

Hold On To What You Need!

Inquiring minds want to know. This was the advertisement for a magazine from years ago. And the point was very clear. Why did they publish this magazine? They published it because people wanted to know. They wanted to know more. They wanted to know the details. Humans are curious, inquisitive creatures, aren't we? We carry this curiosity with us everywhere we go. And not surprisingly we carry it with us as we approach God's word. A couple days ago on Christmas Day we learned what happened as Jesus was born. And we want—we thirst to know what happened next. And the Holy Spirit, in writing his word, does something very unexpected. We want to know what happened next. And instead we fast forward twelve years to this event in the book of Luke. And then, after this one event, we fast forward to Jesus when he is almost thirty years old. If we ask the question: "what happened in all of those middle twenty seven years", the final verse in this section answers our question. We read: "*And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.*"¹

Jesus grew. We could spend hours pondering this mystery. How is it that the unchanging God changes as he is joined with an ever-changing human? Instead, I will save that thought for another sermon. But, in these words, we focus on what it *meant* that Jesus grew. What did it mean for Jesus? What did it mean for his parents? What did it mean for the world?

And so we travel with Mary and Joseph. They are going back home after celebrating the Passover. They did this year after year. They travelled with not just their family, but with their aunts, uncles, cousins and extended family. And as they travel back home they asked themselves a question: "Where is our son? Where is Jesus?" They assumed he was with one of their extended family in this large caravan traveling back to their home town. But, after they had traveled that day, they came to a stop to rest for the night. And Jesus wasn't there. So they went back to Jerusalem. And after *three* days, they found him.

And when they found him they saw the strangest sight. They saw Jesus sitting in the middle of the bible teachers. Now, if you know anything about Jewish culture, this is a bizarre sight. The one sitting in the middle was always the teacher, not the student. How did it happen that their son had this group of teachers straining to hear every word that came from his childish voice?

We talked with Joseph and Mary for three days. But what was it like to walk in Jesus' shoes for those three days? As Luke tells us, Jesus grew. He grew in wisdom and grace. Above all, he hungered to grow in God's word. He grew up in Nazareth hearing God's word week by week and day by day. But, he wanted to challenge his wisdom. He wanted to show his wisdom. He wanted to flex his muscles to keep on growing. So, he went to the temple where the teachers were. And there we find a strange and wonderful event take place. Jesus starts asking questions. And, the sort of questions he asked were the sort of questions experts and teachers loved to wrestle with and answer. And the more he asks his challenging questions, the more teachers gather around him. Finally, there are so many teachers around him he takes a seat, and through his questions teaches the teachers. And finally then, notice what happens: "*Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers.*"²

You see, at first the teachers were amazed at his questions. Then, they were amazed at his answers. The teachers were the ones who were being taught. This boy was the one who was doing the teaching.

Jesus needed to grow in God's word. And very quickly, the teachers discovered that *they* need to grow in God's word. Finally then, Mary and Joseph found that they too need to grow. They found him and Mary said to him: "*Look at how much pain you have caused us as we were looking for you.*"³ And the answer that Jesus gives to her is amazing. He says two sentences. First he says: "*What happened that you are looking for me?*"⁴ He was acting as if it were strange that *they* were looking for *him*. And then he makes his reason for being there all that much more

¹(Luke 2:52 NIV)

²(Luke 2:47 NIV)

³"ἰδοὺ ὁ πατήρ σου κἀγὼ ὀδυνώμενοι ἐζητοῦμέν σε." (Luke 2:48 GNT-T)

⁴"τί ὅτι ἐζητεῖτέ με;" (Luke 2:49 GNT-T)

clear in the next sentence. He says “*You know that I have to be in my Father’s [word], don’t you?*”⁵

Now, you’ll notice that my translation is a little different than the words we have here in the NIV. The NIV here says that Jesus had to be in his Father’s house. The word ‘house’ is not in the greek. In fact there is no word here. It says that he had to be in his Father’s.....and we have to fill in the blank by context. Mary ponders Jesus’ words. The teacher’s ponder his words. I conclude that this is his explanation to his parents. They should not have been shocked or surprised. They should not have been angry or frustrated. This was where he belonged. He needed to grow. He needed to be in God’s word.

Mary and Joseph learned a very powerful lesson in this temple. For four days they had thought that Jesus was the one who needed them. They thought that this child would be hungry or helpless or harmed. They thought that he needed them. And as they saw their child teaching the teachers not-hungry, not-hurt, not-harmed, they realized that *they* were the ones who needed him.

My brothers and sisters, take note of the trap that Mary and Joseph fell into. For it is the same trap we fall into. Just think about the ways we teach our children. A child asks his parent: “Mommy, why do we go to church?” And the Mom answers: “We go to church to make God happy.” What a horrible answer. We do not come to church because God needs us. We come to church because we need him. And we find that same sort of answer in so many other answers parents give to children: Why do we give money to our church? Because God needs it. Why is that child being baptized? Because God tells us to. Why are all those people going up there for the LORD’S Supper. Because God tells us to remember him. How horrible. God doesn’t need our money. Everything belongs to him already. We are the ones who have the need to give. God doesn’t *need* us to be baptized or to come forward for the LORD’S Supper. No, we are the ones who need. We need the forgiveness which God gives to us in these great gifts. Now arrogant and sinful we are to think we are doing God a favor for receiving the gifts he gives to us.

My brothers and sisters, take note of the trap that Mary and Joseph fell into. Take note of how Mary dealt with this trap: “*Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart.*”⁶

Mary, in her great humility realized how great her sin was. And she humbly guarded every word Jesus spoke to her. The NIV here says ‘treasured’. But, literally the word here⁷ means to continually guard. She guarded his words. You can just see her walking silently home trying to memorize every word which came out of his mouth so that she would not forget. You can just see her memorizing every sight, every sound every application of God’s word which her son spoke.

But why? Why would she guard his words so closely and continually? Because in them she saw her sin. And in them she saw the solution to her sin. She could never obey her heavenly perfectly. But her son could. This child could and *did* obey Our Father perfectly. And it is that perfection which he gave to her. It is that perfection he gives to us all by faith, so that when Our Father looks at us, he does not see a band of arrogant beggars who think that we are doing him a favor by taking everything he has to offer. Instead, he sees his Son. He sees a glorious group of Christians who strain to hear every breath and word which comes from the voice of his Son—just as those teachers did. Instead, he sees a group of Christians who humbly obey his word as Mary and Joseph did.

My brothers and sisters, hold onto what you need. You need God’s Son just as much as Mary did. You need his word as much as his teachers did. Guard your Savior and his word all you have as long as you have life and breath. Amen.

⁵“οὐκ ἤδευτε ὅτι ἐν τοῖς τοῦ πατρός μου δεῖ εἶναί με;” (Luke 2:49 GNT-T)

⁶(Luke 2:51 NIV)

⁷“διετήρει” (Luke 2:51 GNT-T)