

Have you ever taken out the family photo album at Christmas time? Did you notice that the majority of pictures are of the children when they were in the first 10 years of their life. Not so many taken during the teenage years. Why is that? Is it because when they were small, they were especially cute and innocent? They tended to view you, the parent, as something special, someone who could do no wrong? But what happened in the teenage years? Not as many pictures. Why? Well, your teenager was starting to break away from you, and wanting to be more with their friends. In addition, their view of you changed. They began to see the chinks in your armor. You went from being the smartest person on the planet to the dumbest and most unfair person on the planet. As a result, you were not as determined to take as many pictures of this child as you used to.

When we look at the child Jesus Christ, we have to say, we don't have many pictures of him at all until he was age 30. The majority of the story of his life is from age 30-33. We hear about his birth in Bethlehem, how the wise men came to visit him when he was several months old, how his family fled for a couple of years to Egypt when King Herod put out an order to kill all baby boys under 2 in Bethlehem. That's about it for his childhood. We have just one story that took place in his pre-teen years. That was when he was 12 years of age. After this information is shared with us, no information until Jesus is 30 years of age. Why? Maybe it was because the Lord wanted us to keep our focus on the main reason Jesus came. His ministry to be our Savior from sin. That focused walk began when he was 30. If that was the case, why even mention a story when he was 12? It is because the Lord wanted to make it clear, that even in his pre-teen or teenage years, Jesus was not a rebellious kid, but a kid who was already focused on his mission. To be our substitute. To be about his father's business. Obedience is a word that describes Jesus. Let's take a closer look at: "Perfect Obedience for a Perfect Reason!"

The silence of the Scriptures about Jesus' childhood indicates that He grew up like any other boy in Nazareth—nothing terribly out of the ordinary. He played with kids in the neighborhood, helped out at home, learned his father's carpentry business, all without the stain of sin. And I think we can actually take comfort in this fact. Jesus lived our ordinary life for us. He was one of us completely so that we would be one of His completely. Luke summarizes the silent years of Jesus' life this way, "He increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man." Never got into trouble. Always did his chores with joy. Looked for extra chores to do around the house. Obedient so that we who are disobedient might share in His perfect Sonship.

The parents of Jesus were quite spiritual. They studied the Old Testament Scriptures. They worshiped on the Sabbath day at the local synagogue. They honored the O.T. festivals such as Passover, Tabernacles and Passover. In fact, Joseph fulfilled his duties as the head of the family and faithfully kept the requirement that every male was to appear at the temple in Jerusalem for the Passover. It was a seven day festival. Mary went with her husband, even though she was not required to go. In Mary and Joseph we have a couple of fine examples of true fatherhood and motherhood—husband and wife helping each other remain faithful, and raising their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. When Jesus was twelve years old they brought him along to Jerusalem, though ordinarily it was at the age of 13 when a boy took his place with the men of Israel.

And now we get to the more well-known part of this story. After the feast was over, Mary and Joseph began the trip back home, to Nazareth. Now remember, back then, walking was the main mode of transportation. Often, people would travel in big groups – it was safer, and the time went by faster. I picture Mary and Joseph traveling with their extended family, friends, and fellow Jews who lived up north. In groups like these, the adults would often walk together, and

the children would separate into their own group to play and do other things, just as children do today. It was a three-day walk back to Nazareth, and so on the first night of their trip back home, Mary and Joseph set up camp and looked for Jesus among the group. But they couldn't find him. He wasn't with the other children. He wasn't with their relatives, their friends. Jesus was missing. He was gone, without a trace.

If you were a parent, and you couldn't find your child, you would probably start to panic, after awhile, and rightly so. There are all kinds of bad reasons why children go missing. Mary and Joseph were very upset, and so they returned to Jerusalem, and looked for him. A day out of town, a day back to town, a day looking for him. All kinds of questions, I'm sure, were racing through their minds, questions like, "Is he lost? Has he been abducted? Is he alive? Is he hurt?" Finally, we are told, they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking questions. I picture Mary and Joseph coming around the corner and there is Jesus, the twelve year old boy, interacting with the teachers at the temple. We are told in verse 47 that "everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers." And then, Mary rebuked Jesus by saying, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you." But Jesus, the twelve year old boy, doesn't respond by saying, "I'm sorry." Instead, he teaches his parents something that they didn't expect to learn that day. He says in verse 49: "Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know that must be about my Father's business?"

Jesus was obedient first of all to His Father in heaven. His work was to do the will of Him who sent Him. He had to be about His Father's business. That business involved teaching the people the Word of God, and so we are not surprised to learn that even before He reached the age when He would have been acknowledged by the rabbis, Jesus was with the teachers in the temple. A child was instructing His elders. Did they have any idea that they were being taught by Son of God Himself in the unlikely form of a twelve year old boy?

For a brief moment of motherly panic, Mary forgot who Jesus' Father actually was. She said, "Your father and I have sought you anxiously," meaning Joseph, not the Father in heaven, by whose Spirit Jesus had been conceived within her. Forgetting that fact, she looked for Jesus in all the wrong places. Now if that happens so easily with the mother of our Lord, how much more easily does it happen to us? When we panic, when our life is in disarray, when our children are sick or running amuck, when our marriage is on the rocks, or our financial situation is threatened, we often forget who Jesus is. And so we're tempted to search in all the wrong places, in man-centered philosophies and pop psychology and worldly advice. Such things have the appearance of wisdom. But sitting almost unnoticed among these wise doctors and great teachers of our day is the Boy Jesus. He has no credentials, holds no advanced degrees, has no teaching position at a leading university. But don't be fooled by outward appearances. The words that come from Jesus' mouth utterly amaze and surpass the wisdom of the experts. The twelve year old boy in the temple is the Christ and God Almighty. Jesus is still to be found in the temple of His true humanity. Seek Him in His Word and preaching. He is still about His Father's business, teaching us and comforting us and giving out His gifts of life and deliverance and hope.

Luke says that when the holy family returned to Nazareth, Jesus was obedient to His father and mother. This was part of His work of keeping the Law perfectly for us. Though He is the Lord of heaven and earth, He does not consider it too low to be obedient to His parents. When Joseph asked him to sweep up the wood shavings in His carpenter's shop, He did that. When Mary asked Him to take out the garbage or help with dinner, He did those things joyfully, lovingly, perfectly. Once again we are reminded the lengths and the depths to which God has

gone to reach down to us and to save us. God the Son, the One through whom all things were created, became an adolescent, for you and me. He came to keep the commandments that you and I break on a regular basis.

Think of all the times when you were a teen that you hollered or showed disrespect toward your mother or father. You hung up on them on the phone, you told lies, you did things behind their backs. You weren't always cheerful and kind to them. You and I have fallen far short of honoring and obeying God's representatives as we should. We must confess we are rebellious children.

But it is precisely here that Jesus' perfect obedience provides a comfort for us. He became obedient where we are disobedient. He was the perfect child of His parents, while we were imperfect. He gives us His perfect obedience as a free gift. It's like having an older brother who never did anything wrong, who takes all the blame for the bad things we do, and who gives us all the credit for what He did. Jesus has provided us with the white bathrobe of his righteousness that we need to stand spotless and pure before our God oneday.

Jesus was obedient even to the point of death. The cross is woven throughout this episode. It was, after all, the festival of the Passover, the feast in which a lamb was killed, its blood poured out, and its flesh eaten in remembrance of the exodus in which the people of Israel were freed from slavery and death. Twenty-one years later, Jesus would again be in Jerusalem for the Passover, and this time to take His place in the Passover as the Lamb Himself, whose blood is our freedom from slavery to sin and death. His body broken. His blood poured out. Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. Not only did Jesus keep the laws of God perfectly for us, but He also died and paid the price for all the sins we have ever or will commit.

For three days Mary would feel the loss of her Son, when He had to be about His Father's business. She would keep all these things that happened in her heart, even though she didn't understand them. Mary surely recalled this day in the temple as she stood at the foot of her Son's cross. She had lost him for 3 days when he was 12. At the cross, she lost him again for 3 days. This time to death and the grave, only to receive Him back again on the third day, risen from the dead. Here Jesus said, "Why did you seek me?" Later angels would announce at the tomb, "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" Jesus had to be about His Father's business, dying and rising, to save Mary and you and me and the world from the wrath that our sins deserve.

Jesus had been unfairly scolded by His mother in the temple when He was twelve. He had been innocent. He was only doing what His Father in heaven had given Him to do. So it was also on the cross. He was punished for sins that were not His own. And that too was the Father's will: that His sinless Son should become our sin, so that we might stand sinless before God. His perfect obedience means that we are forgiven and that we can now joyfully and confidently be about our Father's business in our lives.

Perfect obedience for a perfect reason. The reason was to be our substitute. To rescue us. To make us part of God's family forever. It's a wonderful thing to look at the pictures of the life of Christ. From childhood, to pre-teen to adult, every one is a Kodak moment. A precious moment, that is now scanned into our hearts forever. Amen.