

## WHAT'S WRONG WITH ACTING LIKE JESUS? – LUKE 2:41-52

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**<sup>41</sup> Every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. <sup>42</sup> When he was twelve years old, they went up to the Feast, according to the custom. <sup>43</sup> After the Feast was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. <sup>44</sup> Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. <sup>45</sup> When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. <sup>46</sup> After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. <sup>47</sup> Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. <sup>48</sup> When his 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.” <sup>49</sup> “Why were you searching for me?” he asked. “Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?” <sup>50</sup> But they did not understand what he was saying to them. <sup>51</sup> Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. <sup>52</sup> And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.**



This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

The excitement of Christmas is past. The gifts have been unwrapped, some of them have been returned. Maybe you’ve been especially ambitious and have taken down all of the decorations already. People are getting ready to go back to work after a long holiday weekend, the kids will follow with school in about another week. But while the rest of the world is preparing for New Years and who knows what else, the church still celebrates Christmas. In fact for the two Sundays after Christmas Day, we celebrate the season of Christmas. We continue to celebrate not only the Savior’s birth, but also what that birth accomplished. By sharing our humanity, Jesus fulfilled his Father’s will. And this morning we focus on the importance of Jesus’ obedience.

Unfortunately for many, the significance of this story is completely passed over. It is the only story we have from the childhood of Jesus, and so it must have contained something significant for it to be included. Unfortunately, a lesson that many people will take from this story, a lesson that many pastors and teachers might draw from this story is: look at Jesus’ obedience, now follow Jesus’ obedience. This is the same lesson that is unfortunately drawn from so much of the Bible: see how Abraham acted, see how David acted, see how Jesus acted, see how Paul acted, now act just like them. This may sound OK, but it really misses the whole point. If this is so wrong, then why do so many people believe and teach this? And WHAT’S WRONG WITH ACTING LIKE JESUS?

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The one story we have of Jesus’ childhood is when he was 12 years old and being brought to the temple with his parents for the annual festival of the Passover. The Passover was one of the three major festivals in the Jewish year, so in a way it’s similar to our Christian festival of Christmas. The Passover reminded the Jews of the time when they were enslaved in Egypt. God delivered them from their slavery by sending 10 plagues upon the land of Egypt. The final plague was the Angel of Death coming and killing every firstborn male in every household. The Israelites could avoid this plague and show their trust in God, by killing a one year old lamb and painting their doorframes with its blood. Those who did this had their houses passed over by the Angel of Death. It was after this plague that the Israelites were let out of Egypt.

Jesus went up with his parents to observe what went on during the Passover in the spring of the year. It was only when he was 13 that he could finally participate in the Passover with his father. But this celebration was a family affair, and so Mary joined along too. This was such a routine for the family, that when they had pre-determined to leave Jerusalem, Mary and Joseph assumed that Jesus was in their company. Mary and Joseph would have travelled with a caravan of people – friends and family, to make the journey more enjoyable and safer. But it was only when they had travelled a day's journey from Jerusalem that they discovered Jesus was not with their company. And so, like loving and caring parents, they returned to Jerusalem in search for Jesus.

But it was only after three days of searching that they found Jesus in the temples with the teachers of the Law. Plenty of questions might jump in our minds, but they are questions that are left unanswered by Scripture – “why didn’t his parents know to look here first?” “Where did Jesus sleep?” etc. It was Jesus’ answer to their question of “why are you here?” that baffled them – **“Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?”** It was only after that, that Jesus went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them.

It seems like a simple enough story, right? So, WHAT’S WRONG WITH ACTING LIKE JESUS in this story? We can take the obvious teenager’s response of abandoning their parents and staying here in church as one reason WHY IT’S WRONG TO ACT LIKE JESUS, but we don’t have a problem with Jesus staying behind in Jerusalem. It all seems fine to say let’s be more like Jesus. Let’s have a new year’s resolution to come to church more often in 2015, to celebrate all of the holidays, to read through my Bible and become well acquainted in God’s Word. We should also be obedient to our parents, like the fourth commandment says. Shouldn’t we be like Jesus when the last words of our gospel say, **“Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men”**?

WHY IS IT WRONG TO ACT LIKE JESUS? Don’t get me wrong, I’m not advocating that we look at what Jesus does (or any other character in the Bible) and say that we need to do the exact opposite. But understand where trying to act like Jesus is wrong. It all can be tied into the one often over looked word, **“the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem.”** The word for boy indicates someone who owes obedience to another. At first glance, we might think that this is Jesus owing obedience to his parents. But that isn’t what it’s referring to here. In fact, it’s referring to the obedience that Jesus owed to his Father in Heaven – God the Father.

But Jesus is not the only one who owes obedience to God the Father. In fact, each and every one of us owe obedience to God the Father. It is the kind of obedience we owe that makes it clear we cannot act like Jesus. And so, even if we were able to ACT LIKE JESUS by obeying our parents outwardly, even if we were able to ACT LIKE JESUS by attending as many worship services as we can, even if we were able to ACT LIKE JESUS by reading our Bible faithfully every day, it wouldn’t be enough. Even if all of our actions from this point forward were perfect, we still would owe God more obedience. Because the obedience we owe God is more than just the actions we do and the words we speak, and the thoughts we think. Our obedience we owe God is perfection. And that is something that is impossible for us to attain, because we were born in sin. King David confesses, **“surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.”**

WHAT’S WRONG WITH ACTING LIKE JESUS? Because no matter how hard we try, we will never be able to act like Jesus. All of the thoughts, words and actions we do, no matter how pretty they look to us is just like rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic. Even Jesus plus our actions doesn’t help. This is the other troubling thought people have. Jesus has saved us, but I still need to do my part, I need to act saved, I need to come to church, I need to do good things. But no matter what shape this attitude takes, it’s like multiplying anything by zero. If we include anything we do, even if it’s with what Jesus does, it doesn’t equate to obedience to our heavenly father.

The only one who can act like Jesus is Jesus! And his actions of obedience are not an example for us (nor is any other character in the Bible for that matter), but it shows us what he has done to save us. He perfectly obeyed God in his complete dedication to God and his word. This is shown in his staying in the Temple, this is shown in his knowledge

of God's Word, this is shown in his wisdom in applying God's Word. But he not only perfectly obeyed God, but he also perfectly obeyed his parents as well. This obedience didn't just start when he was 12 years old, but it started at birth, and continued through his childhood, through this event, and into his adulthood.

Just like the Passover Lamb was perfect, innocent, unblemished lamb in its prime, so Jesus would be the substitute for us – perfect, innocent, unblemished and in his prime. There was a reason God didn't want crippled animals being offered as sacrifices, God demanded the best, and that is what Jesus was and is. He was sacrificed on the altar of the cross to atone (pay) for our sins, so that God might pass destruction over us and spare us.

(2)

But how can we be sure this sacrifice is for us? How can we be sure that God won't just change his mind once he sees how we have responded (or not responded) to his gift of grace? That's what the book of Hebrews answers from our second lesson. Verse 11 of chapter 2 of Hebrews reads, **"Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers."** Jesus obeyed God's law for us. When we think that we can ACT LIKE JESUS, we are saying that Jesus sacrifice didn't count for us. Jesus was not to be the example, but the substitute, to be like us in every way, except without sin. He became man to save mankind.

Because the Bible's purpose is not to make us better people, but it is to show us how we are saved. Jesus is not ashamed of us, and we should not be ashamed of him. We may not be able to ACT LIKE JESUS, but we can ACT LIKE LITTLE JESUS'. When we act like a little Jesus, or a little Christ, we display our act of response to the Savior and his love. We also point others to Christ. We point others to Christ when we don't hide the fact that worship and Bible reading are important. We point others to Christ when we don't join in the coarse joking at work. We point others to Christ when we are respectful and obedient to those we owe obedience, whether that be our parents, or the government.

When we act like little Christs, we acknowledge that we could never be Christ, we acknowledge that we could never accomplish what Christ accomplished, and we acknowledge that what Christ accomplished is full and free, regardless of anything we do. We can look to this story not as another way that we can be like Christ, but as a way that Christ became like us and accomplished what we never could. Let us approach this story with the attitude of Mary, **"his mother treasured all these things in her heart."**

The season of Christmas may be packed away for another year, but as Christians, we can be thankful that the effects of Christmas continue on. We can continue to rejoice, not only for these two Sundays following Christmas, but the whole year round because of what we know. We can treasure up this story in our heart. We know that we don't have to ACT LIKE JESUS for God to love us. We don't have to ACT LIKE JESUS to be considered Christians. Because it was Jesus' actions, and not ours that are important, for it is his acts that saved us. As Christians, washed in the blood of the lamb, we cannot act like Christ, but we can ACT LIKE LITTLE CHRISTS, pointing the way to the Savior and his love. Amen!