



Sermon

Jesus grew in Stature, wisdom and favour with God and men

Luke 2:41-52 ; 1 Samuel 2:18-20,26; Colossians 3:12-17

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We have just celebrated Christmas Day and the birth of the Saviour. This was the incarnation when God took on a body. Jesus was truly God and truly human. Today we are given the opportunity to reflect on what this means – what was it like for Jesus to grow up into the knowledge of who he was?

After his birth, we are only told about the visits to the temple for purification, circumcision, the visit of the Magi, the flight to Egypt and later the return to Nazareth. Then there is silence. Luke alone has recorded this incident in Jesus childhood. Then there is silence about the next 18 years until Jesus breaks onto the public scene at his baptism and the commencement of his public ministry. We might like to know more about the home life of Jesus but apparently the Holy Spirit decided it is not important for us to know.

Luke structures this passage with an inclusio. An inclusio is a structure in writing which signals a section or a block of writing. It is done by making a statement and then repeating that later. The two statements act as a headline and tailpiece. In between them, the writer expands with the point being made. It is rather like writing an essay where in the introduction you state what you are going to argue then you argue it and finally in the conclusion you say, that is what I set out to prove.

In this case the inclusio is formed by verses 40 and 52.

⁴⁰ And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.

⁵² And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men.

Between them Luke tells us about this incident in the temple when Jesus is twelve which illustrates the point.

We learn from this account that Mary and Joseph were devout – they made the journey each year from Nazareth to Jerusalem to attend Passover. It was their regular custom.

Although the Pentateuch required all Jewish men to attend the three major feasts of Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles by the time of Jesus rabbinical interpretation¹ had reduced this to once a year and that as an aspiration of a lifetime for those who lived more than 30 km from Jerusalem.

¹ <https://www.jerusalemerspective.com/2392/>

Mary and Joseph are faithful to the requirements of the Law and attend Passover annually even though Nazareth is about 170 km from Jerusalem.

Practical background:

We are told that Jesus was twelve. Around 12-13 years old a Jewish boy makes the transition to being a man. At his Bar Mitzvah a boy becomes a son of the Law. That means he accepts the Law himself and he is responsible for his behaviour instead of his parents being held liable for his actions. From that time on he became a partner in his father's trade.

At the end of the feast, the party for Nazareth set off home. At the end of the first day's travel the parents discovered they had lost Jesus! That may seem rather casual to you but it was the custom for families to travel separated into women with the children and men separately. We see this public separation of men and women in Tanzania today. Husbands and wives sit separately in church (men on the right and women on the left). Children sit with their mothers.

So in first century Israel, the children under 12 would accompany their mothers, boys over 12 would walk with their fathers. Jesus would have travelled to Jerusalem with his mother but being a man on the return journey he could travel with Joseph. It is easy to see how Mary and Joseph could each think he was with the other on the homeward journey.

Having lost him, they turn around and travel back on the second day and on the third day searching Jerusalem they find him in the temple in discussion with the teachers. In their anxiety and exasperation they tell him off for worrying them. But he expects them to have realised where he would be:

⁴⁹ "Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" More literally, "Didn't you know that I had to be about my Father's things?— we might say business.

Mary and Joseph don't understand him at that time. But with hindsight, we can understand he was referring to God as his father and that now he was coming into adulthood, he would enter into the work of his father, God. Already he was asking questions and giving answers that amazed the teachers in the Temple.

We are being shown that he knew who he was – he knew who his true father was. And that he had learnt it by revelation since Mary referred to Joseph as "your father."

What are we shown in this passage under the headline and conclusion of the inclusio?

⁴⁰ And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.

⁵² And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men.

He grew and he grew in stature are saying the same thing – he matured. In the past, I had thought growing in stature was growing in mana – but the Greek word is simply about age and maturity.

He became strong as he was filled with wisdom – is the literal sense of verse 40. Verse 51 also says he grew in wisdom – that certainly in demonstrated by the debating with the teachers and their amazement at his answers. Maybe Luke is also demonstrating his wisdom in verse 51: "... he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them.

Luke tells us the grace of God was on him and that he grew in favour or grace (it is the same word, *charis*) with God and men. Again, we have seen a snapshot of that favour in God's gift of wisdom to the young Jesus. The revelation to know that God Almighty is his father, that he was to be doing the things of God and to have so profound a knowledge already of the things of God that the learned teachers were amazed.

Growing in stature and favour

There is a reassuring truth here – God values the growing up process and our development. Jesus lived about 33 years – 30 of those years were preparation! He had to go through the normal processes of learning to talk and walk. He had learn from his mother and from Joseph. He worked at the family trade as a carpenter. He went through the stages of development we have to do through. Don't despise the process of development

and growth –God doesn't. Whether in others or in ourselves, life has stages and seasons, we go through growth and development.

There is the obvious parallel to the life of Samuel. Luke uses very similar wording to that account.

²⁶ And the boy Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favour with the LORD and with men.

Samuel was a leader who was a prophet and the last judge of Israel. The Spirit of God came on him early in his life. But he too had to grow and mature both physically and in favour just as Jesus did – just as we do.

Growth in Wisdom

There is growth in years and size – there is growth in wisdom and they are definitely not the same thing! We learn wisdom from the lessons of life and the Bible tells us that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom². In other words as we obey God because we respect what he commands, we learn wisdom because all his ways are wise.

Obedience

Luke almost certainly spoke to Mary as one of the eyewitnesses he describes in Chapter 1. You can hear in this account her recounting of events and saying that she pondered these things in her heart.

Jesus went back to Nazareth and was obedient to them. The Letter to the Hebrews (5:7-9) says Jesus learnt obedience – not that he was disobedient before, but there is a difference between being ready to obey and actually obeying. Ultimately, Jesus proved his submission and obedience to the Father by obeying to the death. And that obedience was important because not least because the first and continuing major sin of humanity has been rebellion. By obeying even to death, Jesus showed he was not subject to that sinful nature. Hence he was perfected. Now again you might think that meant he changed from being imperfect to perfect but that is not it. The word is about completion and finishing. Through his suffering he completed the task given to him. He finished his work.

Growth in Favour with God and Man

Samuel and Jesus are both described as growing in favour/grace with God and men. It is not an either or but both and. Pastor David Mathis writes,

“True human growth is not Godward at the expense of love. And development in love should not serve as a distraction to Godward advance. The first commandment is to love God. And the second is like it: love your neighbour as yourself.”³

The Epistle passage from Colossians offers direction for our growth in character and grace. I haven't time to unpack it but I do commend it to you to read over and ponder.

We are told to put on (like putting on clothes) compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. These are fruit of the Spirit in different words. This is the positive.

Then in terms of the negative we are to bear with each other and forgive each other. So put up with the annoyances and forgive the hurts. Remember that the Lord has forgiven you and forgive in the same way.

Then put on an over-garment of love which binds together the graces and the forgiveness into a unity.

We are to let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts. That word rule comes from the action of a judge or umpire in public games. So it is the idea of refereeing. Let the peace of Christ referee in your hearts because we were called to peace.

Now add another positive to the outfit and be thankful to God and express your worship to God in singing. With this suit of grace clothes, we will grow in favour both with God and humans.

We have looked at this snippet of the life of the young Jesus and seen how he knew and declared that God was his father. He grew in wisdom and grace with God and men.

² Proverbs 9:10

³ <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/how-god-became-a-man>

We have seen some pointers for our own growth in these areas. So in conclusion, "... whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."⁴

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⁴ Colossians 3:17