

At the Age of Twelve

by Art Katz

Jesus' story at the age of twelve teaches us about the importance of sonship, humility, and obedience in obtaining true spirituality and growth in stature and favor with God.

Scripture: Luke 2:40

Topics: "Sonship", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

Art Katz emphasizes the significance of Jesus' actions at the age of twelve, illustrating the principles of sonship that apply to all believers. He highlights the tension between the legitimate concerns of earthly parents and the divine calling of a son to prioritize the Father's business. Jesus' astonishment at His parents' lack of understanding reflects the higher priority of heavenly matters over earthly expectations. Katz encourages believers to embrace the conflicts that arise from their commitment to God, as these challenges are essential for spiritual growth and maturity. Ultimately, the submission of Jesus to His parents, despite their misunderstanding, exemplifies the humility and obedience that lead to favor with God.

Transcript

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At the age of twelve, Jesus is giving us a lesson in the making of a son, and the episode reveals an insight into the definitive principles of sonship that are applicable for sons (and daughters) of God in every generation. And the Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him. And His parents used to go to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of Passover. And when He became twelve, they went up there according to the custom of the Feast; And as they were returning, after spending the full number of days, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem.

And His parents were unaware of it, but supposed Him to be in the caravan, and went a day's journey; and they began looking for Him among their relatives and acquaintances. And when they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem, looking for Him. And it came about that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them, and asking them questions. And all who

heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers.

And when they saw Him, they were astonished; and His mother said to Him, "Son, why have you treated us this way? Behold, Your father and I have been anxiously looking for you." And He said to them, "Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's house?" And they did not understand the statement which He had made to them. And He went down with them, and came to Nazareth; and He continued in subjection to them; and His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men. (Luke 2:40-52). There is a remarkable conflict between two things here: the legitimate and natural understanding of parents with regard to a son, as against the particular and peculiar calling of a son to be about His Father's business. The reason we have not experienced the kind of conflict that this episode describes is that we have not been as avid and as intense as Jesus in the way that He went about the Father's business.

The parents represent all that is legitimate, natural, sound, and respectable in their concern for the well-being of a lost son, who had somehow disappeared from their sight. On the other hand, Jesus felt not a twinge of conscience to stay behind in the Temple area, where He could dispute and reason with the teachers of the Law. The thing that astonished Him was that His parents did not understand His action: "Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's house?"

In other words: "Why are you surprised and astonished? Why are you alarmed and concerned?" He could not fathom that this could be any source of perplexity to them. They did not seem to have the most rudimentary understanding that He had to be in His Father's house, and that He had to be about His Father's business. To Jesus it was as elementary as breathing. This is the jealous insistence that characterizes sons, and will also put them in conflict with the things that are traditional and legitimate.

A son has a priority of such a kind, that if necessary, and if it is required, he may have to offend his own Jewish parents. If we are going to be sons of God, we are inevitably going to be brought into conflict with the things that are legitimate, and that make every just demand upon us. Jesus as a twelve-year old had to totally ignore that, in order to fulfill the greater passion to be about His Father's business. When His parents found Him, they were amazed, which indicates the depths of the propriety that was offended in a Son, who was failing to observe what are the unchallenged and uncontested values that prevail in the world.

He violated something that was almost sacrosanct, namely, the willful knowledge that He would make His parents anxious. There is a tension between a passionate Son in the insistence that He be in His Father's house as opposed to parents who 'fulfilled' the customary thing and were returning home. The Son had another intention and design. They supposed Him to be in the caravan, but He had a higher priority than their religious and domestic conventions, and a son will always be a threat to those worldly conventions and traditions that intimidate and impede the full response to the Father that sonship requires.

The rebuke that came from His mother, full of intimidating matriarchal power, is classic: "Son, why have you treated us this way? Behold, Your father and I have been anxiously looking for you." The intimidation is always aimed toward guilt, and how you have injured them: "Why are You doing this to us? How could you?" The ingredients are timeless, and there always will be this friction and intimidation to keep us away from the full consecration to God that sonship requires. It will not be something carnal that prevents our coming to consecration, but the things that are legitimate and right.

There is a certain kind of ruthlessness that sonship requires. The Kingdom of God has a higher priority, and it must, by its nature, always be a cause of offense. The answer of Jesus is very instructive. In His guileless way, He said: "Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's house?" He elevates the urgency of the heavenly over against the earthly, and His astonishment is that they did not know it. There are two fathers here, the earthly and the heavenly, and it is clear who has the higher priority.

The fact that His parents did not understand the statement He had made to them is even more astonishing^{3/4}and is probably the heart of the text. Knowing that they did not understand, and would not likely ever understand, He went down with them to Nazareth. This 'down' is more than just the decline that one experiences from Jerusalem to the flat lands. He went down at the age of twelve. He intuited and understood that sonship, as intense as it is for the glory of God the Father, yet requires a kind of humiliation of an extraordinary kind of having to submit to parents who do not understand, who will not understand, and who cannot understand.

He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and He remained there the next eighteen years. He forfeited the solace and satisfaction that would have been His had His parents been one with Him, and could understand Him. Jesus submitted Himself to parents who did not understand, and it reveals something of what it means to be a son of God. The heart of why it was that He kept increasing in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man was because He had obtained the favor of God in going down to Nazareth with His parents.

It was not a grudging kind of compliance where He patronized them in a condescending way. In that submission was the key to the elevation of a Son who grew in stature and in favor with God, and it is our key also. God favors that disposition of spirit, for it already prefigures the whole mystery of the Messiah, who laid aside His deity in all the humility that characterized His life and death, and it was out of that that God exalted Him and gave Him a name above every name. There is something in this precious submission to unknowing parents that warms the heart of God.

It is the way of God; it reveals the character of God; and to find favor from God is to receive the impetus and the encouragement and the enduing that make for wisdom and growth in stature. This is the pattern also for our growth and maturity. The very contradiction of not being understood by those closest to us, and the tension of it, are the Divine ingredients that really have a wonderful power to keep us from false spirituality. There is a Nazareth for each one of us^{3/4}if we would understand and receive it.

The willingness to uncomplainingly embrace the thing that seemingly opposes our spiritual desire is at the heart of this incident in the life of Jesus as a boy. This is how one grows in maturity and stature. It is in that tension that God's grace is given, and that makes for the growth of sons. It is the very thing that we have resisted as being contrary to our spirituality, and even draining to our spirituality, and a threat to our spirituality that sons are formed. We want to flee from it, yet it is the very ingredient given by God for the obtaining of true spirituality!

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