

THE PRETEEN BOY JESUS

Luke 2:41-52

Key Verse: 2:49

"Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"

Luke the historian and evangelist carefully observes the twelve-year-old boy Jesus in the temple. Apart from this incident, which Luke alone narrates, we know nothing of Jesus' boyhood. We give much credit to St. Luke for this. Many Bible scholars have endless controversial arguments on this passage due to their lack of faith. But it is a simple story of the boy Jesus who gives us a good example that everybody can follow and should follow if they are normal preteens or teens. Also, we learn from this story that we should respect the preteens and teenagers as whole men and as the future leaders of the nation as well as of the whole world.

First, the boy Jesus at the Passover (41-45).

The Passover had historical significance for the people of Israel, and it was celebrated for seven days. The Passover was the climactic event through which God delivered the suffering Israelites from Pharaoh's rule. We call this event the Exodus. The Exodus was possible where there was a man of God, Moses. Moreover, it had God's definite purpose for his people. As we know well, his people could not maintain God's blessing in the promised land. His people had to know God's grace and mission for them. But they only liked milk and honey, and they abandoned God. Because of this, God trained them 430 years in Egypt where only ungodly people lived. Among ungodly people, they had experienced enough miseries for 430 years. After training was over, God delivered them so that they might be a shepherd nation and a kingdom of priests. Exodus 19:5-6 says, "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." These verses reveal God's grace and glorious mission for his people. After the Exodus, the people of Israel made an annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem to remember God's grace of deliverance. It was a joyous occasion for them. Every year Jesus' parents also went to Jerusalem to observe the Passover Feast (41). According to Jewish custom, it was legal for boys from age twelve to participate in the festivals and ceremonies of the Law of Moses (42). As soon as Jesus became twelve, his parents took him to the Passover Feast.

At that time, Jesus was a preteen boy. What then do we know about preteen boys or teenagers? We know that they are getting beautiful, like blossoming flowers. Mostly, the preteens eat a lot. Most boys and girls who went to Jerusalem might have enjoyed eating Jerusalem bagels. The preteens are curious about many things. The preteens are pure and sweet. Still, we think they can't do much. But that's not true. When we look back, the preteen days were the most beautiful days with the most beautiful dreams and hope. Many great men of history were those who had fulfilled their childhood dreams. The preteens are most energetic and capable of doing many things. The preteens can learn five languages before the age of twelve. Most of all, they are humble; they have a learning mind. At the same time, they are ambitious. It is said that when Napoleon Bonaparte was a teenager, he tried to catch a rainbow in the sky, riding a horse all day long. But he was not exhausted.

They also have an inborn desire to know the truth in their deep hearts. There is a funny story. One little boy asked his mother, "How was I born?" His mother said, embarrassedly, "You came out of my bellybutton." We can laugh off the question as a little boy's idle words. But in light of philosophy, it is an ontological question. The boy wanted to know where he came from and where he was going back to. In other words, he wanted to know the truth, for knowing the truth is knowing where I came from and where I am going back to. In light of the preteen Jesus, the time of the preteens is a time of great learning and the time of building one's life foundation. Therefore, we must have a basic respect for the preteens and teenagers as whole men. Because they are a little bit mischievous, if we ignore them it is a great mistake. We must take care of them very prayerfully.

After the festival, Joseph and Mary left. They say that it was the custom when returning from the Feast for women to go on ahead with the younger children, and men to follow with the older boys. The boy Jesus was in transition from preteen to teen, for he was twelve years old. So Mary thought that Jesus was with Joseph, and Joseph thought that he was with Mary. At the end of a day's journey, they began looking for him among relatives and friends. To their consternation, they found that Jesus was lost (44,45). They felt as if their hearts were failing. Early the next

morning, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. It was a day's journey on foot. When they arrived, it was already night. The next morning they went around Jerusalem to look for him.

On the third day, his parents found him in the temple courts sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions (46). Everyone who heard him was amazed at his questions and answers. We don't know what they were asking and answering, but the preteen boy had questions which took three days and nights to ask; it is not an ordinary event in history. Here we learn the preteens and teenagers are full of questions. Usually people think teens are trouble-makers and that they make a fuss about trifles. But that's not the whole story. Goethe said, "Teens are the most capable of imagination." It is common sense that one's integrity is formed during the teenage years. Jesus had no time for Bible study. But he had. He used his festival time for Bible study. Especially, people were amazed by his questions, not because the boy Jesus' questions were highly scholastic, but his questions were fundamental and universal for all mankind. People were amazed at his answers because the boy Jesus could answer all the questions asked by sophisticated theologians. It was possible for Jesus to answer their questions because he only answered from the Bible.

As we know, most students usually have no more than one or two questions. But Jesus, at age twelve, had so many questions to ask. After three days, he was still answering their questions and asking them his questions. Here we learn that the time of the preteens is a time of great learning and a time of overflowing stamina and energy. There is a romantic story. A rich father wanted to make his daughter a world-famous pianist. But she didn't make progress. One night, from a dark room, a fantastic piano sound was heard. It was Chopin. He had a great desire to learn piano. So he memorized music pieces, made a piano keyboard out of paper and practiced. He thought his parents and sister were out. So he went into his sister's room for the first time and played her piano. He became a world-famous pianist at age twelve.

Therefore we must help our children to study diligently, acknowledging that they have overflowing stamina and desire to know the truth. We also must pray that God may restore the basis of our educational system from evolution to creation faith. Most of all, we must teach our children to have the fear of God. Proverbs 1:7 says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline." We must teach our children to have the fear of God as a matter of life and death.

Second, the boy Jesus studied the Bible wholeheartedly.

The boy Jesus was also a diligent Bible student. The mood of the Feast had calmed down and everyone else was busy to go back home. The boy Jesus, however, did not go back with his parents; he remained in the temple. For three days, the boy Jesus, sitting among the teachers, was listening to them and asking questions.

In light of his answer to his parents, "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" we learn that Jesus wanted to be in his Father's house. The boy Jesus was a pre-teen. He seemed to have been too young to talk about God. But the boy Jesus was talking about God with such concentration for the last three days that he forgot he was hungry. He also forgot to go back home with his parents. This part does not teach that Jesus was an extraordinary person. This part teaches us that all preteens and teenagers should grow as Jesus did. Here we learn that Bible study should be the first priority. If it becomes the second priority no one can understand the promise and mystery of the kingdom of God.

John Calvin was a very ordinary young man. Probably he began to have a burning desire to know God from his childhood. He wrote "The Institutes of the Christian Religion" when he was 25 years old. It is totally unbelievable that he wrote such a great book when he was so young. Obviously, he studied the Bible diligently during his teenage time. Illinois is called "The Land of Lincoln." We are still greatly inspired when we think of President Abraham Lincoln, especially when we think of his honesty, courage, and love of truth. How could he be so? They say that he had a burning desire to know the Bible truth. They say that he educated himself through Bible study. He also came to know the truth of God through Bible study. As a result, he declared freedom for African Americans. Our nation suffered much through the Civil War, but the fruit of righteousness is remarkable.

Third, Jesus knew that he had two fathers (49).

Jesus' parents were astonished to see him. At that moment, his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you" (48b). How did he answer? "Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" (49) "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" When the boy Jesus answered, he meant he had two fathers, a physical father and a heavenly Father. When we are young, we need a physical father who can protect us and help us grow in humanity. And when we grow up, we need our heavenly Father who can help us to grow in the image of God, receive eternal life and inherit the kingdom of God. Here we learn a universal truth. When we are young we must have a good relationship with our parents. But when we grow older, we must have a relationship with our heavenly Father. Those who have a good relationship with their heavenly Father can have a good relationship with others. John 15:5 says, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

Fourth, the boy Jesus had the desire to do God's work.

Until now, the boy Jesus had worked hard as an obedient carpenter's apprentice under his human father. But for the first time, he did something without permission. So Mary asked, "Why have you treated us like this?" Jesus answered in verse 49, "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" According to the King James Version, it meant, "Didn't you know I must be about my Father's business?" Up until now, Jesus had been an obedient child. But Jesus could not be forever a good child of his parents. Jesus, in the corner of his heart, had a holy mission to do his heavenly Father's business. When he was twelve, "must" was already in his heart.

In the boy Jesus, we learn a universal truth: Man must work hard to eat three meals a day, but that is not everything. Man is created to carry out the holy mission of God: Man is created to live for the glory of God (Lk 1:74,75). If we do so, we are happy indeed. Everyone has the heart's desire to become a man of holy mission because God made man so. When Dr. Schweitzer was eight years old, he prayed, "Lord, bless me to study well so that I may serve you the rest of my life after study." He prayed like this, not because he was a religious genius, but because his inner person compelled him to do so. While he was studying the humanities, theology, music and medicine, God's high calling was always in his heart. After study, God blessed him to go to Africa as a missionary where he served for 52 years. When he died, even Soviet newspapers recognized him as a light of the 20th century. Of course, there is a conflict between "my work" and God's work; we can't avoid this conflict.

Fifth, he was obedient to them (51-52).

This part tells us what the boy Jesus did after coming back from the Feast. Look at verse 51a. "Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them." It is remarkable that the boy Jesus was obedient after his unusual experience in the Jerusalem temple. It is remarkable that the boy Jesus was obedient when his parents did not understand him. The boy Jesus came back to his carpentry work and he was obedient to his parents. At that time, carpentry was demanding, including the erection of houses, the making of all kinds of furniture, household equipment and agricultural implements. The boy Jesus had to work hard. But still, he was obedient. How beautiful the boy Jesus was! Probably Mary felt God was with him. So she treasured all these things in her heart. "And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men" (52).

In today's passage we learn that all American preteens and teens must imitate the preteen boy Jesus by studying the Bible as of first importance until they know God and his holy mission. When they do so, they will grow in the image of Jesus. And God will make America a kingdom of priests and a holy nation through them.