

THE BOY JESUS COMING OF AGE

Luke 2:41-52

"Every year His parents traveled to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival. ⁴² When He was 12 years old, they went up according to the custom of the festival. ⁴³ After those days were over, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but His parents did not know it. ⁴⁴ Assuming He was in the traveling party, they went a day's journey. Then they began looking for Him among their relatives and friends. ⁴⁵ When they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for Him. ⁴⁶ After three days, they found Him in the temple complex sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷ And all those who heard Him were astounded at His understanding and His answers. ⁴⁸ When His parents saw Him, they were astonished, and His mother said to Him, 'Son, why have You treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for You.' ⁴⁹ 'Why were you searching for Me?' He asked them. 'Didn't you know that I had to be in My Father's house?' ⁵⁰ But they did not understand what He said to them. ⁵¹ Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth and was obedient to them. His mother kept all these things in her heart. ⁵² And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and with people."

INTRODUCTION

Oscar Wilde (1854-1900), an Irish poet and playwright known for his flamboyant lifestyle, once joked, "You're only young once, but you can be immature indefinitely." He admitted growing older is automatic but growing up is not. For people who never really grow up, their immaturity is more of a tragedy than a joke. Coming of Age, arriving in life at a place of personal maturity, is understood as becoming mentally and emotionally well-developed and able to assume responsibility for one's own actions. It's a willingness to admit the quality of our life is the result of the quality of the choices we make; especially choosing long-term progress over short-term pleasure. Maturity also includes awareness of the correct time and place to behave; knowing when to act according to the circumstances and the society in which one lives.

Some people give us an impression of being much more mature than they are. A mature-looking, well-groomed lady made an appointment with a marriage counselor. She told him flat out: "I would like to divorce my husband." He replied, "Well, do you have any grounds?" She answered, "Why yes. We have almost an acre." The puzzled counselor responded, "You don't understand. What I want to know is have you and your husband built up a grudge over the years?" This finely dressed lady answered, "Actually, we haven't, but we do have a nice carport." At this remark, the counselor shook his head and said, "Ma'am, I'm sorry, but I just don't see any reason why you should divorce your husband." The lady looked at the counselor and said to him, "But he's so frustrating! That man can't carry on an intelligent conversation."

We are continuing our look at the earthly boyhood of the Son of God. The Outline Points of Today's message, The Boy Jesus Coming of Age, are Passive Immaturity and Purposeful Maturity.

I. PASSIVE IMMATURITY

This unofficial list of **The Property Laws of a Toddler** (often defined as children between 1-2 ½ years old), seems to support what King David confessed in **Psalms 51:5**, "For I was born a sinner—yes, from the moment my mother conceived me" (NLT): **1.** If I like it, it's mine. **2.** If it's in my hand, it's mine. **3.** If I can take it from you, it's mine. **4.** If I had it a little while ago, it's mine. **5.** If it's mine, it must never appear to be yours in any way. **6.** If I'm doing or building something, all the pieces are mine. **7.** If it looks just like mine, it's mine. **8.** If I saw it first, it's mine. **9.** If you are playing with something and you put it down, it automatically becomes mine. **10.** If it's broken, it's yours.

Such infantile behavior confirms that children (along with the rest of us) generally think they are the center of the universe. Counselors have identified common self-centered behaviors that are often

displayed by childish adults who have yet to achieve emotional maturity to match their physical maturity. Some are obvious, but some may not be as obvious to us. Just to name a few:

1) Emotional Escalations (Tantrums): Young children often cry, get mad, are quickly irritated, or pout when they do not get their way. Adults who are truly grownup seldom do.

2) Refusal to Accept Responsibility. Setbacks in relationships, school, or the workplace are never, ever their fault. They reject accountability for their mistakes, falsely convincing themselves other people or circumstances are the problem. They are stuck in repetitive failure patterns because they cannot face the truth.

3) Impulsivity (or as therapists say, "poor impulse control"). Children strike out impulsively when they feel hurt or mad. They speak recklessly or take impulsive action without pausing to think of the potential consequences. Instead of listening to others' viewpoints, they impulsively interrupt them. True adults resist the impulse to shoot out hurtful words or actions. They calm themselves. They then think through the problem, seeking more information and analyzing options. In the following story, a little girl sitting on her grandfather's lap was probably closer to being grownup than immature. As he read her a bedtime story, from time to time she would take her eyes off the book and reach up to touch his wrinkled cheek. She would alternately stroke her own cheek, then his again. Finally she spoke up, "Grandpa, did God make you?" "Yes, sweetheart," he answered, "God made me a long time ago." "Oh," she paused, "Grandpa, did God make me too?" "Yes, indeed, honey," he said, "God made you just a little while ago." Feeling their respective faces again, she said, "God's getting better at it, isn't He?"

4) Lack of a Conscience. If emotionally mature adults 'lose their cool' or express anger inappropriately, they can see with hindsight that their behavior was out of line with their value system and steps should be taken to apologize for and/or prevent it being repeated. Children who have not yet internalized mature guidelines of respectful behavior toward others lack the inner voice to judge them for what's in line or out of line. They justify themselves by blaming others. "Well, I only did this because you did so and so. . . ."

If we are responsibly mature adults, we've learned that being passive about our maturity is the best way to prolong such immaturity. Today's text confirms **Jesus**, as a boy, was purposeful about His maturity.

II. PURPOSEFUL MATURITY

"Every year His parents traveled to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival.⁴² When He was 12 years old, they went up according to the custom of the festival.⁴³ After those days were over, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but His parents did not know it.⁴⁴ Assuming He was in the traveling party, they went a day's journey. Then they began looking for Him among their relatives and friends.⁴⁵ When they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for Him."

God's law commanded Jewish men to come to Jerusalem for three festivals: Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles (**Exodus 23:14-17; Exodus 34:22-23; Deuteronomy 16:16**). It was the custom in the first century for devout Jews living over 25 miles from Jerusalem to travel to the Temple but once a year. God did not require women to attend these festivals. By Luke specifying, "Every year His parents traveled to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival," which he may have learned from Mary herself, the Bible emphasizes how seriously **Jesus'** parents took their relationship with the LORD! The complete Festival lasted seven days. Many found this too much of a burden upon themselves or their host relatives. They would leave the second day after the actual Passover celebration. Evidently, Joseph and Mary customarily chose to remain throughout the full seven days; another indication of their dedication to worship Israel's God.

People sometimes joke about how irresponsible **Jesus'** parents were to leave Jerusalem without Him and to have no idea for three days where He was. They ask, "How can you misplace the Son of God!" But the Bible places no blame upon Joseph and Mary over this incident. Women caring for children could not travel quickly, so they often left a bit earlier than the men, who traveled together in a second group. At 12, **Jesus** had reached the transition year between childhood and manhood. Mary believed **Jesus** was safely traveling with Joseph. Joseph assumed **Jesus** decided to travel with the other children and the women for

one more year. It was not until their two groups met at their designated stopping point at the close of their first day's travel that they discovered **Jesus** was not with either of them. "Then they began looking for Him among their relatives and friends." It was not until then that they realized there was a need "to search for Him." It was not safe to travel at night. Starting out next morning, it would have taken them most of the day to return to Jerusalem. They would have first searched for Him where they last saw Him, in the company of local relatives or friends. It would not have been until the morning of the third day that they would have broadened their search and then wisely looked for Him "in the Temple complex."

During the Passover Festival, the leading religious "teachers" made themselves available to the Jewish people to give them opportunity to discuss God's law. They customarily sat in the courtyards outside of the Temple, where people could sit at their feet while "listening to them and asking them questions." At this stage of His life, "the boy Jesus" is not a teacher but a listener. His questions were to probe the depth of understanding of the true nature of God's laws being taught by Israel's foremost teachers.

Vs. 47, "And all those who heard Him were astounded at His understanding and His answers." The "teachers" and "all those who heard Him" in the crowd of learners were "astounded" at the "understanding" of God's law **Jesus** displays by thoughtful "questions." "Astounded" is often translated, "amazed" or "filled with wonder." "Dumbfounded!" would be appropriate here. These men had spent their adult lives studying and meditating upon God's laws. They were filled with awe one so young and with little formal training in the Jewish Scriptures could possess such "keen insights" about them. "Understanding" is from a Greek verb meaning "to put together in a meaningful way." Jewish parents knew they were successful if their children first gained "knowledge" of God's law and essential facts of the world around them, and secondly gained the "good sense" to put such "knowledge" to good use by making them useful to God and to others.

Vs. 48, "When His parents saw Him, they were astonished, and His mother said to Him, 'Son, why have You treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for You.'" The Greek verb for "astonished" literally means, "to be struck with a blow." Joseph and Mary were so "smitten" with relief due to their anxiety while searching for Him, and they were so "smitten with panic" over the implications of finding **Jesus** in the imposing company of Israel's foremost "teachers," that they were almost "struck senseless." This is the one definite clue God gives us, as He gave Joseph and Mary on that day, that **Jesus'** fully normal childhood, to that point, is coming to an end. This overwhelms them, at that moment.

Vs. 49, "'Why were you searching for Me?' He asked them. 'Didn't you know that I had to be in My Father's house?'" The translation, "'I must be about My Father's business,'" is unlikely. "Searching" for their "boy," Joseph and Mary were more concerned with *where* He was than *what* He was doing. These are the first known words known spoken by **Jesus** as a boy. He announces to His parents He's now aware God is His true "father"; not Joseph. His intense study and memorization of the central passages of Scripture in the 12th year of His earthly life, in preparation for His rite of passage into Jewish adulthood as a "son of the law," a "Bar Mitzvah," shortly after His 13th birthday, has allowed God the Father to bring clarity to His unique identity as "'the Son of God,'" as the angel Gabriel announced to Mary as a virgin (**Luke 1:35**).

Vss. 50-51: "But they did not understand what He said to them. ⁵¹ Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth and was obedient to them. His mother kept all these things in her heart." Mary "did not understand" the full implications of this event in the Temple in the life of **Jesus** at age 12. The phrase, "kept all these things" refers to her attempt to carefully recall previous events in **Jesus'** life while comparing "all these things" with this new event. Despite her deep faith in God's promises concerning **Jesus**, and despite her great trust in God directing the course of her life for His glory, Mary at times wasn't sure how to react to the surprises or the demands God's will placed upon her or upon her Son. Throughout **Jesus'** normal boyhood, Mary and Joseph focused upon enjoying **Jesus** as a dutiful child, the way all good parents do, while putting off as long as possible thoughts of leaving them or placing Himself in harm's way.

Once Joseph and Mary became aware that **Jesus** now realized His Divine identity as "the Son of the Most High" God (**Luke 1:32**) conceived by "the Holy Spirit" to "save [God's] people from their sins (**Matthew 1:20-21; Luke 1:35**), which His parents had known even before His birth, would it surprise us if we read in Luke's text that they "worshiped Him, saying, 'You are certainly God's Son!'" (**Matthew 14:33**, NASB), as His disciples would later proclaim of Him? Would this seem appropriate while Joseph and Mary were with **Jesus** in the only Temple on earth where Israel's God met with His people? But instead of them bowing before Him, we read **Jesus** "went down with them and came to Nazareth and was obedient to them." The Greek word for "obedient" describes Him as deliberately placing Himself under His parents' God-given authority. Realization of His awesome identity as the Son of God did not fill Him with prideful contempt of His merely human parents. **Jesus** made no demand of them to be given more control of His life. Though He was the perfect Son of God, He was also the perfect son of Joseph and Mary.

Vs. 52, "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and with people." The Greek word for "increased" was used of pioneers purposely forging ahead in exploring and discovering new lands. Luke presents to us a word picture of **Jesus** purposely growing in knowledge of God's will and of the world around Him, in developing His physical strength, and in learning how to interact productively with God and with people. In other words, Luke is telling us **Jesus** took responsibility for His development. He applied Himself physically, mentally, spiritually, and socially to be fully ready for His mission on earth as God's Messiah and our Savior. His progress was not passive but active.

CONCLUSION

In the 2018 Winter Olympics being held now in Pyeongchang in the Republic of Korea, Karen Chen, winner of the 2017 U. S. title, is our best hope for a medal in Women's Figure Skating. Not long ago, figure skater Michelle Kwan was winning five World Skating Championships for the United States (1996, 1998, 2000, 2001, 2003), tying her for the most world titles by an American. Kwan's nine world medals overall (including Olympic silver and bronze medals) is the all-time record for an American skater in any discipline. How did she achieve such a stellar results?

When Michelle Kwan was 13 and but a junior U. S. skater being trained for a later Olympics, she submitted her application for senior competition at the 1994 Olympics in Norway. She did so without first getting the approval of U. S. Olympic coach Frank Carroll. She then set about to do everything in her power to prepare herself for a spot on the Olympic team. Michelle Kwan pleaded with her coach to allow her to compete with skaters older than her, with more polished skills and better knowledge of proper conditioning, to train her for peak performance at the right time. Coach Carroll was still an unknown coach and Kwan was then an obscure skater. He was caught in an awkward dilemma of sending the precocious but eager teenager early to senior competition, where maturity is the standard of excellence, and girliness, play, and braces are frowned upon. Coach Carroll, protective of his prized student, gazed seriously at Michelle Kwan, and told her: "If you want to be a senior skater, you have to learn what it takes. You have to give up your baby feelings, saying, 'I'm tired,' or 'I'm sick.' You have to be willing to suffer." In other words, she needed to leave any lingering passivity about achieving lofty goals with her life behind her.

Kwan was delighted with her coach's consent, took his advice to heart, and from then on, spun, jumped and skated her way to unprecedented heights in figure skating. She even made the 1994 U. S. Olympic team at age 13. She practiced Purposeful Maturity and reaped the thrilling, life-changing results!