

✠ *In the Name of Jesus* ✠

Most of us behave differently depending on who we are with. How you are with your best friend is different from how you are with someone who is two generations ahead of you or behind you. Do you remember discovering this trait in yourself as you were growing up? Perhaps as a teenager you had an identity crisis over this, or at least an identity investigation? You asked yourself, “Who am I? Am I the person who behaves like this when I’m with this group of people? Or am I the person who behaves like that when I’m with that group? Who am I? I need to know so I know how to conduct myself.” Or maybe this identity/behavior issue came up in your life this way. You were behaving badly, probably because of who you were with—perhaps you were trying to impress someone—and someone else who knew you pretty well, like your mom or your sibling, asked with a bit of rebuke in their tone, “Who are you!? You’re not acting like anybody I know and respect. ACT LIKE WHO YOU ARE!” You see, our behaviors help others get a sense of who we are on the inside. If I dress in gnarly clothes and don’t shave or bathe for a long time, I’m telling others something about myself. If I can express myself without any F-bombs or G-D bullets, maybe people will pick up on how grateful I am to God for my mouth, and that I’m trying to honor him by how I use it. Your behavior says a lot about who you are. Who you are impacts how you behave.

Now let’s try to get a sense for who Jesus was as a boy, and who his parents were too. We have only this one incident from Jesus’

boyhood reported in the Bible. Apparently nothing else needed to be reported from the time Jesus arrived in Nazareth as a young child (after returning from the family’s escape to Egypt—see Matthew 2) until he turned 30. Of course, some false teachers in the early years of the Christian church tried to pass off stories from the young life of Jesus. But that’s what false teachers do—they make stuff up. Since we know their evil agenda includes destroying our trust in Christ as Savior, it’s best to set aside those extra stories about Jesus’ boyhood as spurious. But we do have this one incident from when Jesus was twelve. Let’s feed our faith by taking a closer look at it.

Luke reports: ⁴¹*Every year [Jesus’] parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover.* The Passover Feast celebrated how the angel of death had passed over the homes of the Israelites without taking the life of the firstborn males. By ending the life of all the firstborn males of Egypt, the Lord convinced Pharaoh to free Israel from slavery and let them go. After Israel left Egypt, the Lord wanted his people to commemorate their redemption from slavery by having an annual Passover feast. All the men were required to appear before the Lord in his house. This verse tells us that Jesus’ stepdad Joseph AND his mother Mary made it their regular practice to participate in the Passover feast. “Who are you, Joseph and Mary? Is obeying the Lord so important to you that you leave your home and travel 70 miles to praise the Lord? If you’re this godly, perhaps we can follow your example and strive to be godly like you.” From this we can safely say: if Joseph and

Mary were living among us today, they would set aside their Sunday mornings for worship with the congregation. Gathering in God's house every week would be important to them.

Luke reports: ⁴²*When [Jesus] was twelve years old, they went up to the Feast, according to the custom.* This may have been Jesus' first trip to the Temple. We know that Jewish children began to be treated like adults when they turned thirteen. Interesting that our children go through Bible study, profess their faith publicly, and begin receiving Holy Communion about this same age.

Luke reports: ⁴³*After the Feast was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it.* "After the Feast was over." These few words tell us that Joseph and Mary stayed in Jerusalem for the whole week of the Feast. Lots of people would leave after the two most important days—they did their religious duty, got their card punched, did the God-thing, and "Let's blow this popsicle stand." Not Joseph and Mary. They took their time. They liked being near the Lord in his house.

Turns out their son liked it too. When they left, ⁴³*the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it.* Are you wondering how they could be unaware of Jesus' whereabouts? Well, they very likely saw him with their group before they left Jerusalem, and then lost track of him just after they started walking. We know Jesus had never caused them any

trouble before—he was an extraordinarily good child (Hebrew 4:15). Perhaps mom figured Jesus was with Joseph and dad thought Jesus was with Mary, or they both thought Jesus was with friends. ⁴⁴*Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day.* Apparently it was a large company. But that's how pilgrims traveled back then. There is strength in numbers, a sense of security and protection from marauders. More importantly the annual trip to feed their soul was also an important social event.

After walking fifteen to twenty miles, it was time to pitch camp. ^{44b}*Then [Joseph and Mary] began looking for [Jesus] among their relatives and friends.* ⁴⁵*When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him.* Every parent who has lost track of their child, even for a moment, knows what Joseph and Mary were going through.

⁴⁶*After three days they found him.* Now, remember how the Jews counted time. "After three days" probably includes the day they spent walking toward Nazareth, the day of walking back to Jerusalem, and then, after the better part of a day, they found young Jesus. | And where was he? Chasing girls? Hangin' with his new posse? Hustling pool and rocking a new tunic? No, that's not who he was. Jesus was *in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.* He was doing Bible study! This is one of the reasons, dear friends, why I keep encouraging us all to read our Bibles at home and to stay for Bible study after worship. The coolest, most powerful,

most manly man ever to walk the earth did Bible study.

Here's where this Bible story stings us. Jesus' behavior reminds us that God actually expects us to give him first place in our hearts all the time (Mark 12:30, Psalm 119:105). This means loving and respecting and trusting him more than anyone else and anything else. Our attitude toward God is best seen in how we treat his Word. Please join me in admitting that we have not always loved or respected or trusted God's Word more than we have loved, respected or trusted ourselves and others. It's not really true that we're too busy for God's Word, because we all have the same 168 hours each week and we all make choices about how we spend them. Some Christians have told me they don't need to be an expert on the Bible because that's the pastor's job. But I'm not asking you to become an expert: I'm asking you to read it or listen to it for 5 to 15 minutes per day. Some Christians have told me: "My husband/my wife studies enough for both of us." Some Christians have told me: "I know all those Bible stories well enough." Here is my response: "Are you acting like who you are? Do you realize that how you treat God's Word, how often you spend time with God's Word, reveals who you are?"

But here's where this Bible story comforts us too. Jesus did love God's Word, even more than he loved his parents. Look at his respect for God's Word! As a child of God, the Son of God, he ACTS LIKE WHO HE IS. He has just spent the previous

three days sitting among the teachers of God's Word, listening to them and asking them questions! What a great attitude! Better than that, here's some really good news: the Lord counts Jesus' love for God's Word as if we love God's Word like we ought! | Think of it this way. Imagine appearing before God. He asks whether you loved his Word enough to study it faithfully and regularly. Your head hangs down because you know you didn't. But when God consults the record books, on your page it says you loved and respected his Word without fault. You ask to see the page yourself. And there it is, the proof. When you were twelve years old, you spent three days studying with the rabbis in Jerusalem. You're so honest that you say, "But I've never been to Jerusalem." So God leans in, puts his arm around you and whispers in your ear, "My Son did it for you, as your substitute. It counts. Come into my home forever, and I'll teach you things I didn't reveal in the Bible." How do you like that?! Twelve years old, and Jesus is already ministering to us, living perfectly on our behalf! Thanks for ACTing LIKE WHO YOU ARE, Jesus. We are blessed to have you as our Savior!

Normally twelve year olds do more soaking up of insights than sharing them. But in Jesus' case, ⁴⁷*everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers.* He had a knowledge and wisdom that went beyond his twelve years, as if he had lived a long time, as if he were "*from of old, from ancient times*" (Micah 5:2). Jesus, I think some of your divine nature is peeking through. Obviously you're not making full use of your divine knowledge.

Otherwise why would you ask so many questions? But I see you ACTing LIKE WHO YOU ARE.

Luke reports: ⁴⁸*When his parents saw him, they were astonished. “This is not where we expected to find a twelve year old boy!” His mother said to him, “Son, why have you treated us like this? Don’t you realize that your behavior has an effect on us? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you. We’re supposed to deliver you to full manhood unharmed. We’ve never had to rebuke you before, and it’s freaking us out a little.”*

⁴⁹*“Why were you searching for me?” [Jesus] asked, as if their behavior didn’t make any sense under these circumstances. “Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?”* The original Greek translates more literally, “Didn’t you know I had to be among the things of my Father?” The King James Version translated: Didn’t you know “*that I must be about my Father’s business?*” “Mom and Dad, you know enough about me from what the angels told you before I was born that you shouldn’t have been anxious while you were looking for me. And, if you had thought about it fully, you could have known where to find me.” Whoa, Jesus! You just revealed a huge slice of who you are! When you call God your Father, you let us know that you are the Son of God, right there in that little twelve-year-old human body, true God and true man in the same person.

⁵⁰*But [Mary and Joseph] did not understand what [Jesus] was saying to them. They*

couldn’t grasp most of the implications of his words. And we don’t hold it against them either. We have the whole Bible. We know the whole story of Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, and ascension, and we’ve had 2,000 years to think about what all this means.

Luke reports: ⁵¹*Then [Jesus] went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. He willingly did whatever he was told, with a happy heart. He continued being the godly child they were used to. He kept setting an example of how we are to treat those in authority, but more importantly he kept living a sinless life for us, as our substitute. He kept ACTing LIKE WHO HE IS.*

But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. She didn’t just forget about them. She kept thinking about what all these things meant. | ⁵²And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men. He finished growing up so he could finish his work as our Savior. He ACTED LIKE WHO HE IS.

Use this knowledge in your prayers. Say, “Lord Jesus, I have not honored and obeyed those in authority the way I ought, not my parents, not the government officials, not my pastor, or my teachers. I haven’t loved your Word as I ought. But you always obeyed perfectly. Count me righteous for your sake, and help me live like you so that from now on I love your Word and honor and obey those in authority. I am your child, heavenly Father. Help me act like who I am.”