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THE BOYHOOD OF JESUS.

– LUKE 2:40-52. – JANUARY 3. –

FOR the first six months of the new year the International Lessons turn again to the New Testament, beginning appropriately enough with the childhood of Jesus.

The more we think of it the more marvellous it seems that the Gospel narratives record so many of the particulars of our dear Redeemer's ministry – miracles, teachings, etc. – yet never once descend to the discussion of commonplace events, nor of our Lord's sayings or doings other than those directly connected with his ministry. This is one of the strongest internal evidences that these books were written under divine supervision. Our experience with the writings of men in all ages assures us that it would be almost impossible for four men to write biographies of one person, such as these four Gospels are, without entering into social features and events. Our Lord's mother is barely mentioned, and this only where her life touched particularly with that of Jesus. Her husband, Joseph, was probably dead at the time our Lord's ministry began, yet no mention is made of this fact either.

Respecting our Lord's life, previous to his consecration at thirty years of age, we know scarcely anything. The four Gospels merely bring to our attention his miraculous birth, Herod's jealous fury, and the escape of the child before the massacre of the innocents, followed by the little incident of our lesson, which occurred in his twelfth year, and the declaration that he increased in wisdom and stature and favor with God and man. How brief the record, yet how suggestive! [R3291 : page 458] It would have been no part of the Gospel to have explained the details of his life as a boy, as a young man, etc. It might, indeed, have satisfied the curiosity of some to have told us whether he was a farmer or a fisherman or a carpenter, matters about which

people seem inclined to dispute. Undoubtedly the Lord's way in this matter was the better one. Our minds are more drawn to the important features of the Lord's work by reason of the brevity of the sketch given us of his earthly life and interests.

The important thing for us to know is simply stated, namely, that he was the beginning of the creation of God – the first born of every creature; that in his preexistent condition he had glory with the Father before the world was, and was the Father's instrument in the creation of angels, principalities and powers and men, everything that was made. (John 1.) The necessary particulars are also given us respecting the transference of this great spirit being to earthly human conditions – that he might become man and redeem man, the world; that he might be born under the Law and thus redeem those who were under the Law, the Jews. Let us then thank God heartily for the simplicity of the narrative, and for the fact that no item necessary to our comfort and peace and joy has been omitted therefrom, and that no needless items pertaining merely to earthly things have been permitted to intrude themselves and thus to dim in any measure the glorious record of the great love wherewith the Father loved us and the great redemption effected thereby.

Coming more particularly to the appointed lesson: We see that the boy Jesus, although miraculously begotten, not of the will of the flesh, nor of man, but by the holy Spirit, was permitted to grow after the ordinary manner, gradually getting stronger physically and mentally, being filled more and more with wisdom, and giving evidence that God's favor was upon him. Quite probably Joseph, his foster father, was a carpenter, and if so the boy Jesus unquestionably, like other boys, would have more or less association in the carpenter shop, its tools, etc. It has been wondered by some that our Lord never referred to carpenter tools or work in any of his teachings or parables, and this has been urged as an objection to the thought that he was reared in contact with such work and tools. It matters not, so far as we can see. Our Lord addressed, not classes, but the masses; and quite

probably the majority of the people at the time knew little about the carpenter's trade, tools, etc., even less than in our day. Hence it was not necessary or appropriate that our Lord should use as figures and parables that which would not be common to the experiences of all or nearly all of his hearers.

In verse 41 Joseph is evidently referred to as one of his parents. This is not in conflict, however, with the previous statements of the same writer, to the effect that Jesus was begotten, not by Joseph, but by the holy Spirit. (Luke 1:30-35.) We would consider it proper enough today that any child should speak of his foster-father or stepfather as father without explaining the particulars of the relationship, and likewise it would be proper for the friends to speak of both father and mother as the parents of the child, as in this verse under consideration and previous verses. – Vs. 27.

The narrative passes over the twelve years of Jesus' earthly life to tell of the incident of his tarrying behind after having been with his parents at the Passover Feast. The religious Jews from all parts of the country went to Jerusalem upon these feast occasions according to the directions of the Law, and naturally enough close relatives traveled in each other's company considerably. Thus it was that in the large concourse returning from Jerusalem after the feast a whole day elapsed before the boy Jesus was missed by those who properly had guardianship over him. Although admonished by the angel Gabriel that Jesus would in due time be greatly honored of God, and that he was born differently from others of the human family, nevertheless neither Mary nor Joseph seemed to have caught any considerable view of the greatness of the one whom they called their son Jesus. The prophecies spoken respecting him, like all the prophecies of olden times, were more or less vague, and could not be comprehended except by the aid of the holy Spirit, which had not yet been given. His mother Mary, however, we are told, kept all these things pondering in her heart, wondering what would be the consummation – little

dreaming, we may be sure, how great her son must ultimately be made, according to the divine arrangement.

The story of the boy of twelve amongst the Doctors of the Law, discussing the various types of the Law and what these probably signified, and what would be expected to be their antitypes, furnish us a very interesting picture, especially when we remember that the one who was asking the questions was the one who ultimately would give correct answers to those questions in his own experiences. We are not to assume that this precocious boy of twelve was unduly bold or forward; we are not to presume that he undertook to teach the Doctors of the Law. He was not yet anointed to preach, and was therefore not yet qualified. The narrative is that he was found hearing the doctors and asking them questions, and not attempting to teach them. There is a good suggestion here – especially for such as are not permitted to teach, by reason of sex or insufficient years – namely, that even a child **[R3291 : page 459]** can ask questions, and in asking the questions may suggest wonderful and powerful answers.

We may reasonably assume that Jesus had previously, after the manner of the Jewish boys, attended the synagogue worship at his home, and that hearing there the Law and the prophets, the Scriptures of the Old Testament, read Sabbath after Sabbath, and having a perfect memory and an active mind, because not blemished by sin and the fall, the various questions of the Law and the various declarations of the prophets would greatly interest him – especially as he realized that he had left the Father and had come into the world to do a redemptive work.

The Doctors of the Law doubtless remarked that they had never had such pointed questions asked them respecting the Law and the prophets, even by wise men of their day and by each other; hence they evidently noticed the precocity of this boy. As he asked questions which apparently showed that some of their interpretations were faulty and inconsistent, they in turn considered it not beneath

themselves to ply the boy with questions. Doubtless they thought that after his questions had confounded them their questions would likewise confound the boy, but, according to verse 47, so far from confounding him they got their questions answered in such a manner as amazed them. Nevertheless we are to remember that our Lord Jesus could not have himself understood the full meaning of the Law shadows and the prophecies at that time – nor until after his anointing with the holy Spirit. (1 Cor. 2:14.) This little item gives us a suggestion respecting the ability of mind that would belong to a perfect boy. It gives us a suggestion respecting what we may expect of the ancient worthies when they shall be resurrected to human perfection, and the same suggestion also of what we may expect of the perfection of the Church in the glorious condition promised in the First Resurrection.

It was natural enough that after missing the boy for four days his mother should upbraid him somewhat, and, taking Jesus' answer in its simplicity, we must suppose that he had been so absorbed with the opportunities and studies that the time had passed without his appreciating the trouble and inconvenience he was causing to others.

"Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" must have seemed strange enough even from so remarkable a boy. His parents did not fully comprehend the meaning of the words, but Mary set these apart with the other peculiar things to treasure up, hoping ultimately to see something that would fully justify the words, as she did afterwards see. After making this protest respecting his desire to be engaged in the heavenly Father's mission, studying his Word and teachings, and realizing that his sentiments were not understood or appreciated, and that really he was still properly under subjection to his parents, Jesus said no more, but went quietly with them to Nazareth and doubtless to his accustomed vocation.

Our Lord could not begin his ministry because he was under the Law and bound by its every restriction. We note, however, his

promptness to engage in his heavenly Father's business at the very earliest moment, as we read, "Now when Jesus *began* to be about thirty years of age he came to Jordan to be baptized." We who are not under the restraints of the Law Covenant but, on the contrary, are under grace, are not thus limited as to the time we may present our bodies living sacrifices upon the Lord's altar to be used in his service; hence we rejoice the more if we can find that at an early date we can give our hearts and our all to him who loved us and bought us with his precious blood.

It was not the babe of Bethlehem that was to bless the world, nor the boy of Nazareth, nor the young man of Capernaum, but it was to be a full-grown man, a mature one, whose sacrifice would offset the sin of Adam, redeem him and his posterity and satisfy the demands of divine justice against the condemned race. So, then, while interested in everything pertaining to the divine character and plan, while interested to know how Jesus grew in stature and in wisdom as he approached the maturity of manhood at thirty years, while interested to know about his miraculous birth, our chief interest in all of these things is that they established our faith in him as the man Christ Jesus – that he was holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners, and therefore able to make the atonement sacrifice – to give his own life a ransom, a corresponding price for the life of Adam, and thus for the life of the whole race of Adam, in his loins at the time of his transgression and thus sharers with him in his condemnation.

We do well, therefore, to dwell less upon the birth and infancy of Jesus and more and more to grasp the precious themes set before us in the Gospel, of which the cross is the great point or center of interest. Similarly we regard all the followers of the Lord – not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. True, we are glad to know of some that even before their consecration and baptism of the Spirit were noble minded, virtuous and irreproachable, and we have a measure of regret when we hear of some who had a contrary disposition to this; nevertheless our interest centers around the fact

that they did turn from sin, did become the Lord's followers and that they have been begotten of his holy Spirit. In this we rejoice. **[R3292 : page 460]** Thus we know each other according to the Spirit as New Creatures in the Lord, and thus we know our Lord as the New Creature, as the Apostle suggests, "Though we have known Christ after the flesh, henceforth know we him so no more." Our special interest centers in our Lord from the moment of his anointing of the Spirit until he completed the work there begun three and one-half years later on the cross, crying, "It is finished." Our interest still holds beyond that point in the resurrection of our Lord from the dead, and the evidence thus given us that the begetting of the Spirit at his baptism became the birth of the Spirit at his resurrection, and that he was thus the first born from the dead, born of the Spirit to spirit conditions. Then our hope is to follow in his steps, and thus realize the promise that if we suffer with him we shall also be glorified together and share his Kingdom and his nature in glory.

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