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HOLY, HARMLESS, PERFECT.

– LUKE 2:40-52. – JANUARY 21 –

Golden Text: – "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man."

ONE peculiarity of the Bible, which differentiates it from all other religious books, is its candor, its faithfulness to facts. Without specially preaching against them it mentions the weaknesses, the blemishes, the failures of the various heroes which it draws to our attention: Mother Eve's deception, father Adam's disobedience without deception, Abraham's error in not properly acknowledging his wife, Moses' mistake in respect to the smiting of the rock the second time, the shortcomings of Eli, Samson, Saul, David, Solomon and others of Old Testament times. The New Testament similarly mentions the strife amongst the apostles as to who should be the greatest, the wrong spirit of James and John in connection with the Samaritans, Peter's denial of the Lord, the dispute between Barnabas and Paul respecting John and Mark, etc. This faithfulness of the Word of God in pointing out that there is none righteous, no not one, amongst all the race of Adam – that all need forgiveness, reconciliation to the Father through the atoning sacrifice – proves the reliability of its testimony.

Noting that the Scriptures were written by various pens during a period of sixteen centuries, and that they all manifest the same uniformity, honesty, impresses upon us all the more the full import of their declarations respecting Jesus – that he was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners." This was in accord with the predictions of the prophets respecting Messiah, also with the narrative of his birth, boyhood, youth, manhood, to his resurrection and ascension to glory. Angels and men declare to us that he was separate from sinners, that his life came not from

the impaired and condemned Adamic stock, but was a transference from a spirit existence previously enjoyed. His perfection, his keeping of the divine law, his acceptance with the Father, were fully demonstrated and assured to us in that "God raised him from the dead on the third day." – I Cor. 15:4.

THE BOYHOOD OF JESUS

Our lesson (v. 40) declares that prior to his reaching his twelfth year he had been growing in stature and in strength and was gradually being filled with wisdom. We are not to forget that he was separate from sinners, nor to expect that other boys at his age should manifest the same degree of wisdom. Quite to the contrary – inheriting blemishes, mental, physical, moral, they would not belong to the same class at all. Our Lord Jesus is not a pattern for the natural man, and in harmony with this thought he is not introduced to us as our exemplar until he reached the age of manhood, consecrated his life to the doing of the work which the Father had committed to him, and had begun his ministry under the anointing of the holy Spirit.

Nor is his earthly ministry nor his teachings the example or pattern for the world: these are merely for his footstep followers, his disciples – those who, justified through faith in his blood, have similarly made a covenant with the Lord by sacrifice, by full consecration of themselves to live not unto themselves but unto him who died for them. Doubtless there is heavenly wisdom in connection with the limited description given us of the childhood and youth of our Savior. These were not our examples, and indeed any attempt to measure the ordinary boy or youth by that glorious and perfect standard would have undoubtedly been discouraging – perhaps to an injurious degree. Let us not, then, attempt to imagine with particularity what the Lord has seen fit to cover and not reveal. Let us content ourselves with the simple narrative, with the meager testimony of the Gospel on this subject

– that Jesus developed in wisdom as well as in physical strength. [R3711 : page 28]

THE GRACE OF GOD UPON HIM

The word "grace" signifies that which gives pleasure, as loveliness of form or character, or the most admirable virtues. Hence the grace of God signifies his favor, that Jesus as a child was such a one as the Father had pleasure in, and, reversely, such a one as reflected in his form and character the grace, perfection, the beauty which is of God. John, speaking of our Savior, says, "We beheld his glory, – the beauty of the only begotten of the Father." All this speaks perfection in its most absolute sense, and would be very discouraging not only to other children but to their parents also were it understood that the boy Jesus was given of God to be a pattern or model for others. On the other hand it is important for us to know this, as corroborating the testimony that he was undefiled, separate from sinners, holy and acceptable to the Father from infancy to manhood.

In divine providence our Lord was not only born under favorable religious influences, but trained in that way. His mother and her husband were pious, reverent, and evidently disposed to be obedient to every feature of the divine Law to the extent of their ability. In accord with the demands of the Law they went annually to Jerusalem to the feast of Passover, the great religious gathering which called the typical people from one end of their land to the other to a special worship of the Lord, to a special remembrance of their deliverance from Egypt, to their adoption as his people and incidentally to the observance of a type of the coming blessings through the killing of the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world, and whose flesh is meat indeed and whose blood is drink indeed – symbolically.

JESUS A SON OF THE LAW

It had been the custom of Joseph and Mary to go to these feasts every year, and doubtless Jesus, as he grew older, went with them. The one mentioned in our lesson was noteworthy above the others because of our Lord's conduct on this occasion – different from what it had previously been and what it subsequently was. Under the Jewish custom a boy at twelve years of age was supposed to make some kind of a consecration of himself, some kind of a special recognition of the Law, on account of which he was called a "son of the Law," a child of the Law.

The wisdom in which our Lord had been growing up to that time, like all other things pertaining to the Jewish system, was intimately interwoven with the Law and the prophets. He recognized himself as being not the son of Joseph but the son of God, and knew that he had come into the world on a special mission, and it was a preliminary step on his **[R3711 : page 29]** part to gain wisdom respecting the work he was to do as it had been outlined in the promises, in the Law, and through the testimonies of the prophets. Wise far beyond his years because of his perfection, his mind doubtless seized upon the custom of the twelfth year: doubtless he wondered if this custom of becoming a son of the Law did not in some sense of the word imply that he at that age should become in some measure identified with the Law as a student, or in some other capacity.

Of winsome manner, in favor with man as well as with God, and wise hearted, Joseph and Mary found little necessity for keeping close watch over his doings. He was apparently, for a child of his age, especially well able to take care of himself. Hence it was that on returning from the feast they went a full day's journey before noticing that he was not with any of their company, and had evidently been left behind at Jerusalem. It

required a day to return to Jerusalem, and on the third day seeking him they found him in the Temple. They were amazed to see a child of twelve years seated amongst the doctors of the Law, listening to their discussions and asking questions. We are not told of the nature of the questions of those three days, but we may be sure that they all pertained to the Law and the covenants and the prophets respecting Messiah and his work.

Jesus, having already pondered these matters in his own mind, was now seeking all the wisdom he could secure from those who would naturally be best informed on these subjects. Doubtless a part of his inquiry was at what age Messiah could in any measure begin his work, and whether or not the custom of considering a boy the son of the Law at twelve years of age was founded upon anything in the Law or was merely a human tradition. Apparently he would have been glad to have found something in the Law to have justified his entrance upon some department of the Father's business, but found nothing, as this was merely a provision of the Talmud and not of divine authority.

In response to their gentle chiding that he had caused them worry, uneasiness, and that they had been seeking him, Jesus replied, "Why need you have sought me? Did you not know that I would be somewhere about my Father's house?" We prefer this free translation, in accord with the revised version, to the one given in our common version. We may be sure that those days spent in the Temple, studying the exceeding great and precious promises of God's Word, were a feast to that wonderful child's expansive and expanding mind. Apparently he had reached the solution of his queries, and determined that it was not in accordance with divine providence that he should in any sense of the word begin his ministry or public work at this time. In harmony with this conclusion we read that he returned with them to Nazareth and was obedient to them – did not attempt to begin his heavenly mission.

"TRAIN UP A CHILD"

We cannot encourage imperfect parents to expect to rear imperfect children full of wisdom and the graces of perfection, but we can assure them that very much indeed depends upon the way in which they train their children as to what kind of men or women they shall become, and whether they shall bring to their parents happiness or unhappiness, sorrow or joy. It is a sad fact that many parents train up their children in the way they should not go – plant in them the wrong sentiments, which subsequently bring forth characteristics of which they are ashamed, for which they reproach and reprove the children, and against which the children when grown may be obliged to battle for the remainder of life. What a blessing it would be both to parents and to children did the former rightly understand how early the training and disciplining is necessary – that it should begin in the parent before the child is born; that discipline, obedience, insisted upon with firmness and kindness, should be inculcated from the day of birth persistently.

Where a child has been reasonably well born, has been reared under the influences of a Christian home, in which the Bible is the recognized standard, in which one or both the parents are consecrated to the Lord, in which prayer is a constant testimony to that parent's faith in the Lord and trust in his providential care, in which the parent not only seeks to exemplify the fruits of the Spirit – meekness, gentleness, patience, long suffering, brotherly kindness, love – but seeks to inculcate these in the children, the child so trained under such experiences would, we believe, very generally be ready at the age of twelve years to make a consecration of himself to the Lord – to seek after and strive to follow the instructions of the divine message.

The promises to those who early give their hearts to the Lord are known to us all, and many have proven their wisdom – "They

that seek me early shall find me;" "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." (Prov. 8:17; 22:6) Train up a child to sow wild oats, to go thoughtlessly, irreverently, selfishly through the world, and when he is old it will be very difficult indeed to turn him out of the ruts of selfishness into the highway of decency, consideration and love for others.

We will admit that ours is a very difficult day in which to properly rear children. Nevertheless, instead of making the parent lax and indifferent in respect to his obligations, it should lead him to the greater diligence and to the more earnestly seeking of wisdom from on high, that he may so discharge his duty toward the child as to bless it for life with a proper foundation of character laid in the proper cement of appreciation of justice, righteousness, mercy and truth.

ADVANCED IN WISDOM

The statement that Jesus progressed in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man (v. 52), relates to the period of his life from twelve years of age upward to the time of his presentation to Israel in his thirtieth year as the Lamb of God. Apparently not Mary only kept the things which she had heard and seen in her heart, pondering how they would develop and how the words of the angel Gabriel would be fulfilled in her son, but Jesus also kept the whole matter a secret with himself up to the proper time, when he entered publicly at the earliest moment upon his ministry. Undoubtedly this was the course of wisdom; he was not yet anointed to preach, hence had no authority so to do.

Similarly all who hear the good tidings now would best not begin to minister the truth to others by explaining it until first they have received of God the unction from on high – the anointing of the holy Spirit. Before they begin their **[R3711 : page**

30] ministry they should make the consecration whose acceptance by God would bring them unto the place of adoption and anointing, and qualify them for the telling of the good tidings of great joy which ultimately shall be unto all people.
