

## INTRODUCTION

The reason I enjoy preaching through the Gospel According to Luke is because every single message is about Jesus. We have already completed seven messages about all the events surrounding His birth. Today we are going to look at a totally unique story about Jesus. It is unique because it is the *only* recorded story describing an event that took place during the childhood of Jesus. It is also unique because Dr. Luke is the only writer to mention it. It is easy to read between the lines and understand that Luke interviewed Mary about this event, because in verse 51 we read again that Mary "treasured all these things in her heart."

Now why did Luke include this story? Obviously, the main reason is the Holy Spirit directed what Luke wrote. I'm so glad this story is included for a couple of reasons. First, we get a brief glimpse into the family of Jesus and we can affirm that neither Jesus nor Mary was identified by shining halos as depicted by the Byzantine artists. Second, I believe this entire episode is a parable from the life of Jesus that has a powerful application to our lives today.

Luke 2:41-52. Every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. When he was twelve years old, they went up to the Feast, according to the custom. After the Feast 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. When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. 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. 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."

"Why were you searching for me?" He asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he was saying to them. Then they went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

Every year, all Jewish males were expected to travel to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. This would have been a very special time for Jesus and his family because we see that Jesus is now twelve years old. That means it is very possible he had undergone his bar mitzvah on this trip. He would have become a "son of the commandment." As I told you last spring, at age 12 in biblical times, a Jewish boy literally became a man.

If you ever go to Jerusalem with Cindy and me you will witness bar mitzvahs that take place at the Western Wall of the Temple Mount. There will be several going on simultaneously on every day except the Sabbath. Most of them are Jewish families who have traveled from America for this important family event. You will see a twelve-year-old boy reading from the Torah in Hebrew surrounded by men who are his family and friends. His mother, sisters and other female relatives are separated from them by the low wooden fence that separates the men from the

women at the Western Wall. They are laughing and throwing candy. It is a happy time of family celebration: a boy has become a man.

That's what the family of Jesus just experienced—and after all the excitement it was time to travel back home. Have you ever found that it's a lot more fun to travel to a vacation than back home after one? After a day's journey, Mary and Joseph realized Jesus was missing.

You may be wondering, "How in the world could Mary and Joseph do something so lame-brained as forgetting their oldest son? Doesn't that sound like child neglect or something?" Let me give you some Jewish background and you'll understand how it could have easily happened.

Back in Jesus' time, families traveled in large groups with other families. It was much safer to travel as part of a large entourage. Of course, they walked, or rode on slow donkeys when they traveled. There were three separate groups of travelers. All the married women would walk together in the first group but don't think there was any chivalrous reason like "ladies first." It was because the men knew the women walked slower, so they always left first and the men preferred not to walk with the women...because, women, ahem, like to talk. The very young children would travel with their mothers. The second group would be all the older children, basically supervised by the older girls who were not yet married. Can't you just see them skipping along have fun? Then, bringing up the rear were the men, all the guys twelve years or older. This way they could keep a distant eye on the women and children without having to turn around but these groups could be separated by several hundred yards each.

Now, can you see what happened? After traveling all day, Mary and Joseph came together. Mary never saw Jesus in the children's group because she assumed since he was now 12, he was walking with the men. Joseph, on the other hand, was accustomed to Jesus being in the children's group, and even though he had turned twelve, he must have assumed that since he wasn't with the men, that he was where he always walked, with the older children. Both Mary and Joseph made a dangerous assumption: They each thought Jesus was with the other. They were wrong and they lost Jesus.

When they returned to Jerusalem, they found Him in the temple and the religious experts were amazed at his wisdom and insight. Mary scolds Jesus because he caused them so much anxiety and Jesus' reply revealed that even as a 12 year old, He understood His role. In the KJV He says, "I must be about my Fathers' business." Joseph did not interrupt and say, "My business is carpentry, what do you mean?" Joseph knew he was not the real father of Jesus. In the NIV, Jesus says, "I had to be in my Father's house." Mary didn't react by saying, "Your father's house is in Nazareth!" Why? Because Mary knew, better than anyone, that Jesus was the Son of God.

Did you notice verse 51? It's a good lesson for every teenager who thinks he is smarter than his parents. Even though Jesus was the Son of God and *knew* He was the Son of God, it says, "he was obedient to them." Kids, part of wearing your WWJD bracelets is knowing that Jesus obeyed His parents.

Now this is an interesting story, but at this point, I want us to dig below the surface of this story and discover a powerful truth that perhaps you've never seen before. I had heard this story and

read it many times and I missed the point. But about 20 years ago, I read a sermon by the old evangelist, E. J. Daniels, and I've never forgotten his application. You see, this is more than just a captivating story about 12-year-old Jesus and His parents. It is a parable about how you and I can lose Jesus. Let me share with you some personal applications of this text as I ask you to consider the question: HAVE YOU LOST JESUS?

## **1. You *can* lose a sense of fellowship with Jesus—but you can't lose your relationship with Him**

You may wonder, "How can I lose Jesus? I thought you believed in 'once saved always saved.'" I'm not talking about losing your salvation. I'm talking about losing a sense of fellowship with Jesus. Throughout this ordeal, Mary and Joseph never lost their relationship with Jesus. It was intact. What they lost was His presence with them.

When you are born again, you become a child of God. Nothing can change that relationship. You can't sever it yourself and God won't disown you. The devil can't make you lose your salvation. That covers all the possibilities. Once you are truly born again, you can never become anything other than a blood-bought child of God.

I feel sorry for those people who believe you can be saved and lost and saved again and lost again. Jesus never said, "You must be born again and again and again and again!" Just as you can only be born once physically, you can only be born once spiritually. When you receive eternal life, you can be sure that it is *eternal*, not temporary.

However, some people have used the doctrine of the security of the believer as a license to live any way they please. They think because they are saved they can sin all they want and they'll still make it to heaven. After all, "once saved always saved, you know!" I have a good Greek word for that: *Hogwash*. Listen, if you are born again, you don't want to sin! You are a new creature in Christ and your heart's desire will be to live a holy life. If you ever meet someone who is living in constant, persistent, continual sin and still claims to be saved, that person is sadly deceived. So, if you are truly born again, you can't lose your relationship, but you can certainly get out of fellowship with Jesus. That's what some of you have lost. You don't have a sense of sweet, joyous fellowship with Jesus like you once had.

Salvation is like a marriage, you have the relationship but you have to be diligent to maintain the fellowship. I heard about a couple who had been married for 50 years and someone asked the husband what the secret to a long happy marriage was. He said, "For years, twice a week, my wife and I have gone out to a nice restaurant for a good meal and clever conversation...I go on Monday nights and she goes on Thursday nights." They have a relationship, but they don't have much fellowship!

Have you lost Jesus? Let me ask you a personal question: Has there ever been a time in your life when you were consistently closer to Jesus than you are right now? If the answer is yes, then you have lost Jesus; you've lost fellowship with Him.

## **2. You *can* lose a sense of Jesus' presence—even though you were close to Him at one time**

Some of you have already turned off this message because you are thinking, "He's not talking about me. I'm here in church every Sunday. I'm busy serving the Lord. He is talking about all those pagan people who don't come to church anymore. They have lost Christ, but not me!"

Hold on for a moment. Notice three important details in this story: (1) Who lost Jesus? The very ones who were the closest to Him, His parents! The ones least likely to lose him. (2) Where did they lose Him? In the temple, which in our language would be the church. (3) What were they doing when they lost Him? They were involved in religious activity, observing the Feast of Passover.

Sometimes the very people whom you would least expect to lose Jesus do exactly that. Right now, I'm thinking of a man who was once a fine pastor, but he became bitter over the way he was treated by a church, and he got out of the ministry. The last time I talked to him, he told me he was saved, but he couldn't ever see himself setting foot in a church again. I was blown away. I never expected him to lose fellowship with Jesus.

How many of you know people who were once deacons or Sunday School teachers or choir members who at one time had a dynamic walk with Jesus, but now have back-slidden and they don't have fellowship with the body of Christ, the church? Our membership is approaching 10,000, but that number almost makes me cry because I know it includes thousands of people who never give a penny, never attend, never participate. It's more of a prayer list than a membership list.

You say, "Amen, pastor, preach to those folks!" But wait a minute—they aren't here—and chances are they aren't watching on television either. I'm not talking to them: I'm talking to us. When I think of that former pastor and when you think of those people who have dropped out, let's don't make the mistake of saying, "that will *never* happen to me." The ones who were the closest to Jesus were the very ones who lost Him!

And you don't have to drop out of church to lose fellowship with Jesus. It is possible to attend church every week and be busy doing religious activities and still get out of fellowship with Jesus. Don't look with disdain at those who don't attend church. Examine your own heart today and ask yourself, "Have I lost my fervor, my fellowship with Jesus?"

Don't misunderstand me, it's *good* to attend church, to sing, serve, study the Bible and fellowship with God's people but none of those things are a substitute for intimate fellowship with Jesus. In fact, sometimes we stay so busy in church doing religious things that we miss Jesus. We have more meetings and activities than any other group in town. If you tried to come to everything Green Acres offers, you would die. I quoted the little poem before: "Mary had a little lamb; it would have been a sheep; but became a Southern Baptist; and died from lack of sleep!"

**3. You *can* lose intimacy with Jesus when you take steps away from Him—think He is still with you**

Now how did Mary and Joseph lose Jesus? They just started walking from Jerusalem toward Nazareth, thinking Jesus was somewhere in their travel group. But with every single step, they were moving farther away from Jesus. What can we learn from this?

When a person loses fellowship with Jesus, it doesn't happen overnight. They don't just wake up one day and say, "I think I'm going to walk away from Jesus today. Let me find something really wicked I can do." No, they generally begin to take small steps in the wrong direction and they keep convincing themselves that Jesus is still with them.

Some of you are still struggling with this whole idea. You say, "Wait a minute, didn't Jesus say 'I will never leave you or forsake you?'" Yes. "Doesn't the Bible teach that God is omnipresent and there is no place we can go where we can escape from His presence?" Most certainly. Jesus didn't leave Mary and Joseph; they left Him. Jesus won't leave you, but there is a type of attitude and behavior you can adopt in which you lose a closeness and intimacy with Jesus and the only thing that causes that is sin.

Sin has an exponential nature in which it starts small and grows like an insidious infection. That's why you ought to hate sin. What starts as a baby step into sin becomes a giant step, and that step becomes a mile and that mile becomes 10 miles. Mary and Joseph traveled one day's journey without Jesus—but their first step set the wrong direction. Friend, you can't afford one day out of fellowship with Jesus.

Is there something in your life right now that constitutes a step away from Jesus? It's so easy to justify it, "Oh, Jesus is with me, He won't mind." Don't deceive yourself.

Paul Harvey once shared on his radio program how an Eskimo hunter kills a wolf. It's not a pretty story, but it is a perfect illustration about the danger of sin. The Eskimo will take a razor sharp knife and coat the blade with seal blood. He will let that coat of blood freeze then apply six or seven additional layers until the blade is covered with several inches of frozen blood. He will then plant the knife in the ice with the covered blade sticking up. That's all he has to do. Later a hungry wolf follows the scent and comes by to sniff the blood. The wolf will be wary and cautious but finally he will chance a lick, then another. Soon the old wolf is licking away without caution. His tongue has gotten numb from licking the frozen blood, and in his feeding frenzy the wolf will lick until, without even realizing it, he slits his own tongue on the blade and is soon dead.

You say, "Ugh! How gross!" That's exactly what happens to a person who walks away from Jesus. At first, they take tentative baby steps into sin. Soon, they are licking away until suddenly they find themselves without the fellowship of Jesus.

One of the saddest stories in the Old Testament is that of mighty Samson. God gifted him with supernatural strength. But Samson was a he-man with she-problems. He dabbled in sin by having a relationship with the Philistine beauty, Delilah. When he finally revealed to her that the secret of his strength was in his hair (actually his strength was in God symbolized by his vow never to cut his hair), she called in the barbers and they gave Samson a buzz-cut while he was sleeping. When he woke up, he was ready to fight, and he was certain he was going to bust a few Philistine

heads—but he was in for a shock. Here's one of the saddest verses in the Old Testament, Judges 16:20. "He awoke from his sleep and thought, 'I'll go out as before and shake myself free.' But he did not know that the Lord had left him." Whew! He didn't know it. He assumed God was still there giving him strength. We know that the Lord hadn't left Samson but Samson had left the Lord.

I hope you can see now that just as Mary and Joseph lost Jesus, you and I can lose Jesus too. That leads to the next main point in this message: What can you do about it? Just as Mary and Joseph returned and found Jesus, I have good news for you. There are some definite steps you can take to restore intimacy with Jesus. If you have lost Jesus, don't despair because

## **YOUR FELLOWSHIP WITH JESUS CAN BE RESTORED WHEN YOU:**

### **1. Admit that you've left Him**

We can only imagine the shock and the regret Mary and Joseph experienced when they came to the campsite at the end of the day's walk. If they reacted like most of us, they would have started blaming each other. "I thought he was back there with you! After all, he's 12 now and he's supposed to walk with the men!" "Me? He has always walked with you, after all He's not even my real son!" But fortunately, Joseph and Mary didn't start arguing, they started working together to solve the problem. That's a good example for couples today, don't waste your emotional energy assigning blame; devote your attention to resolving your problem. Mary and Joseph admitted it, "He's not here. We've got to do something about it!" I'm sure they were embarrassed when everybody else discovered it as well. It was not time to cover up and make excuses, it was time to declare a personal emergency!

Friend, you will never reclaim fellowship with Jesus until you are honest enough to admit that you have lost it.

Let me repeat my earlier question: Has there ever been a time in your life when you were consistently closer to Jesus than you are right now? You don't have to admit it me or to anyone else.

Listen to the powerful words of Oswald Chambers: "Beware if in your personal testimony you have to hark back to the past and say, 'once, so many years ago I walked with Jesus.' If you are walking in the light, there is no harking back—if you get out of the light, you become a sentimental Christian and live on memories alone. Beware of trying to patch up a present refusal to walk with Jesus by recalling past experiences when you did walk in the light. Whenever the Spirit checks, call a halt and get the thing right, or you will go on grieving Him without knowing it." (*My Utmost for His Highest*, p. 165)

Next, you must

### **2. Persistently begin to seek Him**

I'm sure that after Mary and Joseph discovered Jesus was missing, they made plans to return to Jerusalem. It was dangerous to travel at night, so they probably bedded down for a sleepless night. As the dawn approached they set off to retrace their steps to Jerusalem. An amazing part of the story is found in verse 46. It says "after three days they found him." That may mean three days after they left him or three days after they returned to Jerusalem. The shortest time would mean they spent one day walking away, one day walking back and a full day searching Jerusalem. The point is, they didn't find him immediately but they weren't going to give up until they found him again. They didn't quit after one day and say, "Well, he's twelve he can take care of himself. That's all we are going to search. We'll just call the authorities and have them put his picture on the milk skins in Jerusalem." There's a great lesson here; are you listening?

The lesson I learn here is that when you have lost fellowship with Jesus, it may take some time to fully restore your intimacy. You must persist in seeking Jesus. It would be nice if I could lay hands on you or slap you on the forehead or you could say a prayer and have some kind of emotional spasm and boom! Everything returns to what it was. Don't misunderstand me, salvation is instantaneous—you are lost without Christ one second and the next second you are saved. But intimacy and fellowship must be built. You will need to take as many steps back to fellowship as you took walking away.

But the important thing is that you change direction. Some of you need to repent today. The word repent literally means to "change direction." You need to begin to seek the Lord diligently and persistently. It's not enough to hear a sermon like this and have a little emotional spasm and say, "Yeah, I need to have my fellowship restored with Jesus. I'm going to do something about it." But then, by tomorrow, you've totally forgotten about it. That won't work. You need to start seeking the Lord daily, in a quiet time of prayer and Bible study. But trying it for one or two days won't help you. Some of you need to quit being a spectator and start being a servant again. Find a place of service in our church and start working. But one week won't do it. Hang in there; don't give up. Be as persistent as Mary and Joseph were in searching for Jesus.

There is one more important step in restoring your fellowship with Jesus. You must

### **3. Return to where you left Him**

Where did Mary and Joseph finally find Jesus? They found Him in the Temple. That's where they had visited on their religious pilgrimage and that's probably where Jesus had his bar mitzvah. Now this may be so simple you miss it. But if you want to find Jesus again, if you want your sense of fellowship and intimacy rekindled, you must go back to where you left Him.

For some of you it simply means going back to where you "stopped doing the Father's business." When you stopped serving the Lord and said, "I'm just going to take a vacation." That vacation has become a permanent retirement. That's where some of you need to go to find fellowship with Jesus. Others of you need to go back to the Father's house. Maybe you are no longer seeking fellowship with the church, the body of Christ. You need to go back to that time in your life when you stopped being faithful and deal with it. You need to return to that place where you got angry at the church or at God and you just dropped out. You may be here today and this is just one of those Sundays when you decided, "I think I'll go today." But you aren't consistent in

worship and seeking the Father's house. That's where some of you need to go back to this morning.

For others, it could be those tiny steps of sin that you started taking a long time ago. It's when some of you guys started opening your mind to pornography, gambling, or drug abuse. It may be when you allowed that spirit of bitterness or anger take hold in your heart. Some of you can trace your spiritual chill to that time in your past when you got into an adulterous relationship or went through a messy divorce. Or you took a job that influenced you to compromise your Christian convictions. You need to go back to that place and make it right with God. Then and only then will you find the intimacy and fellowship that God wants to have with you.

## CONCLUSION

Remember, you can be saved and going to heaven, but your fellowship and intimacy with Jesus can be spoiled. Let's be honest. Have you lost Jesus? Do you want to find Him again? Will you admit it and start seeking the Lord persistently and diligently, not just for a few minutes or a few hours? Are you willing?

As I conclude today, let me give you a case study of a man in the Bible who lost fellowship with the Lord and found it again. Let's use him as a model for us today.

In the Bible, there was a man who was so committed to God he was called, "a man after God's own heart." Surely, this man would never lose the Lord! But remember, sometimes those closest to Him are the very ones who lose Him. King David took the tiny step of spiritual laziness and gave up his God-given job of spiritual leadership. When he should have been leading his troops into battle, he stayed back at his palace. Then, from his palace rooftop, he took the tiny step of looking at a woman who was bathing, then he invited her to his room—another step. One step led to another until finally, he was so far away from the Lord he had not only committed adultery with Bathsheba, he had murdered her husband to cover up her pregnancy. During this entire period, he deceived himself into thinking that since he was the king, God's anointed, everything was okay.

God sent a prophet to call him to repentance, just as the Holy Spirit may be calling you today. And in Psalm 51 we read the agonizing words of man who had lost fellowship with God. He cried out: "Oh, God, my sin is ever before me. Against you and you only have I done this wicked thing. Create in me a clean heart, oh God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence and don't take your holy spirit from me!" (Psalm 51:10-11) Actually, God hadn't cast David away from His presence; David had walked away, one small step at a time. Did you see what David did? He admitted his alienation from God, he was willing to seek God, and he went back to that place in his life where he left God's fellowship. Your problem may not be as obvious as David's. But the principle is the same. Will you return to where you left the fellowship of Jesus? Oh, the joyous reunion that must have taken place when Mary and Joseph found Jesus! The Bible doesn't say this, but I believe Mary did what any mother would have done in the same situation. I believe that she ran to Jesus and He ran to her and they embraced in a tight hug of sweet fellowship.

Later on in Luke we are going to read the story that Jesus told about a son who left home and spent his inheritance on sinful living. He never lost his relationship with his father but the fellowship was spoiled. Finally the young man came to his senses and got up out the filthy hog pen of his life—and do you know what he did? Did he call his dad to come get him? Did he send a messenger to tell his dad he was sorry? No. He got up and returned to where he had left his father. And when his old dad saw his son returning, Jesus said the father *ran* to meet his son and threw his arms around his son and kissed him.

Today, God the Father is waiting for some of you to return to Him. When you do, do you think God is going to condemn you or criticize you or punish you? No, my friend, He is going to welcome you with open arms; He is going to embrace you with His grace; He is going to enfold you with His love; He is going to shower you with His mercy. Have you lost Jesus? He's waiting for you to seek Him and find Him and fellowship with Him.

## OUTLINE

### YOU CAN LOSE:

1. A sense of fellowship with Jesus—But you can't lose your relationship with Him.
2. A sense of Jesus' presence—Even though you were close to Him at one time.
3. Intimacy with Jesus when you take steps away from—thinking He is still with you.

### YOUR FELLOWSHIP WITH JESUS CAN BE RESTORED WHEN YOU:

1. Admit that you've left Him
2. Persistently begin to seek Him
3. Return to where you left Him



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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes