

§ 019

THE EIGHTEEN YEARS AT NAZARETH

⁵¹ And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart. ⁵² And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man. ¹

Luke 2:51-52

Introduction

1. The main theological emphasis of this passage is Christological.
 - Long before Jesus began his public ministry, Luke revealed that he was aware of his unique relationship to God.
 - Already at the age of twelve he knew that he was God's Son and that he possessed a unique calling.
2. He demonstrated a higher allegiance to his divine sonship than to Mary and Joseph (Luke 2:49), although because he kept the law he would be obedient to them (2:51).
 - This is no adoptionist Christology from below but one from above.
 - Before his birth Mary's child was already Lord (1:43) and Son of God (1:35), and this was affirmed by the twelve-year-old Jesus (2:49) and would soon be affirmed by God (3:22).
3. Along with the "person" of Mary's son, Jesus' role as teacher (cf. 2:46; 4:20–27; 5:3) and the centrality of Jerusalem and the temple may also be alluded to in this account.
 - One other possible emphasis found in this passage is the equating of true piety with the keeping of the law.
 - We find this in Jesus' parents' yearly celebration of the Passover Feast of Unleavened Bread in Jerusalem (2:41), in Jesus' training in the law (2:46–47), and in his obedience to his parents (2:52).²

¹ *The Holy Bible: English standard version*. 2001 (Lk 2:51-52). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

² Stein, R.H. (2001, ©1992). *Vol. 24: Luke* (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; The New American Commentary (124). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Commentary

1. *He went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them.* He continued subject unto them, this wondrous boy who really knew more than parents and rabbis, this gentle, obedient, affectionate boy.
- The next eighteen years at Nazareth (Luke 3:23) he remained growing into manhood and becoming the carpenter of Nazareth (Mark 6:3) in succession to Joseph (Matt. 13:55) who is mentioned here for the last time.³
2. During these eighteen mysterious years we may, by the light of what is here revealed, view the holy Child advancing onward to that fullness of wisdom and divine approval which was indicated at His Baptism, by ἐν σοὶ εὐδόκησα.
- We are apt to forget, that it was *during this time* that *much of the great work of the second Adam was done.*
 - The growing up through infancy, childhood, youth, manhood, from grace to grace, holiness to holiness, in subjection, self-denial, and love, *without one polluting touch of sin*,—this it was which, consummated by the three years of active ministry, by the Passion, and by the Cross, constituted “*the obedience of one man*,” by which many were made righteous.
3. We must fully appreciate the words of this verse, in order to think rightly of Christ.
- He had _____⁴ Himself of His glory: His infancy and childhood were no *mere pretence*, but the Divine personality was in Him carried through these states of weakness and inexperience, and gathered round itself the ordinary accessions and experiences of the sons of men.
 - All the time, the consciousness of his mission on earth was ripening; ‘the things heard of the Father’ (John 15:15) were continually imparted to Him; the Spirit, which was not given by measure to Him, was abiding more and more upon Him; till the day when He was fully ripe for his official manifestation,—that He might be offered to his own, to receive or reject Him,—and then the Spirit led Him up to commence his conflict with the enemy.
 - As yet, He was in favor with man also: the world had not yet begun to hate Him; but we cannot tell how soon this feeling towards Him was changed, for He alleges (John 7:7), “Me the world hateth, because I testify of it that its deeds are evil;” and we can hardly conceive such testimony, in the years of gathering vigor and zeal, long withheld.

³ Robertson, A. (1997). *Word Pictures in the New Testament*. Vol.V ©1932, Vol.VI ©1933 by Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. (Lk 2:51). Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems.

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- The incident of Luke 4:28, 29 can scarcely have arisen *only* from the anger of the moment.⁵
4. *And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.* The whole birth story closes with a note of Jesus' continued growth to manhood (2:40).
 - The Greek verb προκόπτω, 'to progress, advance', has lost its original sense 'to make one's way forward by chopping away obstacles' (Rom. 13:12; Gal. 1:14; 2 Tim. 2:16; 3:9, 13**).
 - Stählin notes how ancient biographers emphasized the harmonious development of their subjects, and concludes that Luke has done so in Jewish terms here and in 1:80; 2:40.⁶
 - Thus he refers to the wisdom of Jesus (2:40).
 5. *Stature* (ἡλικία) can mean 'physical stature' (19:3; Eph. 4:13) or 'age' (12:25 par. Mt. 6:27; Jn. 9:21, 23; Heb. 11:11).
 - Here the thought is of the maturity associated with increasing age.
 - Stählin holds that Luke had spiritual maturity especially in mind (cf. Eph. 3:16; 4:13 with Lk. 1:80; 2:40).
 6. The final reference to favor (χάρις) with both God and man takes us back to the OT (1 Samuel 2:26; Proverbs 3:4), although there is no direct parallel in the LXX.
 - The intended picture is one of perfect development, the continuation of what has already been described in 2:40. When Jesus next appears, it will be as One ready to be consecrated to his task.⁷

Conclusion

As Luke in verse 40 gives in a single sentence, pregnant with meaning, a summary of the life, growth and development of Jesus from His birth to His twelfth year, so in this verse he again gives a beautiful summary of the subsequent eighteen years or so of His life until He began to appear in public. What was done by Him during all these years is not known to us in detail. From other data in the Gospels it appears, however, that He grew up in a fairly large family—Mary and Joseph had quite a number of sons and

⁵ Alford, H. (2010). *Alford's Greek Testament: An exegetical and critical commentary* (1:467-468). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

** All the occurrences of the word in the NT are cited.

⁶ Stählin, G. TDNT VI, 703-719, especially 713f.,

⁷ Marshall, I.H. (1978). *The Gospel of Luke: A commentary on the Greek text*. Includes indexes. The New international Greek testament commentary (130). Exeter [Eng.: Paternoster Press.

daughters after His birth (cf. Mark 6:3). We also know that Joseph was a carpenter and that Jesus helped him in this work. During the years after the happenings in the temple and before our Lord's appearance in public, Joseph died; and as far as can be ascertained from the allusions in the Gospels and in the early church fathers Jesus after this took the place of Joseph as provider for His mother and His younger brothers and sisters (Mark 6:3). Thus He continued in the work of carpentry until the beginning of His public appearance. A carpenter's trade in those days included the erection of houses, the making of all kinds of furniture and household requirements, and the construction of such agricultural implements as ploughs and yokes. Indeed, in the words and parables of Jesus we find many traces of His intimate knowledge of these things. Thus, e.g., He spoke about houses built on sand or upon a rock; of a person who "turns his hand to a plough"; of the taking up of His yoke—a yoke which is easy and thus makes the load light; and so on.

But whatever was precisely done and experienced by Jesus during these years, we know from this verse that "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man". He passed through a natural but perfect spiritual and physical development. At every stage He was perfect for that stage. But there is a big difference between the perfection of a child and that of an adult—the difference between perfect innocence and perfect holiness. Therefore it is stated that Jesus *increased* in wisdom and stature and thus also in favor with God and man. According to His human nature and character, He grew and developed in such a manner that His life and condition were at all times in full agreement with God's will. Thus the creative idea of God was for the first time realized completely—Jesus was a perfect Man in soul and body. Adam and Eve were also created in perfection, but their spiritual perfection before the fall was merely the perfection of innocence. In order to possess the perfection of holiness, they had voluntarily and deliberately to choose good and reject evil, but, alas, they did not do so. Jesus, however, chose rightly, without any external pressure, completely and voluntarily, to serve His Father, and never gave way to temptation. And thus in Him was realised in every respect the perfect creative ideal of God. Accordingly God could in an absolute sense show Him His favor and reveal His pleasure in Him.

And because He associated as an absolutely perfect human being, spiritually as well as physically, with the people in Nazareth and elsewhere in Palestine, they could not but feel attracted towards Him. His body, not having been disfigured by sin, was in the highest sense beautiful and attractive, the expression of His eyes pure and exalted like the mirror of His spotless and noble soul. His whole human personality was without any defect or injury of whatever kind. So Luke declares that He "increased in favor" with man as well as with God. According as He came to a fuller and more adult development, both physically and spiritually, He was more and more highly esteemed and loved by His fellow-men.

Thus it was through all the years until He began to appear in public. Then it was that the unavoidable crisis foretold by Simeon arose, for then the Son of God, by exercising

His Messianic vocation, openly exposed the low condition of the inner life of the people. And this led to sides being taken for or against Him. Those who loved the darkness more than the light resisted Him and His divine claims, so that from henceforth He was no longer in favor with the people as a whole. His *via dolorosa* began with His public appearance and ere long the words of Isaiah 53 would be fulfilled.

But, as is expressly shown in verse 52, before these clashes came, He was One who enjoyed the highest respect and affection of people who knew Him. And God gave His approval to this, for He Himself also showed Him His favor and pleasure—“He was in favor with God”.

In these verses we have seen Jesus in His perfection, physically and spiritually, as Child and later on as grown-up Man (verse 52), and also in His consciousness of the fact that God is His Father. It is blessed to know that every believer is accepted in Him as a beloved child of God; that in and through Him, the Son of God, we also may call His Father our Father—not in the same sense as He is His Father, in an eternal and unique relationship within the Godhead, but, nevertheless, in a very real and unending sense, for no one can wrest us from His arms.

In addition, we have the blessed knowledge that, because we have been accepted in Him as the beloved children of God, we, with glorified and heavenly bodies, shall also hereafter partake of His perfection as Man. He came to save us *as complete human beings, in soul and body alike*.⁸

⁸ Geldenhuys, N. (1977). *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes*. The New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament (129). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

