

---

# THE VOICE OF THE CHILD

BY MICHAEL CARD

---

Most of us are already well on our way to becoming whatever it is we're going to be by the time we're thirty. In a large part, the story of our lives is the story of those years. During that time we receive whatever education we're probably going to get. We fall in love for the first, and hopefully the last time, and many of us marry by then. During those first three decades we set a course for our lives, the course which most of us will follow until we die.

By the time I was thirty, I had been a Christian for twenty-two years. I was finished with college. I had been married to my wife, Susan, for four years and our first child, Katherine, had already come into the world. The ministry of teaching and music to which I had been called was well underway. I was basically "me," the person I'll probably be till the day I die, for better or for worse.

In that block of time, in that story which is uniquely my story, the most important event had already taken place by the time I was only eight years old. During a Sunday morning service I gave my life to Jesus and He gave His Life to me. I struggle today to find the words to describe just what happened. The best I can do is say I met Him that day and realized that His extravagant demonstration of love on the cross was for me.

The Gospels are hopelessly silent about the first thirty years of Jesus' life. They are often referred to as the "silent period." The New Testament gives us only one precious window through which we can look into that secret childhood. It is frustratingly brief and leaves us longing for more detail...

Jesus was only twelve. His parents always came to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. Whether they always took Him along or not, we do not know. Nor do we know if the Passover meal had a particular impact on the young boy, if it made Him weep or become thoughtful. The one thing we do learn is that Jesus' parents lost Him! Imagine, having been entrusted with raising the Messiah, only to lose Him. Not for a few moments but for three days!

When Mary and Joseph finally found Jesus, He was in the temple, where He said they should have looked in the first place. He was with the teachers, the same group He would come into conflict with so often as a

man. We have no indication of the tone of His discussion with them. Was He dumbfounding them with His innate wisdom? Was He asking simple, but unanswerable questions to confound them? Luke tells us that those who heard were "amazed at his understanding and his answers." Were the teachers amazed by a precocious boy or by someone who was infinitely more?

While the teachers were amazed, Luke tells us Joseph and Mary were "astonished." Mary gently asked, "Why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you."

Jesus almost always answered a question with another question. And this incident was no exception. He could not understand why they would have looked anywhere else but in the temple, His "Father's house." Even as He was misunderstood all His life so His own parents fail to understand what He means.

In the face of such a hopeless lack of detail, we are left to our own imaginations to take our place alongside the teachers and listen to that small voice speak as no one had ever spoken before. One seemingly naïve word of His might have exposed the hypocrisy of a Pharisee, something He specialized in later on. Another moment His childlike words might have confronted the confused and weary hopes of a scribe who had longed to see he day he now saw. Chances are at least a few who were listening that day in the temple were there twenty-one years later to watch not a meek child, but an angry young man rage against the greed and hypocrisy He had first seen there as a boy.

I've always imagined an elderly rabbi who was just curious enough to stay for a while and listen to the young Jesus. Convicted by His words, the teacher does not stay for long. However, later that night he realizes the voice of God was indeed speaking through the most unlikely Galilean boy. Early the next morning he runs back to the temple to look for Jesus, only to find that His parents have already come and taken Him home.

I suppose the old rabbi of my imagination is really me. I would no doubt have been the one who would have stood in the back of the crowd and listened only as long as my busy schedule would have allowed. I would have made an immediate judgment on the boy: "He's too young. What does He know?" His poor circumstances would have made me certain that He had nothing of value to say. Yes, I'm certain that old man in my mind is me. But even as I imagine the rabbi heard the voice of God, I trust that the Lord would have broken through the wall of my foolishness, as He does today. And though I'll never know for sure, I pray that I, too, would have come running back to find that little boy who spoke the words of God. ✍

