

**Title: Staying young as a Church - Luke 2v41-52**

**Purpose:** Lessons we can learn from Jesus YOUTHFUL stage. The importance of being flexible and not growing too rigid in our ways spiritually.

**INTRODUCTION**

Rare Saxon coins find

I think it would have to be classed as one of the biggest – early Christmas presents. Paul Coleman was out 4 days before Christmas day in a field near Aylesbury when his metal detector went off and he dug up a hoard of 5, 000 11<sup>th</sup> Century Saxon coins in a lead metal bucket.

To put the find into perspective a little bit – the county Museum has 4,000 Roman coins but just 20 Saxon coins. So all in all a VERY VERY RARE FIND.

A rare account

It is worth noticing that **this passage TODAY is A ALSO A VERY VERY RARE ONE:**

- early on in the gospels we see Jesus as a “new born”/an infant (Gk. brephos)
- as time progresses we start to see him as a young child being returning from Egypt to be brought up in Nazareth where Joseph and Mary originally came from (Gk. paidaion)
- BUT HERE we have a UNIQUE INCIDENT where Jesus has got to **the stage of being a YOUTH** (Gk. pais)

And I suppose it is a little fitting that we might look at this passage:

- FIRSTLY because it naturally follows on from the Christmas story that we have been working through in Luke
- and SECONDLY (and more importantly) because, as a CHURCH, we are at a similar YOUTHFUL AGE & STAGE

We are now entering into our 10<sup>TH</sup> YEAR.

The importance of YOUTHFUL LEARNING

And I think we should never underestimate the importance of what you might call **YOUTHFUL LEARNING** – learning whilst you are still in that **YOUTHFUL STAGE** of life.

It is a formative stage, a time when you are still impressionable, teachable and mouldable.

Sometimes you can look at a church and align it to a particular stage in life – and one stage, as a church, that you want to try and avoid, if at all possible is **OLD AGE**.

**That is a stage when a church has become long in the tooth and inflexible.** That church no longer finds it easy to make changes – **perhaps the church has accumulated too much HISTORY and too much TRADITION** and now the saying “we’ve always done it this way” becomes a law that **MUST NOT BE BROKEN!!**

**That church has become immobile** and just as too much sitting around and immobility is a physical health hazard, so too it is potentially fatal at a spiritual level for a church.

### Kate Booth – Salvation Army

Now, as I know that at least one of us has some Salvation Army background here, let me tell you something about the daughter of William Booth, the Founder of the Salvation Army.

The daughter was called Kate and when she was just 15 years of age she was already speaking in public to large crowds. She got the name “The Marshall” because of her work in the slums of Paris.

Q. But where did it begin for her?

Well **when she was only four years of age**, her mother would tuck her into bed with the words:

“Now, Katie, **you are not here in this world for yourself**. You are here for God and for others. **The world is waiting for you.**”

And these words: “The world is waiting for you” were very shaping words for her as she grew up and listened out for God’s calling on her life.

Later on people would flock in their thousands to hear her speak – and when they were asked why they came, they would reply: “Because she makes Jesus more real than any speaker we have ever heard.”

Even her father, William Booth, would say:

“She is my **Blücher** (he was an aggressive and successful Prussian Field Marshall). When all else fails **put on Katie!**”

It is a powerful stage of life to be YOUTHFUL – it is a time that is, what you might say: “pregnant with opportunities!”.

And so coming to this story this morning is very exciting, partly because it is unique and because you know it must carry important things for us to understand.

### Mary & Joseph – one of the worst days of their lives

I want to start with Mary & Joseph for a moment.

Q. What do you think is one of the worst things that can happen to any parent?  
(I would imagine anyone who has ever had a child – knows the answer to this).

Well it is that awful moment of realisation that you no longer know where your child is.

I can still remember the sheer panic that came over Bola and I when we were in a very large shopping centre with our first child, she was still just a toddler. And one moment she was there with us, the next, somehow, we had become separated.

People are everywhere and you start rushing here and there looking around frantically!

Well something similar happened to Mary and Joseph – Verse 44:

(Verse 44) "Thinking he was in their company, they travelled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends."

**So this was one of the worst days of their lives.** HOWEVER, I think it fair to say, that when this episode was over, they would look back (and we know that Mary treasured these things in her heart) and realise that they had learned a really key lesson.

However before we do that let us take up the story where Luke does:

#### The story setting – Passover

The setting is that of the main annual celebration. Jews were meant to attend each of the 3 festivals, but given that people were spread out quite widely away from Jerusalem, many would just select one of the 3 feasts and that most significant one was **Passover**, which was a celebration of remembrance of God delivering his people from bondage to slavery in Egypt.

(We should be clear that this was an OT symbol of the deliverance from the slavery to sin that our Redemption achieves).

Now the traditions of the Jews indicated that the women were specifically exempted from having to make this annual trip, however here we see that Mary and Joseph represent a very devout, though poor family.

#### A 7-day feast – Q. Why did Jesus stay behind?

Now Passover, like the other annual feasts, was a 7-day feast. That said, however, many people would not stay for the whole time and would likely go home after a couple of days.

What seems to be the case here is that Mary and Joseph were heading home after the whole week was actually completed, they had stayed the full duration.

A question that we naturally ask from this section is:

Q. Why did Jesus stay behind?

Now clearly the passage itself does not tell us the answer to that.

Given that the feast was technically over we would seem to be in what you might call "EXTRA TIME" but **Jesus seems to be marching to a different drum beat** from that of his parents.

There is a saying that goes like this: "When the meeting is over the service begins" – and what it is saying is that once we have attended the Sunday meeting in the church THEN we go on out into the world to give service for another week.

There can be some value in turning that statement around and saying: "When the church service is over the meeting begins."

In the OT, they had something known as the Tent of Meeting where God's presence would descend in the form of a cloud. There in that tent Moses would meet with God "face to face" – and one of the aspects of Israel's travel arrangements was that they were told to always stay put until the cloud lifted.

RT Kendall, in his book "The sensitivity of the Spirit" puts it like this:

"...sometimes a church service will finish but God isn't finished. The meeting – with God – may suddenly take place even before people leave the building, and then remain for hours. That is how the Hebrides Revival (1948-9) is said to have begun. After a service was over, one man was found kneeling at a pew, praying aloud for Revival. He kept saying, 'Your honour is at stake, your honour is at stake.' God stepped in; within an hour hundreds spontaneously turned up at the church. Revival came to the islands and lasted for months."

#### Some parallel application

By way of application it does leave us a few questions worth posing:

- Q. What is our typical habit when the final AMEN is said?

Maybe we seat ourselves and then wait the standard silent 15 seconds before closing our bible and gearing ourselves up for coffee and chat.

- Q. Are we in the habit of short-changing God?

Q. If we were called to some optional extended spiritual activity, would we sign up to all of it?

From what we know of Mary and Joseph they were truly devout people. Certainly Elizabeth and Zechariah were stated as being devout and so we suspect that Mary and Joseph would probably not be less devout.

When the final whistle goes at 90 minutes are we thankful there's no EXTRA TIME.

You see it could well be that this is when God wants to commence the MEETING.

#### Habits important

Let me say something briefly about HABITS and by this I mean SPIRITUAL HABITS.

And I guess that I am not saying anything very ground breaking by proposing that HABITS ARE IMPORTANT.

As Verse 41 says "EVERY YEAR his parents went to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover." This was evidently their custom.

If you want to have an OT example of this very principle – then look no further than the story of **Hannah**, there at the very start of 1 Samuel. We read of **Elkanah**, the husband, that:

"YEAR AFTER YEAR this man went up from his town to worship and sacrifice to the Lord Almighty at Shiloh."

**Speaking personally**, from very early on in my life and in **Bola's** life – before ever we really knew each other, both of us had the same pattern or habit set in place that we would go to church morning and evening and that we would fellowship at the bible study midweek.

This was always the standard pattern that was modelled to us by mature Christians and also that seemed to us to best fit what we saw in Scripture. And I suppose, just for good measure, these patterns fitted easily with our consciences.

**Jesus** himself was a man with certain religious habits:

**Luke 4 verse 16** “He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, **AS WAS HIS CUSTOM...**”

So good habits are very fundamental to our progress and maturing in the Christian life. It is my view that so many of the troubles that people end up bringing into their lives would have, most likely, been avoided if they had early on set in place good habits when it came to meeting together with God’s people and taking in a solid & consistent diet of God’s word.

#### When good habits might become bad

It is worth putting one caveat in place from this story regarding habits – and that is simply to say that habits – even good habits, can backfire on us, when they swap places from being our servants to being our masters. When they become nothing more than lifeless rules that we no longer even think about.

Habits are not meant to suspend our thinking about why we do things and why we prize and prioritise certain things.

#### Getting back to the story

OK – getting back to the story – we see that here Jesus is 12 years of age. Apparently it was around 13 that a boy was ready to have his coming of age ceremony called the **Bar Mitzvah** (literally “Son of the commandment or law” and what it signified was that at this point the boy would become Subject or accountable to the Law).

Typically children might go up a year or two earlier than their **Bar Mitzvah** to get them more prepared for the big occasion.

Now **Verse 43** says “After the Feast was over, while his parents were returning home, **the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem**, but they were unaware of it.”

Q. Why did Jesus not say anything to Mary or Joseph?

Maybe:

- he truly assumed that they would realise where he would be
- maybe, he was prevented by the Spirit of God from saying anything – but basically again Scripture is silent here and so we won’t speculate too much

What I think we should realise is that **Jesus was SENSITIVE TO THE SPIRIT OF GOD within him.**

There is a clear CONTRAST that is being presented to us in these verses – because Mary and Joseph move on from there without any clue that they are leaving Jesus behind.

Q. I wonder whether that is very much like us?

We have become so INSENSITIVE TO THE HOLY SPIRIT that we have absolutely no idea that God has retired from us.

**AW Tozer**, author of many helpful books famously wrote:

“If the Holy Spirit was withdrawn from the church today, 95 percent of what we do would go on and no one would know the difference.

If the Holy spirit had been withdrawn from the New Testament church, 95 percent of what they did would stop, and everybody would know the difference.”

Q. Why so long to notice and find Jesus?

Q. Did you ever ask yourself why it took Mary and Joseph so long to realise that Jesus was missing and also why it took them 3 days to find him?

Well when you understand the way they did their travel arrangements in those days it does become a bit clearer.

Normally people from a particular geographic region would travel together in a caravan or convoy. And the way these worked was that the women and children would set the pace and go at the front and then the man and the older boys would travel behind.

With Jesus being at the sort of age where he might go either at the front or the back, then it is not beyond reason that Mary would assume Jesus to be with his legal father Joseph and vice versa. If that were the case then it would only be at the end of the day when people were bedding down in their family groups that the absence of the boy would become apparent – and not only that there were plenty of relatives as well a friends from the same town where Jesus might have been travelling with.

Q. Why 3 days? Well – one day to know he was missing, one day to get back to Jerusalem and then they would find him on the third day. So in reality, they might have found him relatively quickly on getting back to where they left off.

Perhaps that should encourage us – given that we too may find that we have essentially mislaid the presence of the Lord in our lives – however once we realise our mistake and make moves to put it right – then we will not have to play a game of hide and seek to re-locate the Lord.

They truth is that we always find the Lord at the place that we last departed from him.

Q. What was Jesus doing when they found him?

Now it is worthy of note seeing what it was that Jesus was doing when Mary and Joseph catch up with him:

Verse 46&47 “After three days they found him in the temple courts, **sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.** Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers.”

What is obvious here is that:

- Jesus had a **real APPETITE** for the things of God
- He had a **real DESIRE** to understand his faith.

And to listen to some of the best teachers.

Bear in mind that at this PRIMARY FESTIVAL OF THE YEAR – this would be when **the cream of the Rabbis** would be around to teach to any that would want extra.

The **NASB** renders **Verse 43** this way: “and as they were returning, **after spending the full number of days**, the boy Jesus stayed behind...”

It seems **THAT JESUS WANTED MORE** because he knew that **MORE WAS AVAILABLE** and he wanted to **BUY UP THE OPPORTUNITIES**.

- Jesus was also learning to be a **good LISTENER** – and we need that both for listening to other people and also for learning to listen careful to what the Spirit is saying to us.

### The first words of Jesus

One of the reasons that this passage is particularly precious is the fact that it gives to us the first recorded words of Jesus. We have them there at Verse 49:

(Verse 49) “Q. Why were you searching for me?” he asked. “Q. Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?”

Notice that Jesus, even from this age, is asking, posing, provoking by way of **QUESTIONS**.

This is what Jesus does – his words are such that they cannot just be brushed aside if you are spiritually awake.

Now Jesus is not trying to be evasive by asking questions. The first question is somewhat rhetorical – really he is making the gentle statement “You should not have been searching for me if you really knew me.”

So we notice even now that Jesus is very gracious, gentle and polite to his parents. He is humble and does not act in any superior or imperious way.

### The second question

But notice this second question: “Q. Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?”

Again Jesus was not trying to be unkind to his legal Father Joseph here – but by degrees he was beginning to live out something that was becoming a dawning realisation for him.

### A 2<sup>nd</sup> dawning realisation

It is quite possible that this occasion for Jesus was something of **A DAWNING REALISATION**.

Jesus was fully human, and in that regard we see that he was constantly learning and growing – as **Verse 52** says:

“And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men.”

But not only that, Jesus was slowly coming into the full understanding of his **DIVINE NATURE** – He was truly the Son of God – He was the Son of His Heavenly Father.

### I HAD to be in my Father’s house

Notice the imperative nature in which Jesus spoke the words of that 2<sup>nd</sup> question – “Didn’t you know that I **HAD** to be in my Father’s house.”

The ESV puts it: “Did you not know that I **MUST** (Gk. *dei* – indicating logical necessity) **be in my Father’s house?**”

Isn't it typical really of Jesus, that in the very opening words that we get from his lips – that they include a statement of **NECESSITY**.

I wonder for us: Q. What aspects of our Christian profession enter the realm of some **LOGICAL NECESSITY**?

For you, when you speak of the practical aspects of your faith: Q. Do you speak in terms of **LOGICAL NEGOTIATION** rather than **NECESSITY** – (by which I mean that things, under the right conditions, can be **NEGOTIATED ASIDE**)?

## CONCLUSION

Let me try and draw the strands together.

I wonder whether this passage here should remind a bit of the generation gap. Young people often like to point out what they see as the generational differences.

And some of the differences come about solely because those who are older have become over time **INFLEXIBLE** and **INSENSITIVE** to how things have moved on.

We read in Scripture that:

- a) we need to **LIVE** (or walk) **by the Spirit**

Galatians 5 and Verse 16-18 says: “So I say, **LIVE (walk – peripateo) BY THE SPIRIT**, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are **LED BY THE SPIRIT**, you are not under law.”

- b) that we also need to **KEEP IN STEP with the Spirit**

Galatians 5 Verse 25 “Since we **LIVE BY THE SPIRIT**, let us **KEEP IN STEP (keep in step – stoicheo) WITH THE SPIRIT.**”

As a church AND as individuals – let us learn the lessons from this unique **YOUTHFUL** passage – copying Jesus particular sensitivity to meeting with God, to keep in step with the Spirit's prompting & for us \*not\* to grow old before our time, showing ourselves to be **INFLEXIBLE** or **INSENSITIVE** to what God is saying at the moment.

In Jesus Name - AMEN