

## 1“THE DANGER OF LOSING SIGHT OF JESUS”

(Luke 2:40-52)

*And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon him. Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast. And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it. But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance. And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him. And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers. And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? Behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing. And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business? And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them. And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man.*

Note some important features from the text. In verse 40, the term "child" means "little child," but in verse 43, a different word is used which means "the boy." In verse 40, the word "grew" is in the passive voice, which means that no force of will was necessary on Jesus' part; the growth was inevitable. The word apparently refers to physical growth. The statement that he "waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom," indicates that His inner growth kept pace with His physical growth.

There is a volume of meaning in verse 41. Note that "His parents (plural) went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover." The plural word "parents" unfolds the entire story to us. You see, only the male head of the family was mandated by the Law to attend the required Jewish feasts in Jerusalem each year. The attendance of the wife and mother was optional. What a testimonial to the spiritual character and hunger of Mary that she went every year!

"When Jesus was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast" (vs. 42). A very important time had come for the young boy, the time of His "Bar Mitzvah," or His becoming "a son of the Law." This marked His official induction into manhood and into the full privileges of the Jewish Law. This also provides the probable answer to the charge of parental delinquency that is sometimes made against Mary and Joseph because of this story. Normally the travel caravans from areas of the country divided into male and female groups. The women usually traveled a short distance ahead of the men, and the men "cleaned up camp" before departing. Up to this time, Jesus had always traveled with the women when the Galilee caravan had gone to Jerusalem for the Passover Feast. So Joseph undoubtedly thought Jesus was doing what He usually did. But since He had reached His Bar Mitzvah, the time of His majority as a Jewish male, Mary naturally would assume that He has begun traveling with the men. So neither Mary nor Joseph was delinquent, just careless.

Verse 43 says, "When they had fulfilled the days." Can you imagine what the days of the Passover meant to Jesus? They were days of absolutely holy delight, in which His pure heart would

swell with growing awareness of some connection between Him and all the features and functions of the Passover.

Please read every phrase of this text with great care. The story closes with this monumental verse, "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man." The word "increased" is an engineering term which literally means "to chop forward," the word for a corps of engineers clearing a pathway. Previously (vs. 40), His growth was automatic, but now, strenuous energy and activity are required on His part. And note that when His will is involved in the growth process, "wisdom" (His inner growth) moves ahead of "stature" (His physical growth). He also "increased . . . in favor with God (His spiritual growth) and man" (the development of His personality, His social growth). So here is the picture of *a perfectly balanced* and symmetrical *human* life. *He lived the only absolutely normal human life ever lived.* There was perfect balance between the physical, the mental, the spiritual, the social, and the domestic. At each stage of His life, He was perfect for that stage. As a child, His perfection was that of *innocence*; as an adult, it was that of *holiness*.

Now, let's use this familiar story in an unfamiliar way. Let's think of what it reveals about "The Danger of Losing Sight of Jesus." Years ago, I wrote this sentence in the margin of my Bible: "Every sin a Christian commits results from a loss of perspective." Indeed, a Christian never sins except when he misplaces his attention from its Proper Object. The saint's secret is in the phrase, "Looking away from all else and unto Jesus" (Hebrews 12:2). But what happens (what doesn't happen!) when he loses sight of Jesus?

## I. THE REASONS FOR LOSING SIGHT OF JESUS

First, we will consider *the reasons for losing sight of Jesus* which are suggested in the story.

The first reason suggested in the story is *sheer carelessness*. Many have wondered how in the world Mary and Joseph could have made the mistake they made in leaving Jesus in Jerusalem, thinking He was with them on the return journey. However, careful thought will reveal that there was absolutely no delinquency on their part. Remember that this was the season of Jesus' "Bar Mitzvah." When families and communities traveled to the feasts, the women traveled in one group and the men in another, with the women going ahead. Because Jesus had always previously traveled with the women as a small child, Joseph assumed He was in His usual place. But, because it was the official time of His entrance into manhood, Mary assumed that He was with the men. So there was no delinquency on the part of His parents, only carelessness. But carelessness had the same effect delinquency would have had! Note verse 44, "But they, supposing Him to have been in the company." "Supposing" is extremely dangerous in the Christian life. Mary and Joseph did not deliberately plan to displace Jesus; they just drifted into the loss!

On December 31, 1989, the daily newspaper of Memphis, Tennessee, my home city, contained this article, datelined in Nashville, Tennessee:

Five-year-old Tyler Payne was on his way home to Texas with his family after a Christmas visit with grandparents in Knoxville when he took advantage of a service station stop in Nashville to use the restroom. The restroom door stuck. The family car pulled out. Young Tyler was left behind. Glenn Payne and his

wife, Kris, noticed a small absence among the five boys and one girl snoozing in the back of their station wagon about two hours later in Jackson, Tennessee. Back in Nashville, Tyler had been rescued by a woman who heard him screaming for his mommy. "This is embarrassing, but I'm glad he's safe," said Payne, the boy's dad, an electrical engineer. Payne said the family usually does a head count before embarking, but he had turned the driving over to Mr. Payne. Nobody counted. Sobs turned to smiles when Tyler saw his family. *Tyler Payne says he'll never go to the bathroom again.*

Undoubtedly, this understandable oversight is quite similar to that of Mary and Joseph in our Gospel story.

In John Bunyan's classic Christian allegory entitled Pilgrim's Progress, when Christian lost his great burden of sin in God's forgiveness at the Cross, he was immediately met by "three Shining Ones" (representing God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit). Each confers upon him a great spiritual benefit. The third one (the Holy Spirit) "set a Mark on his forehead" (representing the sealing of the Spirit - Ephesians 1:13, 4:30), "and gave him a Roll . . . which he bid him look on as he ran, and that he should give it in at the Celestial Gate." This "roll," or scroll, represents the Bible, the believer's manual for guidance and his assurance of admission into Heaven. However, a short time later, Christian had to climb a long, steep hill called "the hill Difficulty." He found the hill very difficult, indeed, and so, when halfway up, he saw "a pleasant Arbor" (the arbor of ease), he decided on his own to turn aside and rest. "Thus pleasing himself a while, he at last fell into a slumber, and then into a fast sleep . . . and in his Sleep his Roll fell out of his hand." He was abruptly awakened, realized the error of prolonged ease, and hurried back to the narrow path over the hill. Soon he ran into a major crisis, whereupon "he felt in his bosom for his Roll, that he might read therein, and be comforted; but he found it not." When he faced a major crisis, and desperately needed his appointed resource, he discovered that he had lost it — through sheer carelessness!

In Jesus' parable of the ten young women, five wise and five foolish, the five foolish ones surely did not deliberately plan to take no oil with them; they simply "supposed" they could acquire oil conveniently along the way, or borrow it from those who had it in an emergency. But the point of the story is that the crucial spiritual values of life are non-negotiable and non-transferable in a crisis. The supposition that you can borrow from another's stock is sadly erroneous. They, like Mary and Joseph, supposed, and their supposition was fatal!

When I was a teenager, I traveled with my family on a vacation trip to the northeastern United States. We traveled for some distance on the Pennsylvania Turnpike, which at that time had just been completed. At one point, our trip was stalled because of a major wreck in one of the turnpike's mountain tunnels. While we were waiting with the stalled traffic, a state trooper was visiting with us. He stated that the turnpike had been built to relieve the traffic congestion and number of accidents on the smaller state highways, but actually the opposite effect had occurred. The number of accidents and fatalities had increased during the first year it was open. Puzzled, my father asked why. The trooper explained that the consistency and ease of travel on the new highway had induced what he called "Highway Hypnosis," which meant that the drivers were sedated into carelessness by the steady conditions which allowed them to "suppose" security. The problem was corrected, he explained, by sharply varying the highway terrain and by installing occasional bumps on the highway surface to alert the drifting driver. What a picture

of one of the subtle but major dangers of the Christian life. It's possible to lose sight of Jesus by sheer carelessness.

Then, a Christian may lose sight of Jesus through a *substitute concentration*. Once the first false suppositions had been made, Mary and Joseph became too busy to notice any problem. They were so absorbed with family, friends, and the festive pleasures of the trip that they went a long distance before they were shocked into awareness of Jesus' absence. Mary and Joseph didn't even know they had lost Him. And a similar tragedy occurs far too often in every believer's life. At one time or another, we give primary attention to secondary things — and tragically lose sight of Jesus. A popular slogan has appeared in many places in recent times: "The Main Thing is to keep the Main Thing the Main Thing." This needs to be emblazoned on the heart of every child of God.

When Gypsy Smith, the renowned evangelist, was an old man, a lady took her small boy to one of his crusades just so the little boy could meet the great evangelist before he passed off the scene. After the crusade service, the moment of introduction finally arrived. When she introduced evangelist and boy, Gypsy Smith heartily extended his hand, but the little boy stood completely still, holding his mother's hand in his left hand. The mother said, "Son, give Brother Smith your hand." The little boy just stood there, unmoving. The mother said sharply, "Give the preacher your hand!" The little boy broke his left hand loose and extended it. "No, no, son, you know better than that! Give him your right hand!" The little boy soberly said, "Mom, I can't." She said, "Why can't you?" He replied, "Because I've got my marbles in my right hand." This is precisely why many Christians never give God the right hand of their best dedication: they've got their "marbles" in their right hand. It's possible to lose sight of Jesus through a substitute concentration.

Again, it's possible to lose sight of Jesus because of the *social crowd*. Notice the phrases in verse 44, "in the company" and "among their relatives, neighbors, and friends." How many are like Zacchaeus at this point! "He wanted to see Jesus who he was, but could not for the crowd, because he was little of stature" (Luke 19:3). How many combine Zacchaeus' two handicaps - pygmy stature and a pressuring society — into a deadly loss of the sight of Jesus.

Others lose sight of Jesus because of *selfish conceit*. When Mary and Joseph found Jesus, He was "in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. And all that heard Him were astonished at his understanding and answers" (verses 46-47). At this point, these scholars and religious leaders of the people gave respect to Jesus because of His incredible sensitivity and insight with regard to spiritual realities. But later, it was this same camp that became violently incensed over the threatening teachings of this apparently innocent, erudite child. Later, they would say, "We are the religious authorities, and He is only a carpenter's son. It isn't sensible that we should listen to Him, and that He should assume authority over us!" Here we see the insane imbalance of selfish conceit. How subtly and powerfully pride distorts our inner lives at any moment!

A little girl went with her mother to visit her grandmother in a distant city. The first morning of their visit in the grandmother's home, the little girl awakened beside her mother in a strange bed. Looking around to get her bearings, she noticed a large mirror at the foot of the bed. As she looked, she observed a reflection of a picture of Jesus at the head of the bed. She sat up to get a better look, but when she did, she projected her own body into the line of the reflection, and thus blotted out the reflection of Jesus, then sat up again to get a better look. After a few

"trial runs" of this exercise, she awakened her mother. "Look, Mommy," she said, "when I can see myself, I can't see Jesus; but when I can see Jesus, I can't see myself!" Exactly! But how many of us daily lose sight of Jesus through an inordinate over-attention upon ourselves. We lose sight of Jesus through selfish conceit.

The final reason suggested in the story for losing sight of Jesus is a *sterile church*. You won't mind me stretching the story a bit to make a valid point. The people who loved Him most lost sight of Him, and they did it in the very place least likely to induce such a loss — at church. The church is the most likely place to get a life-transforming vision of Jesus, but it may also sadly be the very place where many lose sight of Him. How many conventional church-goers have not had a soul-shaking, sin-conquering, service-motivating fresh look at Jesus in years!

We must sadly admit that sometimes the church itself is responsible for this failure. To paraphrase Vance Havner, the church is often a firecracker institution while professing to believe a dynamite Gospel. It can easily substitute activity for vitality, the idolatry of size and success for the influence of spiritual power, coldness in place of Holy Spirit warmth, and formality for faith. "It is time for judgment to begin at the House of God" (I Peter 4:17). Much of the responsibility for society's misdirected gaze lies squarely at the door of the church. And often the church is sterile because it has permitted a lapse of its own look at Jesus.

But we must fairly say that one reason many lose sight of Jesus in church is solely because of the church-goer himself. Many people attend church actually looking for distractions or focusing on inferior objects. And attitude is all-important. Any bad spirit in a church-goer — anger, pride, hostility, protest, envy, jealousy, prejudice, lust (you complete the list), will cause the tragic loss of a clear look at Jesus.

Just as in the Old Testament, the written Word was lost in church and the people suffered fearful consequences; here the living word was lost in church and the ones suffering the loss were thrown into deep distress. This scene could be reproduced many times over in churches every Sunday.

So Christians may lose sight of Jesus at any time because of sheer carelessness, a substitute concentration, the social crowd, selfish conceit, or a sterile church. What may be done about such a loss?

## II. THE REMEDY FOR LOSING SIGHT OF JESUS

There is a powerful, perfect *remedy for losing sight of Jesus* suggested in the text. Mary and Joseph reveal the proper pattern.

First, they *stopped*. Verse 44 says, "they went a day's journey" without Him. Friends, even one day's journey without Christ is too far! And one day's journey without Him can (and often does) lead to another day's journey without Him. The loss may seem innocent enough at the moment, but direction and momentum tend to become irreversible with each reinforcement. Beware of even "a day's journey" without Him! When they became aware of His absence, they immediately went into an emergency alert. They stopped all progress toward home, refusing to take another step without Him. Oh, that we were as wise as they! We often become aware of emptiness, sterility, powerlessness and all the other deficiencies that attend a lost vision of Jesus, but instead of calling a halt to everything until the vision is restored, we rush on through the

traditional and expected activities — without Him! The approval of countless others is worthless if Jesus is absent! But we need to take the same absolutely radical measure Mary and Joseph took; we need to stop everything until we vitally see Him again. Many of us need to take a spiritual inventory, echoing the words of William Cowper:

"Where is that blessedness I knew, when first I saw the Lord,  
Where is that soul-refreshing view, Of Jesus and His Word?"

Then, they *switched directions*. Verse 45 says, "They turned back again." This phrase, when viewed spiritually, combines the gigantic words, "repentance" and "conversion." To "repent" means to rethink your present and past life and spiritual status with a view to redirecting your life away from all distractions and toward Jesus Christ.

Let me give you a crazy riddle that has a crazy answer — but it illustrates an eternal truth.

Question: Do you know why the ram went over the cliff?  
Answer: *Because he didn't see the ewe turn.*

Do you know why people go to hell? Because they ignore the "*you-turn*," the absolute necessity for repentance. The primary Greek word for repentance is "metanoia," which means "a change of mind." Everything begins with a spiritual re-evaluation of life and destiny, *now thinking from God's point of view*. This change of mind leads to a change of character, which in turn leads to a change of direction. Then comes a change of conduct. All of this means a change of eternal destiny.

Conversion (which is not merely an initial experience, but an ongoing lifestyle) is the actual turning from all lesser objects unto Christ. Just like the needle of a magnet, when released from all distracting pulls, will invariably turn to focus on polar north, so the heart of every born-again believer, when released from the multitude of sinful distractions, will turn invariably to its True Focus, Jesus.

Finally, Mary and Joseph *sought Him*. Verse 44 says, "They sought Him (a very strong word which means to 'search up and down')." And verse 45 says, "And when they found Him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking Him." When they found Him, Mary said, "Thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing" (vs. 48). We would each be wise to conduct a sorrowful search for Him when the Spirit convicts us of the sin of distracted vision. And where will we find Him? Precisely where we lost Him! And you really *know* where you lost sight of Him. Was it when you began to omit Bible study from your daily habits? Was it when you began to drift away from the prayer closet? Was it when you began to accumulate unconfessed sins in your heart? Was it when you began to be careless about church attendance? Was it when you became silent in your personal witness? How many Christians lose sight of Jesus and then try to go on without correcting the loss. But God is not a God of unfinished business. To try to make progress without a full, fresh view of Him is inviting disillusionment, despair, and disaster.

Do you remember the account of the lost ax-head in II Kings 6? When the ax-head flew off the ax-handle, the man who suffered the loss went quickly to Elisha (a picture of Christ) and reported the loss. Elisha's first response was, "Where did it fall? Where did you lose it?" Dear friend, if you are at this moment conscious that your faith-view of Jesus has blurred or gone, stop

what you are doing, switch directions, and, sorrowful over the loss, engage your heart in The Search that never goes unrewarded. Then, you can join the multitude about whom it has been said, "Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord."

### An Addendum

Eight important questions will enable us to explore this story:

- (1) *Who* “lost” Jesus? Mary and Joseph! His own family (today, His Family is the Church made up of His own children)! The ones who loved Him most!
- (2) *In what sense* did they “lose” Him? They only lost *fellowship with Him*, they only lost sight of Him. They *did not* (in fact, *could not*) lose *relationship* with Him. They had not lost their *love* for Him; they had not lost their *faith*. They had lost *Him!* We must be very careful to understand this point. Though they “misplaced” Him and got out of *fellowship* with Him, they were still His parents, and He was still their son. Even so, a Christian may get out of *fellowship* with God, but once he has become God’s child, this *relationship* cannot be broken.
- (3) *Where* did they “lose” (or, lose sight of) Him? In the most unlikely place! They lost Him in church! There is nothing about merely *being in church* that guarantees encounter and relationship with Jesus there. In fact, it is very easy to lose sight of Him in church—for various reasons. How many times have each of us gone to church, only to stay in our cocoons of coldness, or criticism, or cynicism, or carnality while we were there!
- (4) *When* did they “lose” Him? During the Passover season! When every article and particle of Passover observance pointed to Him! At a time when Messianic expectation was alive at a fever pitch, Mary and Joseph, of all people, should have had a very high level of such expectation, and should have strongly suspected that Jesus was central to the Passover observance. Today, Christians should never “lose” (lose sight of) Jesus in church. Sunday worship should remind every Christian of the Death and Resurrection of Jesus, and of the Presence and Power of the Holy Spirit. These things should dynamically focus our attention *upon Jesus*.
- (5) *How* did they “lose” Him? They lost Him for the most unlikely reason! They were guilty in Jerusalem at the very end of the Passover Feast of the most unlikely of sins, and that sin caused them to lose Jesus. Indifference! Carelessness! The text says, “They, *supposing* Him to be in the group.” Here we see the deadly danger of drifting, the sin of supposing. When we go to church taking everything for granted, without proper preparation, without advance thought, we will lose sight of Jesus there.
- (6) *How long* did they suffer the loss? The text says that “after *three days* they found Him in the temple.” *Three days!* Sometimes we go long distances without seeing His face, don’t we? Even *one day* without Jesus is too long. A one day’s journey without Jesus (verse 44) is too far. Furthermore, until they turned around, they were only increasing the distance between Him and themselves.

(7) *How did they find Him again?* They went back to the very spot where they had lost Him. “They turned back to Jerusalem, seeking Him” (verse 45). A train that runs from Kansas City to St. Louis and back again must enter the train’s turntable in St. Louis (and in Kansas City) to make the return trip. It must be turned around. When a believer “loses” Jesus, he must turn around as God acts upon His mind and heart. Thus, he is *turned around* by the agency of Another, and he *turns around* by his own choice. Urged by their embarrassment, by their desperation, and by their desire to correct the loss, Mary and Joseph turned back to the place where they had “lost” Him.

(8) *What did they do when they found Him?* They resumed the old relationship! “And He went down with them, and came to Nazareth” (verse 51). They went back to daily life together. They went on together, and so shall we — when all problems in our relationship with Him are made right.

### **Humor**

**(Could be used under Question 7 in the Addendum, or under the final point in the message)**

A church sign in front of the church on the corner announced the pastor’s sermon topics for the following Sunday. The sermon titles were listed thus:

“11 a.m. Service. ‘Jesus Walking on the Water.’”

“ 7 p.m Service. ‘*Searching For Jesus.*’”

**Another devotional idea:** This story reveals the “danger” of attending *retreats*, convocations, conferences, conventions — and even *church*. When the demands of activities, fellowship, teaching and being taught, sermon-tasting, etc., are heavy, we tend to drift into a loss of fellowship with Him.