He was doing.)

However... I've come to appreciate (even MORE) a third way of looking at this. Look (again) with me at Jesus' reply to His mother. (And yes... **He** rebukes **her**! The angel Gabriel had given her enough understanding.)

### **Luke 2:49**

She obviously considered Him to have sinned. But Mary's divine twelve-year-old did not see it that way at all. ... And the answer Jesus gave in the form of a question gives us the earliest recorded words of Jesus. ... And we ***MUST NOT MISS*** the powerful... impacting message... that is contained in Jesus' earliest recorded words!

Jesus called the temple (where He sat) His “*Father’s house*,” and in doing so He asserted that He stood in unique relationship to God — that He had a relationship to God that no other human has ever had.

It is very important that you and I see this! There is no parallel in the Old Testament for the phrase “*my Father*” in speaking of God. ... To catch the idea of how radical this self-understanding was... we need to understand that in the huge library of the Old Testament’s thirty-nine books... God is only referred to as “Father” fourteen times — and then rather impersonally. In those fourteen references “Father” is always used in reference to the nation... (God is the Father of Israel - not of individuals.) ... But when Jesus came on the scene... He addressed God as His Father.

So what we see here is that (as a twelve-year-old)... Jesus had come to understand that He had a unique relationship with God the Father (one far deeper and more profound than any human had ever known before.)

Jesus knew Who He was... what His mission was... and what His true authority was. Namely... He knew that He was the Son of God—the Messiah — God become man. Jesus had a relationship with His heavenly Father that transcends even the most basic of our human relationships – that of parent and child. Jesus claimed an authority that excels the most important human authority.

OK... Now please listen to me carefully... because this can so easily be misunderstood. (Don’t only hear part and ignore the whole of what I am about to say...)

But first... I want you to hear what I am about to say in the context of the next two verses.

### Luke 2:50-51

Taking verses 49 and 50 together... I think Jesus' reply to His earthly mother was this: "*My relationship with God relativizes my relationship to you...*" ... .. [ P A U S E ] ... .. In the context of our passage Jesus may very well be saying: "*I don't really have to obey you.*" ... And then very quickly Luke adds that Jesus returned to Nazareth with His parents and submitted to them anyway! So this was (in no way) like a spoiled little child to his parents: "*No. I don't have to obey you!*" Jesus reveals a powerful truth... "*I know Who I am...*" and then (with His actions) says... "*But I will choose to submit to your authority.*"

Notice also in Jesus' response to Mary in telling her that He HAD to be about His Father's business... In the Greek it shows "*It was absolutely necessary.*" ... At the very end of the book of Luke... the same thing happens. ... In Luke 24... there are two disciples returning to Emmaus from the cross... and they are confused. Jesus starts walking beside them and they say, "*We've lost Jesus. We thought he was going to save Israel and he was crucified. Why did he let himself die?*"

They're confused... and they meet this stranger who's very calm. ... He actually uses almost the same Greek construction. He says, "*Don't you realize He had to die?*" Here are confused parents: "*What are you doing?*" Calm Jesus: "*Don't you realize I had to do this?*" ... [ P A U S E ] ...

Like Mary... one of the things you're going to find as a follower of Jesus... is Jesus will constantly be confounding your expectations for how He

should behave and how He should be treating you. ... On the road to Emmaus they didn't understand. "*Why did Jesus do that?*" Jesus said, "*I had to. You can't understand, but it's part of the plan of salvation.*" Mary says, "*Why are you doing this? We love you. Why have you treated us like this?*" He says, "*I had to. It's part of the plan. It's part of the salvation.*"

We have a tendency to say: "*Oh... I'm going to give my life to Christ... and then I'm going to obey Him and dedicate myself to Him... and now He's going to answer my prayers and bless me.*" ... You're going to find Jesus will constantly be not only doing things that don't seem to fit... but also saying things that don't make any sense.

(LISTEN!) We dethrone Him if we demand that He act in ways that satisfy OUR ideas. ... God is God. ... (And) if He is God... He is worthy of our worship and our service. ... We will find rest nowhere but in His will... and that will is infinitely... immeasurably... unspeakably **beyond** our largest notion of what He is up to."

Jesus is confusing even to the people who love Him - **and we're always going to be confused** ... Even if you're feeling good right now and everything is going fine in your life... it won't be long before (like Mary) you're going to be looking at Jesus and saying, "*How can you treat me like this? I love you. I'm giving myself to you. How can you treat me like this?*" and find that Jesus doesn't really give you much of an answer... at least not in the short run. Are you ready for that? ... [ P A U S E ] ...

I am so thankful that Luke was so quick to show us that even though Jesus had a unique authority... He did not reject Mary and Joseph. He went back to Nazareth with them and lived under their lesser authority. ... .. Knowing

who you are... will always result in proper obedience. Jesus knew a lot about Who He was and what His mission was. But He still grew in His understanding and maturity.

### **Luke 2:52**

As we close today... let me ask: “*Are you growing and maturing in your Christian life?*” ... Realize that if you leave the Lord behind (or out of your life)... you will not grow and mature AND your circumstances will become a nightmare. ... So let me give you a simple check to see if you are growing spiritually. Test yourself. Do you see growth in these areas of your life? (Don't leave the Lord behind in your life.) Evaluate these.

1. The desire to be holy rather than happy.
2. The desire to see the honor of God advanced through your life.
3. The desire to carry His cross.
4. The desire to see everything from God's viewpoint.
5. The desire to die right rather than live wrong.
6. The desire to see others advance at your expense.
7. The desire to make eternity-judgments instead of time-judgments.