



Sunday School Lesson for December 28, 2003.
Released on December 26, 2003.

Study Luke 2:40-52. Jesus Grew in God's Favor
Questions and answers below.

TIME: A.D. 7 or 8
PLACE: Jerusalem

Luke 2:40-52

40 And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon him.

41 Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover.

42 And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast.

43 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.

44 But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance.

45 And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him.

46 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.

47 And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.

48 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.

49 And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?

50 And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them.

51 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.

52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.

Introduction

The Youth of Today

Josh McDowell continues to challenge today's youth as he has done for more than thirty years. But in a 1997 interview with the Dallas Morning News he said that what he has seen happening to kids over the past several years disturbs him very much.

His chief concern is that young people do not believe in absolute truth. They may believe that God exists, but they don't connect that belief to the fact that there is a

set of unchanging universal values established by that God. The modern notion of "tolerance" undermines young Christians' faith. And when a person accepts everything, he or she loses the ability to discern right from wrong.

The result is that instead of having morality we just have different opinions. Since much of today's theology and world outlook are based on emotional hurt rather than rational thought, children twelve or thirteen years of age are making life decisions and adult choices with adolescent emotions.

Sadly, Josh McDowell is right. The result is that many of our young people are virtually lost to the church today. He goes on to say that Christian parents must do more than teach the Bible to their children. They must practice what they preach. If they don't, their teens will be lost to a society that questions everything.

Luke's Gospel describes a young Person who had a different outlook on life from that of many of today's youth. His was a mind drawn very early to the Lord and the things of the Lord. Luke chooses one incident in the life of young Jesus to illustrate a point about the sense of duty to God that characterized Jesus from His youth. This account teaches us of the value of bringing to bear every noble spiritual influence upon all the young people we can reach for the gospel.

Lesson Background

This incident from the boyhood of Jesus is all that the Gospels offer us regarding this stage in Jesus' life. What evidence we have points to His living a normal human life until He was inaugurated into public ministry at His baptism.

We know that after His birth He was taken to the temple, where Simeon and Anna were privileged to see Him. Both realized who He was and responded with great joy and thanksgiving for His arrival (Luke 2:25-38). After that, Luke wrote that "when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth" (v. 39). The next recorded event was when Jesus was twelve years old.

This boyhood incident, however, is recorded with some detail. In it we see how Jesus was different from other boys. There was a sense of purpose in Him that usually does not appear until much later in life. In this we see Jesus' deity and humanity combined.

To the Feast

(Luke 2:40-42)

Jesus Grows Up (v. 40)

1. Why did Luke mention the growth of Jesus (v. 40)?

Luke described the physical growth of Jesus with the same words he used for John's growth in Luke 1:80. Luke omitted reference to the family's flight to Egypt and went directly from their appearance in the temple to their return to Nazareth. Matthew, however, included it because it was important to his argument that Old Testament prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus in minute detail.

While Matthew wrote primarily to show Jews that Jesus was the Messiah, Luke wrote to show that He was the perfect Man. Luke wanted to be certain his readers understood Jesus' humanity; so he pointed out that He grew as any normal child. Accompanying that physical growth was intellectual growth: Jesus was "filled with wisdom" (Luke 2:40), a fact Luke mentioned again in verse 52. The incident in this week's text shows that Jesus' intellectual growth was accompanied with true spiritual

wisdom. All this was accomplished because the grace of God was upon Him in a very special way.

2. The text notes of Jesus that "the grace of God was upon him." In what ways has God extended His grace to you?

Hopefully, all Christians should realize that God's saving grace means rescue from sin. Beyond that, God is gracious to us in many ways; encourage your learners to share specific examples and incidents of God's grace in their lives.

3. What two feasts were being celebrated in Jerusalem, and how long were they (v. 41)?

Passover was a one-day feast, but it was followed by the weeklong Feast of Unleavened Bread. The date on the Jewish calendar for Passover was 14 Nisan and the Feast of Unleavened Bread was 15 through 21 Nisan. Sometimes the entire time is referred to as Passover and sometimes as the Feast of Unleavened Bread, but there was a distinction in the Mosaic law. Three feasts each year required the attention of devout male Jews. Since Jesus' parents were devout, they faithfully attended according to the law.

4. For what was Jesus preparing by visiting Jerusalem at age twelve (v. 42)?

Although the religious ceremony was not formalized until centuries later, at the age of thirteen a Jewish boy became Bar Mitzvah ("son of the commandment"), taking on responsibilities and privileges of manhood. Prior to this, his relationship to the law was taken care of by his father's gifts and offerings (Deut. 16:16). A year or two before age thirteen, however, a boy was to be brought to the temple to observe the religious festivals (Edersheim, Jewish Social Life, Hendrickson). This trip to Jerusalem for the Passover was undoubtedly part of Jesus' preparation for that important step into manhood.

For Jesus, both the journey and the time in Jerusalem must have been exciting. "It was a journey of four days of wonderful experience for the growing boy. Many places of historical importance, sites of the struggles, victories, and defeats of ancient Israel, they would pass, bringing to remembrance glorious feats of the great heroes about whom He had been taught from His earliest years.

"From Jericho, they must climb four thousand feet from the lower tropical level of the Jordan Valley up through the narrow robber-infested passes to Bethany and the Mount of Olives, where they would get the first glorious view of the Holy City across the Kedron Valley" (Shepard, The Christ of the Gospels, Eerdmans). For Jesus that was just the beginning of a fulfilling festival experience, for He already understood His relationship with His Father and what was expected of Him.

**On the Road
(Luke 2:43-45)
Parents Unaware (vs. 43,44)**

5. How was it possible that Joseph and Mary could travel one whole day without realizing Jesus was not with them (vs. 43, 44)?

It was customary for those who lived great distances from Jerusalem to travel in caravans with neighbors, friends, and relatives. At times the women traveled together in a group apart from the men. It is easy to understand how Jesus would not be missed until the end of the day. Each parent had apparently assumed He was with the other parent or was in the company of some of His relatives or friends and their families. Neither was concerned until the end of the day came and He was missing.

This was not a case of neglect on the part of Joseph and Mary. Such group travel was a normal arrangement, and it was often a very large group. Mary could easily have assumed that since Jesus was now twelve and almost a man, He was traveling with the men and older boys. At the same time, Joseph might have assumed that since Jesus was still young, He was traveling with the women and children. Since everyone walked leisurely, it was easy to become spread out, knowing they could congregate at the close of the day.

It was not a case of rebellious disobedience on the part of Jesus, either, as will be seen in the conversation that was eventually held between Him and His parents. There is much evidence in this passage that Jesus had a mature understanding of His role on earth and was eager to begin fulfilling it. Joseph and Mary were going to have to accept this, but at this time they were still normal, protective parents concerned about the child's safety.

**In the Temple
(Luke 2:46-50)**

6. How long did it take Joseph and Mary to find Jesus, and what was He doing (vs. 45, 46)?

The caravan had accomplished a full day's travel. Since it would not have been safe for Joseph and Mary to travel at night, they probably spent the night with the group and started back to Jerusalem early the next morning. They evidently spent most of a day looking for Jesus after they arrived, for Luke wrote that it was after three days that they found Him in the temple. We can only imagine the anxiety they felt in their hearts during that time they did not know where He was.

The temple courts were known as places of learning. It might be that the Apostle Paul learned at the feet of Gamaliel in one of the courts of the temple (Acts 22:3). During Passover the greatest rabbis in the land would gather in Jerusalem and teach, and all classes of people were welcome to their instruction. These were the "doctors" of the law whose understanding of the Scriptures was held in highest regard. It was here that Joseph and Mary finally found their Son. This was not the usual place for a twelve-year-old to be found!

Since Jesus was in the presence of such learned men, it was not unusual that He would be asking them questions. He was there to learn and apparently was eager to absorb all the knowledge from them that He could. "He was utterly respectful, taking the role of the student. But even at that young age, His questions showed a wisdom

that put the teachers to shame" (MacArthur, The MacArthur Study Bible, Word). We can only wonder how much knowledge Jesus had and what He needed to learn.

7. How were the people responding (v. 47)?

Indeed, everyone was astonished at His depth of understanding. Luke 2:47 indicates not only that Jesus was listening and learning from the teachers but also that they were asking Him questions. It was a situation unlike anything any of them had ever encountered. A twelve-year-old boy was asking them deep theological questions, probably some of which they could not answer. When they did have answers to His questions, He obviously understood immediately. When they in turn asked Him questions, however, He was able to clearly answer and explain!

Imagine the astonishment not only of the teachers but also of those observers who were in attendance. Everything Jesus said was accurate and thorough. It is probably safe to say that most of them had never heard such depth of understanding before. They were awed at what was taking place before their eyes. We can imagine how they glanced back and forth among themselves while they listened to the dialogues taking place between Jesus and their most respected teachers.

8. How did Mary respond, and what did Jesus tell her in return (vs. 48-50)?

Joseph and Mary likewise were astonished; but their concern at the moment was expressed by Mary, who said, "Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing" (Luke 2:48). What parent cannot identify with the anguish of their souls?

In verse 49 are the first recorded words of Jesus, and it is rather significant that He spoke of the importance of doing His Father's work. We have already noted that He was well aware of why He was on earth, and His response to His parents confirms that once again.

Jesus sounded truly amazed that His parents had not known where to look for Him. From before His birth, they had known Mary was carrying the Messiah of Israel; but Luke wrote that they could not understand what Jesus was telling them. The words of Jesus present riddles to Joseph and Mary that they cannot solve. Why does their boy believe that He has to be in the temple?

Although Mary and Joseph knew he was God's Son, they didn't understand what his mission would involve They knew he was unique, but they did not know what was going on in his mind" (Life Application Bible, Tyndale).

Did Joseph and Mary later reflect on this scene and Jesus' words and come to a full understanding? They probably did. Luke would want us to understand also what Jesus said. He truly is the Son of God who came to earth to fulfill His Father's plan for providing salvation for sinners. Ultimately that plan included His death on our behalf, making provision whereby we can be forgiven our sins and made certain of an eternity in heaven with Him. Have you understood? Have you received Him as your personal Savior?

9. Instead of answering His parents directly, Jesus asked a question—suggesting a deeper meaning without becoming condescending or disrespectful. How can we use this technique in our interactions with fellow believers as well as with unbelievers?

Many of Jesus' responses to friend and foe during His ministry would come in the form of questions. This allowed Him to challenge His listeners or opponents to discover truth through personal reflection, or to provide understanding at a level that was appropriate to them. Those employed in sales and marketing careers today are trained to overcome objections by turning objections into questions. Remember: before we can arrive at the right answer, we have to ask the right questions.

10. Some people today have had to choose between pleasing their Heavenly Father and their earthly families. When have you seen people make the right choice in this regard, and when have you seen them make the wrong choice?

The responses to this question may turn out to be very emotional for some of your learners. Be prepared for some to recount tragic stories of estrangement from parents and siblings because of a decision to follow Christ. Rejection may take comparatively mild forms, such as being looked down on by family members as some kind of "religious nut." Estrangement may also take the severe form of being disowned outright—being unwelcome at family gatherings, etc.

You can encourage your learners by pointing out that Jesus also had to endure misunderstanding—perhaps we could even say rejection—by family members (see Mark 3:21). He understands! Jesus also predicted family discord because of our decision to follow Him (see Luke 14:26), so we are not to be surprised. As painful as these situations can be, our eternal reward will outweigh any loss (see Mark 10:29,30).

11. What kind of relationship did Jesus maintain with His parents (v. 51)?

Even though Jesus knew He was the Son of God, He did not reject or disrespect His earthly parents. In fact, just the opposite is true; He submitted to their parental authority throughout His adolescent years. Here we are told that Mary did indeed keep all these things in her heart and ponder them over and over. As mothers do, Mary watched and contemplated the growth, change, and effectiveness of her Son.

The example of Jesus in being obedient to His parents is one all children and young people should follow. It is interesting to notice that many times young people feel they know more than their parents and thus tend to ignore their commands and wishes. In the case of Jesus, He really did know more than His parents; but He willingly submitted to them and was obedient in order to fulfill His Father's will. In the same way, young people today are obedient to God's will when they submit to the authority of their parents.

In verse 52 once again Luke mentioned the growth of Jesus, this time placing His increase in wisdom ahead of His physical growth. As Jesus grew spiritually and physically, He also grew in favor with both God and man. It was probably for our benefit that Luke mentioned this, for Jesus was certainly always in God's favor. As God's children grow in wisdom, He is pleased. We then find that such growth results in a closer relationship with Him. The accompanying reality will be deeper respect from those who observe our growth.

CONCLUSION

This incident from the boyhood of Jesus well demonstrates the remarkable nature of Jesus' early development and His awareness of His identity and mission. All this was nurtured when His godly parents created for Him the best spiritual environment possible.

It is not enough to grow physically. We also need to grow spiritually and pray that the favor of God may rest upon us, for without His blessing we can really do nothing. Jesus had the blessing of God upon Him from the very beginning so that He could fulfill His mission on this earth and please His heavenly Father. We too must seek the Lord's wisdom and blessing in all that we do.

PRAYER

Please, Lord, lead me today to some young person who needs my encouragement to be in the house of our Heavenly Father. And may I not neglect my own spiritual growth in the process. In Christ I pray continually, amen

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

What young person will you help today to grow in favor with God and people?

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

In our lesson next week, we shift to the Old Testament. We will examine the life of Job and see how he was able to maintain his integrity in the midst of intense suffering. There is a very significant lesson for us there. Study background scripture Job 1:1-2:10.

We take this time at year end to thank and pray for the writers and publishers (our resources)of the Sunday School material. This list includes commentary derived from Standard Lesson Commentary Copyright©; The Incorporated Trustees of the Gospel Worker Society, Union Gospel Press; as well as excerpts from The KJV parallel Bible commentary (Nelson).

We would also like to share with you as we did a few years back, this free 25 minute video featuring continual scripture verses with beautiful changing nature background scenes. This clip is entitled "A Father's Loveletter." Enjoy!

Just copy and paste:

<http://www.fathersloveletter.com/fllpreview.swf>

May God continue to bless you in the New Year !

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