

Jesus before his public ministry

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[0 : 00] Thanks, John. Good morning again, everyone. Well, this passage is often a passage that is skipped. It's quite an underestimated passage. That's why I was quite excited to preach it, actually, because it's in Luke at the end of chapter 2, after all the exciting Christmas passages. And normally, that's kind of where we end, because people, for some reason or other, take a holiday around Christmas, but they take a holiday from church as well, which is not good. And I'm glad to see everyone here this morning. This is often the Sunday after Christmas is often the historically worst attended service of the year. And I just think that's foolish, because you don't take a break from eating over Christmas. Why take a break from feeding on God's Word? And so I do encourage you to keep coming back, even in your holiday, to keep feeding on the riches of God's Word for our spiritual good and our eternal security. But anyway, this passage, end of Luke 2, it's often skipped because it's after the Christmas passages, but it's before things really get interesting, you know, with

John the Baptist and the conflict with the Pharisees and the start of Jesus' ministry. That's where we normally skip to. And besides, another reason this passage about Jesus' childhood, childhood, which by the way is the only passage that records him as a kind of pre-adolescent, normally the rest of the Gospels skip from his infancy and birth right to his adulthood.

We hardly, this is the only story of him as a boy. And it doesn't seem like there's much we can learn from it at first read. Many commentators and devotional writers, you know those devotionals, you get good as they are. Sometimes they don't go deeply enough in a passage. And many devotional writers don't really get a whole lot from this passage. I looked up some. And mostly it's all examples. This passage gives us some good Christian examples for parents and children to follow.

Mary and Joseph were shown as very devout Jews going to Jerusalem each year for the Passover, despite being poor. So ought we, one commentator writes, to encourage one another in a devotion to the Lord. How sweet, how nice. And Jesus, when he goes missing, he doesn't get up to mischief like any normal 12-year-old boy would, but he is found where? At the Jewish temple. What a good boy, encouraging Christian children to have similar priorities, of course. And that's pretty much as far as many Christian devotionals tend to take this passage. Although, is that really the point of this passage? Is that why it's here in the Bible? Is that the reason Luke included it in his gospel? And back in those days when you're writing on scrolls, you had to, you know, ink was expensive. Scrolls were expensive. You wouldn't write stuff unless you really wanted people to know it, unless it was really important. And so why did he put this in his gospel? Just to give us some good examples? I mean, if you think about it, there's as many bad examples in this passage. What about Mary and Joseph leaving their 12-year-old son alone in the city? Should we encourage

Christian parents to do that? Or Jesus seeing fit not to follow his parents' home? No, this passage is not here to give us some pious examples to follow. And we must get out of the habit of actually reading the Bible like that. Often we read the Bible and we just look for examples of how we should live. But the Bible is a story. It's one big story. And each passage is there. And it is deep. And it is inspired by God to be there to tell us some very important things. And this passage is no different.

[3 : 47] What's going on here is much deeper. And Luke has put this story here for an important reason. It's actually a hinge between what we've been looking at in December so far, the Christmas story, and the lead up to the birth of Jesus. This passage is a bridge or a hinge between that and the rest of Luke's gospel. Because it serves to show us who this prophesied child who is now born into the world actually is and what his priorities are going to be from here on out. So let's see what God is really wanting us to learn through this story. I'll start from verse 41. Please do follow along in your Bibles.

And if you didn't bring one, there are a few Bibles. So grab one. Turn to Luke 2 verse 41. I think it's important that you follow along as I read through it. So from verse 41, every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. When he was 12 years old, they went up to the festival according to the custom. After the festival was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. But they were unaware of it.

Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. By the way, this doesn't mean necessarily that Mary and Joseph were bad parents. In those times when you would travel, especially to the Jewish festivals, whole family groups would travel together. And it was normal not to see your kids until the evening meal. You know, it was normal for your kids to be gone for the whole day playing with the other kids in the family. And that's the norm, how they traveled. Parents here are probably thinking, wow, they had a good idea. That was the right idea. You'd only see your kids in the evening meal just before they go to sleep. And that, it seems, that's when Mary and Joseph discovered Jesus was missing. Now, if you're a parent, you'll probably know that feeling, that sick feeling. I don't know if you've ever been in a similar situation, lost your child in a shopping mall or something. It's terrifying, isn't it, as a parent, to realize that your child is not where you thought, that they are gone. The child that you had responsibility for keeping alive and you have no clue where they are. And of course, this was not just a shopping mall. It was the whole city. In fact, the surrounding areas of a city, the capital city of Israel. And so his parents, at this point in the story, are rightfully freaked out. They go back to the city. They search three whole days.

If it was today, the pink ladies would be putting this picture up on Facebook, missing juvenile, last seen Passover celebration. And so they're frantic, you can imagine, these parents.

They search three days in the city. Imagine that. I mean, we're not told where Jesus stayed and how he was fed or anything like that. But the parents must have been losing their head over this. And eventually, they find him in the least expected place, that for a 12-year-old boy to be the temple in Jerusalem. So they call off the search. Mary and Joseph come up to him and her first words to him, you can kind of feel how freaked out she is. Verse 48, son, why have you treated us like this? [7:12] Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you. It's a typical mother's reaction, isn't it? What were you thinking? You could have died. You know, it's amazing how angry parents get when they're really relieved. And it's interesting also how kids are often less afraid of being in danger than of their mom finding out that they were in danger. You know what I mean? And so Mary, rightfully, you can understand her anger as a mother who's been searching for her missing child for three days in the city. What was he thinking, actually? Why is this future Messiah, this supposedly perfect Jewish child, now all of a sudden seeming to defy his parents? It's quite a shocking thing. And it's the real tension in this story. And it's also why Luke sees fit to say later, verse 51, he makes a note, then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. So he has to say that because Jesus seems to be disobedient. He seems to be quite a rebel here. And that's not what we expect from Jesus, is it? But it's what makes his answer to them in verse 49 so important, which are, by the way, the first ever recorded words of Jesus. And the climax of this passage and the really important part of this passage is his answer to them. Verse 49, why were you searching for me? He asked, didn't you know I had to be in my father's house? I mean, he's got a point, doesn't he? You get lost, you go to your parents' house. That's where you should go. But it's interesting how Luke parallels

Mary's question and Jesus' answer. I wonder if you picked it up. Mary says, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you. And his answer is effectively, well, I was actually with my father all along. And that's the shock of this passage. She's saying, your father and I were here. Jesus is saying, no, I was in my father's house with my father.

Mary and Joseph need to realize something about their son here. And it's a shocking implication that Jesus is making, that his father's house is the temple and that he was with his father. And it's all the more shocking when you realize that no Jew in that day would have dared call God their own father. That was one thing you didn't do. And we do all the time as Christians. And so I think we miss the significance of when a Jew in the gospels calls God their father.

Not even the great Moses or David or Solomon called God father. It was far too intimate a term to refer to the transcendent creator.

You don't presume to be that close to God. And yet the 12-year-old Jesus does exactly that. It's like the most natural thing in the world for him.

[10:15] And it's also not just that he thinks God is his father, that he's not just some child with a vivid imagination. Because of what happens as well, he shows it in what he does.

From verse 46, he was sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Then everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. This is interesting. Did you notice how in two sentences, Jesus goes from an inquisitive child to the one who is actually teaching the teachers of Israel?

It's basically like he starts asking a question and ends up telling them the real answer. Nice attempt, Rabbi, but let me tell you how it actually is. It's a crazy scene. You've got this amazing knowledge coming from a 12-year-old that astounded everyone who heard him.

And of course, he has all this knowledge and wisdom for no other reason than he actually is who he implies himself to be, the son of God. God is his father.

He knows things these teachers don't know because he's got personal access to God that none of them have. And that's the first major thing we see in the story, the unique relationship this boy, this human being who walked our earth, has with the creator of the cosmos.

[11:36] This closeness and intimate access. He is in every way the true son of God. But we also learn something else.

We don't just learn who he is in this passage. That sets us up for the rest of the gospel. But we learn about what he's come here to do.

Which is also implied in his answer, if we read it carefully. Verse 49, Didn't you know that I had to be in my father's house? An alternate translation, you might have a different English translation of the Bible, might say, I had to be about my father's business.

I had to be doing my father's business. The Greek is, it could be one or the other. And it's essentially the same thing, because for a large part of history, God conducted his business on earth from the temple in Jerusalem, which is where Jesus is.

The temple was a vitally important place in the Old Testament and the beginning of the New. In fact, right up until AD 70, when the Romans came in and wiped it out, as was prophesied, the temple was the place of God's work.

[12:52] Well, actually before that, right up until really the death of Christ, where God's work was transferred to Jesus as the true temple.

Anyway, but before that, vitally important. And the reason it was so important for most of the Bible story is because it was the place where two things happened, at least.

Revelation from God happened and relationship with God happened at the temple. You needed to be part of what the temple was doing in order to hear from God and be in some kind of relationship with God and approach God in prayer. Revelation happened because it's where the word of God would be heard and recited and relationship happened there because it was the only place and the sacrificial system that happened there was the only way that you could approach God.

You could have your sins covered so that you could approach a holy God and people could be made righteous. That means in a right relationship with God through what happened at the temple. So you see how vitally and important place it was and why it was the center of Jerusalem pretty much and why people traveled there from all over and why it is such a central location in the Bible story is because revelation and relationship with God happened through the temple.

[14:20] And so what that means for this story is that Jesus insisting that his place was at the temple in other words that his place his priority was being involved in doing the work of the temple means that he already at age 12 had identified what his job on earth was going to be and he knew what he was there to do.

I wonder what you wanted to be when you grew up when you were a kid. Interesting survey. I want to see how many people actually ended up being what you wanted to be when you grew up?

Gene, teacher, Alan. Okay. Okay, two out of probably about 70 people. That's not a very high ratio. I don't think we often do end up what we wanted to be when we grew up.

I wanted to be a detective. Then I wanted to be a doctor. Then I wanted to be a navigator. Even after I left university I was still changing what I wanted to be.

Thing is though in this story Jesus was 12 and he knew exactly what he wanted to be when he grew up. He wanted to carry on the family business. His father's business in the temple.

[15:35] More specifically he wanted to fulfill what the temple's whole purpose was which was to bring revelation of God and relationship with God to a dark and a lost world.

That was Jesus' passion and priority even at age 12. And yet we also see that passion and priority that Jesus so obviously displayed at age 12 was already causing problems even in this story. His parents were anxiously searching for him and were cross with him because his priority wasn't the family anymore. He still ended up obeying them because he was good and submissive but it's quite clear in the story his immediate family was not the top priority in his life.

And we often hear the phrase family is everything don't we? There's nothing more important than family. Family above all. Actor Michael J. Fox in fact says family is not an important thing it's everything.

and that's generally how you know you've got this loyalty to your family that nothing else can compete with but for Jesus that wasn't the case.

[16:52] Family wasn't the most important thing in his life. And we see it in fact when he was all grown up as well. So in Luke 8 from verse 19 listen to this little account this is now after Jesus started his public ministry as an adult.

Now Jesus' mother and brothers came to see him but they were not able to get near him because of the crowd. Someone told him your mother and brothers are standing outside wanting to see you. He replied my mother and brothers are those who hear God's word and put it into practice. And so again we see that there was a higher priority that Jesus had over and above making his family happy.

He has work to do to reveal God and bring people into right relationship with God. And it was that work throughout his life even from age 12 which drove him to do what he did even though it caused all kinds of conflicts and upsets in the people around him.

These people obviously had expectations for Jesus. You know it's amazing we live life and the people around us whether they say it or not have expectations of us and for us and how we should be and what we should prioritize and what we should do.

[18:10] And Jesus upset a lot of expectations not just his family I mean it caused so much his priority in life and his drive caused so much conflict to the point that it made enemies enough that they all ganged up against him and killed him.

In fact it's quite telling the story where he is and who he's talking to and what time of year it is. he's in Jerusalem talking to the teachers of Israel at the Passover 21 years later the exact same time of year these very same people were going to execute him.

It's quite a chilling story if you think about it that way and they were going to execute him because he was undermining their very existence. No longer did people need to look to them for revelation and relationship with God which they could never bring anyway but of course they couldn't stand that they couldn't stand that Jesus is coming and undermining their whole ministry their existence as the leaders of Israel that everyone relied on and looked to for relationship with God and so they needed to get rid of him for their survival and so they plotted for a number of years to kill him and eventually through Judas one of his own disciples they managed to trap him take him through a kangaroo court trial unfairly accused all part of their plan and eventually they succeeded in their mission to kill him not realizing they were actually fulfilling his mission and that was all part of God's plan anyway because his death on the cross was the way he ended up succeeding in making the temple work to make revelation and relationship with God possible to human beings like us as he became the ultimate sacrifice for our sins the ultimate sacrifice that all those temple sacrifices were pointing towards and were only made effective because of his sacrifice and that is what this story is here to point towards to his death on the cross in fact

I think it's no mistake Luke mentions that he was found on the third day you notice that Luke probably mentions that because he wants to take our minds the next time at Jerusalem he would be missing for three days because he would be dead and so this story is here to point towards the cross it's to link the Christmas stories with what Jesus has actually come to earth and been born into this world to do and it anticipates the cross by showing us not only who Jesus is but but what his real priorities were when he was on earth and what kind of conflict that would lead to this story is just a foreshadowing of the rest of the gospel so that's why the story is here in the Bible that's why Luke includes it but what does that all mean for us today how do we now take this and when we leave here apply it to our lives what do we need firstly the story reminds us that

Jesus is not just another religious teacher here we see beyond any doubt that Jesus has a unique relationship with God unprecedented in human history this person even though he's just a 12 year old boy at the stage has a unique relationship with the creator of the cosmos to call God his own

father and even a 12 year old Jewish boy would have known well you just don't do that to call God his own father is either hugely presumptuous or it's true and we see similar statements from Jesus throughout his life claiming equality with God claiming to be from God to be preexistent eternally to be the son of God not just the Messiah prophesied but the son of God from heaven he claimed that in many ways and in many instances and so he can't just be a good teacher if he isn't the son of [22 : 28] God and he's saying all that he said then he's actually a really bad and deceptive teacher you may have heard C.S. Lewis put this well once I'm going to read it in its entirety his quote because it's quite important because a lot and the reason I want to read this is because a lot of but no more than that that's how most people will answer if you ask them who do you think Jesus is but listen to what C.S.

Lewis says I quote I'm trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about him I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher but I don't accept his claim to be God that is one thing you must not say a man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher he would either be a lunatic on the level with the man who says he's a poached egg or else he would be the devil of hell you must make your choice either this man was and is the son of God or else a madman or something worse you can shut him up for a fool you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher he did not intend to and so we see here right at the start of Luke's gospel that

Jesus was far more than a great moral teacher and if you consider if you in your life because what if I cornered you and asked you who do you think Jesus is wonder what you would say I know you're going to rush off to make sure I don't do that but imagine I did what would your answer be because if you would answer if you think in your mind that Jesus is nothing more than a great religious teacher then I think I know you've missed something huge and you need to pick up the Bible you need to read through Luke this holiday and read on and discover that he was so much more than you think he was that's the first thing we see in the story he was more far more than the great moral teacher people think him to be the second thing we see in the story is that Jesus greatest superpower was wisdom when you read on in Luke and the gospels you discover that Jesus was very powerful he did some amazing supernatural things that only

God can do he calmed a storm with a word he healed people from incurable diseases he raised the dead and himself came back from the dead but Luke in this story before all those amazing things happen Luke is subtly drawing our attention to another supernatural ability of Jesus that we tend to take for granted but in some ways is far more important than all the others and that is his wisdom in fact the story it's carefully structured to emphasize that look at verse 40 that began the story in fact these are two bookends you know bookends on a bookshelf that keep your books together there's Bible passages and this one's clear verse 40 and the child grew and became strong he was filled with wisdom and the grace of God was on him right at the end of the story verse 47 oh is it 47 oh no 52 and Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with

God and man those are the bookends mentioning Jesus wisdom and then in the middle of the passage and so this story the way it's framed and the way it's presented by Luke is here to emphasize the supernatural wisdom from heaven that Jesus brought to earth and understanding about this world and about why we're here and about our purpose and about our origins that we could never find on Google you know Google it's great isn't it it's a great tool you're sitting at a dinner party and you say what was that actor in that movie oh let me just google it or what is the freezing point of carbon dioxide oh let me just google whatever information you want Google has a lot of knowledge well Google itself has no knowledge Google is a search engine it retrieves the knowledge from the internet and the internet has a great amount of knowledge doesn't it deeply want to know well you can't find that on

[27 : 23] Google Jesus wisdom however is infinite there is nothing you need to know outside of what Jesus can tell you if you could be a superhero what superpower would you have flying that would be cool what about super strength telekinesis what superpower would you have if you were a superhero well Jesus being from heaven could have done any of those things but his most important superpower was actually wisdom from God which enabled him to achieve the mission that he came to this world to achieve I know a hero with wisdom as a superpower wouldn't make the most exciting Marvel movie but that is the hero we need more than any of the others the hero who comes to this world and brings wisdom and knowledge of God and salvation and eternity we

need that hero more than we need Superman or Batman or

Spider-Man because there is no way we can find God ourselves we are stumbling around in the darkness in fact we were reminded at Christmas weren't we the verse from Isaiah the people walking in darkness have seen a great light on those living in the land of deep darkness a significance of that is that finally we can find our way out of the darkness and the uncertainty of this life and Jesus came to earth to bring that light to us to bring wisdom to us that we could never find from human teachers or from the internet light that guides us out of dark places out of sin and death and back to God and eternal life that is the superhero we because there is no other way out of this so that's the second thing we learn about Jesus here but then finally we learn a third and important thing and that is about

Jesus uncompromising commitment to God's priorities above all other things so Jesus was drawn as a 12 year old to God's work at the temple because his life's mission was to make the purpose of the temple happen to make God known and accessible to the human race which he ultimately did as we've seen by dying on the cross for our sins that is how he made God accessible a holy God accessible to sinners like us there is no other way that our sins can be atoned for and that we can come into relationship with God but that you see that uncompromising commitment to God's purpose in his life we've also seen resulted in the upsetting of many people the straining of many relationships and the making of many enemies his parents in this story were not the first well they were the first but they were not the last who would become upset by Jesus having the priorities that he had he upset his disciples he upset the

Jews he upset the Gentiles he even upset a whole bunch of demons he came into this world and turned the delicate universal balance on its head and people didn't like that at all which is exactly what Simeon prophesied about him in his song remember a few weeks ago I quote this child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be spoken against so Jesus came here not to be liked his priorities made that not possible his priorities caused a lot of trouble when he came to earth but here's the thing if you call yourself a Christian if you call yourself a follower of Jesus following him means making his priorities your priorities putting other things that used to be your top priorities and that people expect of you as secondary to

God's priorities and I can tell you now people will not like it when you do that you may upset your family who don't share those priorities you may upset your boss at work when you put kingdom priorities above career advancement you may even upset your government when they make it illegal to have those priorities as they do in many countries and you've got to expect that because in John 15 20 Jesus says these words a servant is not greater than his master if they persecuted me they will persecute you also he's assuming that his disciples people who call themselves followers of Christ share his priorities and therefore will share his persecution from others who don't want us to have those priorities and so while we mustn't look for trouble right we must be peacemakers as far as we're able we must also realize that following

[32 : 47] Jesus will cause friction in our relationships prioritizing God's priorities over other priorities is bound to upset people in your life and it's going to be something that's going to be hard to do because of the relationship problems it's going to cause but you and I will be willing to do it when we realize that God's work on this earth is the most important priority we could have in our lives God it's it's it's work that Jesus prioritized and it's only because he prioritized it that you can be saved from your sins and it's the work that he's still doing today through us his people revealing God and leading people out of darkness and bringing people into right relationship with God Jesus is doing that today through us his church that's the work that he has always been involved in and is still involved in and so this passage is a vital reminder as we begin a new year 2020 it's crazy isn't it 2020

I thought there'd be hover cars when I was a kid in 2020 but we're going to start a new year this week and I think this passage is a vital reminder as we do that as we go forward that to be an effective church in 2020 we at St.

Mark's also with Jesus must uncompromisingly commit ourselves to God's purposes over all others lots of people have ideas of what a church is here to do and what there's lots of expectations aren't there from our society as to what we as a church should be doing but we must put all those aside and we must open the Bible and make sure we know what God wants us to be doing and look at what God is doing in this world and get on board with that but also not just as a church as individual believers in our daily lives we must unashamedly pursue God's priorities over and above all other

priorities and expectations from the people around us no matter who that upsets don't go prioritized it's going to cause friction and that is what our Lord did for our sake when he came to save us and that that is the real example that this story challenges us to follow in the coming year so will we let's pray and ask for

God's help Lord we do thank you for this story of the boy Jesus is 12 years old and yet it reveals to us so much of not just who he is but what his priorities are and we ask Lord that you would help us to share those same priorities Lord help us in the coming year as Christians to take up the task that you've given us to make disciples to proclaim the gospel faithfully to teach your word not what we want it to say but what it really does say help us to do that in the coming year Lord and through us will you bring revelation and relationship to people who are still trapped in darkness and ignorance would you shine the wisdom of Christ through this church as we open the word and as we do the work of

Christ and would you make us effective for the salvation of people and for the glory of your name
Amen God Hy Amen