

What Were You Thinking?

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- [0 : 0 0] So we are on part four of a four-part series. We're looking at the childhood of Jesus. We've been spending the last four weeks looking at snapshots of Jesus's childhood.
- The writers of the Gospels are showing us these pictures so we can better understand Jesus and his whole mission. Better, more deeply. We've seen Jesus as an infant. He was brought to the temple by his parents.
- And there was an old man named Simeon and a prophetess named Anna. And they both declared him, having this been revealed to them by the Holy Spirit, that this was the Savior, the Redeemer, the Rescuer that God had promised.
- And then two years later, some court astrologers would come all the way from Persia to Bethlehem. And they brought gifts to this who they read would be king of the Jews.
- And it showed us that Jesus would be a king, that he is a king. And he is a king for all nations, not just for one. And we looked last week.
- [1 : 0 9] Very soon after that, Herod was a person who styled himself a king and felt threatened by the presence of this young boy who's been called king of the Jews.
- And so he ordered all of the firstborn sons in this area of Bethlehem, ages two and under, to be slaughtered. And so Jesus and his parents, Mary and Joseph, had to flee as refugees into the land of Egypt.
- Tommy preached on that last week. And if you weren't here, I'd highly recommend you checking it out online. Today we jump ahead ten years to an account when Jesus is twelve.
- The family has since returned from Egypt, and they have made their way to Galilee, into a town called Nazareth. This is a fun passage.
- It's colorful, it's a little confusing, and it's deep. And in looking at it, we're going to learn something about Jesus. We're going to learn about the Father, and we'll learn a couple things about ourselves.
- [2 : 1 3] So the Son, the Father, and us. Before we do that, let's pray. Father, we would seek to understand you more, Father.
- But you are indescribable. Ineffable. We can't understand you without you revealing yourself to us.
- And so that's why we're praying to you right now. We need your help. To understand you more deeply. Not just as an idea or as a concept. But as a person.
- We want to know you as our Father. Jesus, we want to understand you. And your mission. And in doing so, we ask that you'd help us understand ourselves as well.
- We need your help. So we ask your spirit to be here, working in our hearts and in our minds. Opening our hearts to your word. Opening your word to our hearts. This we pray. In Jesus' name.
- [3 : 3 1] Amen. Amen. So I have to say I was pretty excited when I learned I'd preach on this passage. About a boy. When he was 12.

Because, yeah, I have a boy. He's 12. I have four boys, actually. Jen and I have boys ages 4, 7, 9, and 12. And a line that we've repeated over and over.

Like a liturgy. Dozens of times. A day. What were you thinking? What were you thinking? Now I see a couple of you who have grown adult sons who are kind of nodding with a bit of schadenfreude.

Like, yes. Yes. And I see a number of you who have infant sons who look frightened. Well, not frightened enough. I know what you are.

I know what you are raising. So let me tell you a few things about boys. And some of us might be sensitive to gender distinctions.

[4 : 32] But physiologically, boys are very different than girls. There are reasons why they do what they do. The bodies of boys produce less serotonin than that of girls.

Serotonin is the hormone that suppresses impulsivity. That's true. Come on. Now, combine that with the fact that boys produce more testosterone than girls.

You can see why boys do crazy things. They act aggressively and impulsively. And when they're asked, what were you thinking? The most honest response for them is nothing.

Boys just do. They don't think. They see a drum and they bang it. They see a tree and they climb it. They wonder what it's like to fly. And then they jump. They see their sisters' green nail polish.

And they think, I could look like the Incredible Hulk. So they just paint themselves. They don't think. They just do. What were you thinking? Nothing. Here's some other differences between girls and boys.

[5 : 35] Girls have 15% more blood flow to their brains than boys. The occipital lobe of a boy develops more slowly than that of a girl. Boys have less gray matter than girls.

They have less electrical activity. Again, this doesn't seem to surprise any of us here, does it? But all of this explains why boys are horrible multitaskers. It's why they get fixated on one thing.

It's why they become zombies in front of a TV or a video game. It's why they seem to ignore or not hear their mother when the mother is standing right over them calling their name.

They really don't hear it. They can't. Like, they're physiologically not able to process their name because of the way that they're wired. Now, I mean, sometimes they're being obstinate. But really, most of the time, trust me, most of the time they just can't hear.

It's creepy. Why do I labor all of that about boys? Well, I tell it to you because of the experience that we find Jesus having when he's 12 years old.

[6 : 39] And I think it gives us some background to what's going on. Being 12, he's almost 13. The year that Jewish boys become what's called a son of the commandment or a son of the law, a full member of the synagogue, officially a man.

And just as they had been doing every year, Jesus and his family for the last several years had been traveling from Nazareth down to Jerusalem for the Passover.

And they travel through the region of Samaria. And they go in a large caravan of lots of other people, which is kind of necessary because the roads are not safe.

Samaria is not a friendly place to Israelites. It was often customary for the women and the children to be in the front and the men and the older boys to be in the back.

Because Jesus was right on the edge there between boyhood and manhood, you can imagine him bouncing back and forth between the front and the back with his mom, with his dad, and then bouncing around to his cousins, aunts, uncles, friends, family, playing, talking, walking.

[7 : 45] And they're going to celebrate the feast of the Passover, the biggest event in the trifecta of Jewish holidays. They've traveled about 80 miles over four days.

That's 20 miles a day. And at the end, they're ascending the Mount of Jerusalem. And there's pilgrims from all over the world that are streaming into the city.

200,000 people would be packed into this walled city, the time of the Passover. They pass through the gates. And there's all kinds of sights and sounds, smells, many different languages.

Jews have come over from all over the empire. It's like a big, giant video game, right? As far as, like, stimulation. There's vendors up and down the street, beggars on every corner.

Every room is rented out. The day after they arrive is the day of Passover. Jesus accompanies his parents to the temple. You know, people are lined up in rows.

[8 : 52] The gates of the temple courts are shut. And around 3 p.m., the ram's horn is blown. And everyone slays the lamb that they brought. And up and down, there's these rows of priests.

And they have these bowls. And they're collecting the blood. And then they're dousing the base of the altar with it. It is a literal bloodbath. Joseph dresses the lamb.

He throws it over his shoulder. And they head back to their room. They're going to roast the lamb on a pomegranate spit. And then they're going to go through this beautiful liturgy of the Passover meal.

Full of prayers, hand washings. And at one point in the liturgy, Jesus asks Joseph, Why is this night, this is in the liturgy, Why is this night different than every other night?

And Joseph will give a dramatic review of God delivering Israel from Egypt. The celebration will continue into the night. And then it lasts six more days.

[9 : 54] And this whole time, Jesus is in paradise. There's nothing like this in Nazareth, right? He's in paradise. He's learning also in the temple about God and about the law, about himself and his mission and his identity.

He's coming alive. And after seven days, if he was any other adolescent, how zombified would he be, right?

Or impulsive, or fixated, or oblivious. The thing is, Jesus is every other adolescent. He's every other adolescent.

Why? Because when the Son of God became incarnate, he became both fully God. And fully man. He had a fully human body. And was subject to every physical distress, sickness, condition, and vulnerability that you and I are subject to, including adolescence.

Yet he was without sin. Without sin. So did you see how he could possibly miss the caravan? Without sinning. Physiologically, being an adolescent, it would have only taken a window of 15, 20, 30 minutes to miss the departure of the caravan.

[11 : 10] And then he's stuck. He can't go running after the caravan. The roads aren't safe. He's stuck in Jerusalem, not willingly causing his family distress. Now, some people suggest that he did disobey.

But that's impossible because Scripture tells us over and over that he was without sin from start to finish, birth to crucifixion. He was blemishlessness.

He was without sin. Some suggest that staying in Jerusalem in the temple was a higher ethical priority for Jesus at this moment.

So he put that before following his parents in the caravan. Well, he had a whole week to honor his parents by telling them, hey, I'm going to stick around in a few days. But he didn't do that. So, I mean, and it could have also been a simple mix-up.

But I think this is the best explanation. I think I'm right about this. Because Luke paints such a gritty, detailed picture of Jesus. And it's frankly a story that everyone has experienced, or most of us, as a child or as a parent.

[12:18] For me, I was at Memorial Stadium when the Orioles used to play there. I was five or six. And I got lost. My parents went without me. It was my dad.

My mom was there. And I just started to cry. And I saw a police officer, so I went to him. And so he took me into, like, the security room.

What's your name? I'm Daniel B. Oh, man. That's probably what I said. And I know this because my dad found me. We went to our seats. And then 15 minutes later, there was an announcement of the PA.

Would John Beadleman come claim your child? Yeah.

So, I mean, we've all been there. Luke paints a gritty picture of Jesus. And I think we're to see the stark humanness of Jesus in this story.

[13:16] Fully God. Fully adolescent. But so what? Like, so what that he was fully adolescent? What difference does it make to me or to you? Why are we even talking about it?

Well, I think it shows us how deeply Jesus can sympathize with our weaknesses. Right down to our adolescence. He's experienced everything.

I mean, he's experienced the big stuff. Right? By the time he was crucified, he had experienced the big stuff. He had experienced the death of a family member.

This is the last we hear about Joseph. We can surmise that Joseph died somewhere between this point and when Jesus started his ministry. He's experienced the deep grief of seeing a world wracked with injustice.

The big stuff. But he's also experienced the little stuff. Like all the little things about our jobs that make us experience futility.

[14:19] Or the common cold. Or whatever is the first century equivalent of constantly misplacing our keys. Tearing our pants. Breaking our glasses.

Or a shoelace. Or getting overcharged by the cashier. Or getting into a traffic jam. Because of some protesters.

Or single tracking. I mean, he experienced the first century equivalent of all of that. He understands how all of that just kind of builds up and eats away at your soul.

He gets it. He's experienced it. I mean, how comforting is it to hear that someone has gone through the same thing that you've gone through? How comforting is it to hear you're not alone?

I remember when we were financially hit really hard in the real estate crash of 2008. And I felt pretty foolish by it.

[15:17] Like I should have somehow anticipated it. But our realtor, who was also a friend, said, you're not alone. I got slammed by this too. We're living in rural Florida. So, I mean, we're definitely not alone there.

Everyone got slammed by it there. But to hear it was really comforting. That I'm not alone. Or after a couple years on the mission field talking with a counselor.

Like I experienced some pretty dark thoughts. It's not easy living overseas. And he said, I lived overseas too. And I experienced those same thoughts.

Actually, a little worse. You're not alone. Our wonderful counselor, Jesus, begs us to talk to him about our stuff.

Because he's been through it all. From the day he was born to the day he was crucified, he experienced every temptation we can experience. He experienced the full range of human suffering, yet didn't sin.

[16 : 21] As Hebrew 4 says, We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. So, Jesus misses the caravan.

And one might think that maybe it was Joseph and Mary that were irresponsible. But Jesus was almost a man, and he was capable of joining up with the caravan, meeting them at the right place, at the right time.

When we lived in Vienna, at one point our oldest son was 7, and every day he and another 7-year-old with a 10-year-old girl and a 13-year-old boy would travel on public transportation by themselves without parents, taking the tram, walking two blocks, taking the metro 20 minutes, crossing a really busy street, going to school.

Every day, we felt fine about it. And I think in most of the world, parents feel fine about their kids at this age, like being independent, figuring stuff out on their own, being responsible. So, Joseph and Mary probably that Jesus was with the other, like either in the front of the caravan or in the back or with some cousins or friends.

[17 : 41] And not until the end of the first day did they realize he wasn't there. Where could he be? Imagine Mary's horror.

I mean, is he on the road somewhere back there, getting waylaid? Is he back in Jerusalem where there's lots of shady characters? And doesn't feel that safe either.

Imagine her embarrassment as she has to tell the whole caravan, could we go back 20 miles to Jerusalem? I kind of misplaced something. What was that? Just the second person of the Trinity.

Can we go back, please? So, they return to Jerusalem, and after another full day of looking for him in Jerusalem, they finally find him in the temple.

And he's learning. He's learning about himself, about God and his mission. These teachers, they're like the brightest around. They're like the worldwide web of Jewish wisdom.

[18 : 44] And Jesus is just clicking, clicking, clicking, like can't get enough, right? Everyone there is impressed with him, with his questions, with his answers. Very wise for his age.

And up come Mary and Joseph. And they say to Jesus, What were you thinking? What were you thinking? Why have you treated us this way? We were looking and looking and in deep distress.

And his response was a bit of a rebuke. A loving, gentle one. But he basically says, Well, what were you thinking? Where else would I have been?

I've been with my dad. I've been in my dad's house. Where else would I have gone? Now, these are the first recorded words of Jesus. In the Gospels.

Did you not know that I must be in my father's house? Because they are the first recorded words, they're extremely significant. As a matter of fact, I think these words shape how we view the whole New Testament.

[19 : 49] You could say that the main thing that the Old Testament says about God, what it reveals about God, is that God is king. That's the Old Testament. But in the New Testament, the New Testament would have us know about God, is that God is our father.

God is father. Father. It's easy to miss. I must be in my father's house. These words indicate his relationship to the father.

My father. It was a way of thinking about God. A claim to it. A relationship with God that was different and deeper than any that had been known before. That the ancient Jews would have said, Our father.

They would not have said, My father. It's different. It's deeply personal and intimate. It described the relationship Jesus had with God.

And it is a relationship into which he will bring all others who believe in his name. He will teach them to address God as father as well. And teach them to pray our father.

[20 : 55] And teach them to use the intimate word, Abba. The Aramaic word that a child uses to refer to his father intimately. Two weeks ago, we talked about what it means to be in an intimate relationship with God.

We talked about, because there's intimacy, we can just blurt out whatever it is we're thinking or feeling. We don't have to play at before God. We know that he accepts us. We can say what we think and feel. But if we want to discover the real intimacy we have with the father, the kind of intimacy that Jesus had, that he brings us into, then we probably need fixed times in our schedules to spend with him, just to be with him.

It's the kind of time the father wants, more than the occasional thought or brief conversation, but good, quality, intimate time. Some of you have never done it before.

If you've never done it before, you don't know how to do it, just put 30 minutes on your schedule. We'll start with once a week. Find 30 minutes there, block it out, and then find a space to do it.

It could be a park or a church. It could be outside or inside. I prefer to go to the crypt of the National Basilica. And be aware of the things around you as you talk to God, as you see children play on the playground, or you hear the sound of birds, or the shuffling of feet, or the whisper of voices, all the while telling him what's going on inside.

[22 : 27] I mean, there's no shortage of things from these past couple weeks to talk to God about, right? In the temple, Jesus found a safe space, a place where he could rest and be safe, sheltered, where he could eat, sleep.

Likewise, to understand God as our Father and to spend time with him means we find a safe space. The author Brennan Manning, in his book, Abba's Child, wrote in his journal, this is a journal that he quotes in his book, he wrote in his journal, to feel safe is to stop living in my head and sink down into my heart and feel liked and accepted, not having to hide anymore and distract myself with books, television, movies, ice cream, shallow conversation.

It's staying in the present moment and not escaping into the past or projecting into the future, alert and attentive to the now, feeling relaxed and not nervous or jittery, no need to impress or dazzle others or draw attention to myself, unselfconscious, a new way of being with myself, a new way of being in the world, calm, unafraid, no anxiety about what's going to happen next, loved and valued, just being together as an end in itself.

Isn't that attractive? Don't we all want that? So we've learned something about Jesus, that he was fully human, maybe more human than we thought or realized.

We've learned something about the Father, that we're closer to him, that we can have more intimacy than we thought. But we also have a couple things to learn about ourselves. Two quick things, okay?

[24 : 25] The first is we don't understand Jesus as much as we think we do. So I think this is what Luke is really writing. I mean, he's giving us a record of Jesus and he's writing for a man named Theophilus.

And he has like a very similar story, bookending this gospel of Luke. There's a couple in the beginning, they leave Jerusalem without Jesus. They come back and they discover like they didn't really know who he was and his mission.

And at the end of Luke, there's the two men that are walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus and Jesus is with them and they don't recognize him either. Now Mary and Joseph had been visited by an angel.

They had heard what Simeon and Anna had declared about him. They had had shepherds and Persian magicians visit them. And yet they still didn't quite understand Jesus and his mission.

Verse 50 says, And they, Mary and Joseph, did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. Now if they didn't fully understand him, then surely we have work to do.

[25 : 30] This is for those of us who have known Jesus our whole lives and it's for those of us who are skeptics, who also have our minds made up of who Jesus is. Jesus is not where Moses, excuse me, Jesus is not where Mary and Joseph expected him to be.

He was also not who they expected him to be. We too need to be careful we don't make up our mind about who Jesus is. We need to diligently search for him, praying, opening the scriptures, not approaching them with our minds made up, but letting the spirit speak through them.

The second thing is to learn about our mission. When Jesus is saying that he had to be in his father's house, another way to translate that is that I have to be about my father's business.

The father's business is nothing less than the renewal of all things. When Jesus brings us into a relationship with his father, he brings us into his mission too.

We tell others about the good news of Jesus. We find ourselves transformed. We engage our vocations wholeheartedly, knowing they contribute to the flourishing of our neighborhoods, our city, our world.

[26 : 48] We work towards mercy and justice, coming to the aid of the unloved, the unspoken for, the widow, the poor, the refugee.

We'll spend the next three weeks exploring God's renewal of all things and what that means for the church of the Advent. there's something we'll do right now.

One of our members put on our Facebook page yesterday, there are six things we can do to care for refugees right now to address the situation. The first one was pray, just pray.

She's absolutely right. It's in prayer that we exercise authority and power to carry out the father's mission. So in a few minutes, we're going to pray for refugees.

We're going to spend quality time with our father, telling him exactly what we think and we feel about this, knowing that Jesus and his incarnation identifies with them.

[27 : 53] Let's pray.