

The Early Life of Christ

Call to Worship: Psalm 63

1st Scripture: Philippians 2:1-11

2nd Scripture: Luke 2:39-52

Hymn #387- *I Love to Tell the Story*

Hymn #644- *Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us*

Hymn #547- *My Jesus, I Love Thee*

Introduction

As I've said in the past, the Gospels do not provide us with a "biography" of our Lord's life. Were that the purpose of any of the Gospel writers, what we have in our Bibles would actually look quite different. And so, you will find large gaps in the narratives that are given, especially between our Lord's younger years and the time that He had begun His earthly ministry, when He was around thirty years old.

What we can and ought to suspect is that throughout the majority of His teenage and young adult life, He just lived as an ordinary man, working as a carpenter (like his father, Joseph) and doing all that He could to support His parents in the care of their home in Nazareth. Now certainly, He spent much time studying and learning the Scriptures, as we will see this morning, but beyond that, He wasn't out performing miracles or doing anything that grabbed the attention of his neighbors or local towns people. In fact, he was so discreet in His earlier years, that during His later years of ministry, the people of Nazareth had a hard time embracing Him as the Messiah, stating, "Is this not the carpenter's son?" He was just so ordinary to them, that they could not even register the possibility that He could have been the extraordinary Messiah.

All of that said, the text that we just read (14 verses) provides us with the only narrative that addresses our Lord's younger life. Since, we will be jumping into the beginning of our Lord's ministry years, in Matthew's Gospel (next time, Lord willing; beginning with John the Baptist), I thought it might be helpful to spend a little time, this evening, considering a few observations that can be found here, in Luke's gospel, which provide us with a general summary of the early life of Christ.

I. The Early Life of Christ

It's actually quite interesting how Luke summarizes the early life of Christ. He does something intentional, which as a whole, states as it were, "Okay, we are going to leap forward into the public ministry of our Lord, but before we get there, let me leave you with a critical summary of those years that filled the gap, between His infancy and the time of His public ministry, so that you will have everything essential, that you need to know about those earlier years, which would fall in line with the perfect sacrifice of His cross. I'm not going to say much about those earlier years, because they were ordinary in many ways (He lived, grew and acted like a man), but you do need to understand some things about them, which is necessary to affirm that He legally and legitimately fills the role, as the Great High Priest and Perfect sacrifice on behalf of His people."

Now, how exactly does Luke convey this? He supplies, as it were, a theological sandwich for us. He gives us a general summary statement as the bottom piece of bread, followed by one single, critical piece of narrative as the filler, and then concludes with another general summary statement as the top piece of bread. Following this, he then fasts forward to the beginning of the public ministry of Christ, just like all of the other gospel writers do, starting with the ministry of John the Baptist, who prepares the way.

Let's then look at this theological sandwich, beginning with the two pieces of bread (bottom and top), before honing in on the one critical narrative, given in the middle, as the important filler.

I. The opening and concluding general summaries: Notice, at some point after they had fulfilled all of their obligations at the temple, they later return to Nazareth of Galilee (vs. 39). And then, we are told, in summary, "And the child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him" (vs. 40). That's the bottom piece of theological bread. And then, after the important narrative filler (vs. 41-50), where Luke speaks of another important trip that Joseph, Mary and Jesus had taken to Jerusalem, he speaks of how they had returned again to Nazareth, where Jesus had subjected Himself to the authority of His parents (vs. 51). And then, he adds the final, top piece of bread, when he closes with the summary statement, "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men." And

then, in Chapter three, Luke fasts forward, some eighteen years, to the beginning of Jesus's public ministry.

And so, there's an intentional, carefully laid out picture here that Luke wants to leave with his readers, in this brief overview of the early life of our Lord. And it's interesting because it contains a locational schematic format as well, so as to help the reader recall the message which Luke is here seeking to emphasize. They go from Jerusalem to Nazareth, with a summary statement that follows, then back to Jerusalem and then to Nazareth again, followed by a concluding summary statement.

And so, what then is the primary message that we find in these summary statements, which Luke wants to get across to his audience, concerning the early life of Christ? Here it is. This Jesus was a human man, in every sense of the terms, and He was a righteous human man, who was always obedient to God, throughout the entirety of His earlier years. That's a general summary of the bottom and top bread pieces. Now, let's look at the general statements more clearly, to see that this is indeed the case.

[Read vs. 40 again]. Now, for a moment, we just note that the very purpose for which they had gone to the temple, just before we are told this, was to fulfill the Law, concerning firstborns, who open the womb. That itself is worthy of noting, as well. But, what are we then told here, in this summary statement? He grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him. Notice again, all of these descriptions affirm the humanity of Jesus. He grew. That is, he got taller, bigger and aged like a normal human being. He became strong in spirit. Even as His human body grew, His human spirit became strong. He matured physically and mentally.

He was also filled with wisdom. That is, He increased not only in knowledge, but also in understanding and applying that knowledge. He learned how to live life in a way that would define humanity and manhood, in accordance with God's designed intention for man. He learned the "ins and outs" of carpentry, and how best to build, in such a way, that whatever He set His mind to build, would maintain an excellence in quality and craftsmanship. And He learned how to walk wisely, in every area of obedience to His parents, and in relating to others who interacted with, or came to meet or know Him. And of course, most of all, He learned how to obey God in

all circumstances, favorable and unfavorable (from the standpoint of comfort or difficulty). He grew and matured, in every way that God would have expected of Adam (and mankind), from the beginning.

And the grace of God was upon Him. God's gracious favor travelled with Him in every life circumstance, not keeping Him from experiencing suffering or the growth pains that come with living in a sinful world, but rather, in providing Him with everything that He needed to attain to physical and spiritual maturity. In the same way that God had earlier preserved our Lord from the wicked intentions of Herod, He preserved Him from the workings of Satan, who would do all that He could to thwart Christ's preservation unto becoming a mature man, fit to redeem mankind. Again, God didn't have to keep Jesus from sinning, but He did have to provide Him with every necessary (physical and spiritual) assistance, which man, the creature needs, to advance through life. Man is dependent by nature. Jesus became dependent, when He became man. And as Jesus depended upon His God and Father, God met all of His creaturely needs, by grace. All of this, again, affirms with the utmost affirmation, that Jesus was fully man, preparing Him to be the only Perfect Mediator, High Priest and Sacrifice, needed for sinful men. And so, this is your bottom piece of bread.

Now, let's quickly observe the top piece of bread, found in verse 52. For a moment though, we recall verse 51, which testifies to the fact that our Lord had wholly subjected Himself to the authority of His earthly parents, Mary and Joseph. Right up to the time of His public ministry, Jesus honored and obeyed His parents without the slightest infraction against whatever commands they gave Him. That is, of course, critical to note. And then, again, we are told in verse 52, that Jesus increased in wisdom and stature. This is a reiteration on Luke's part, of what we had already seen in the bottom piece of bread, which again affirms His humanity, and His perfect and proper progression of living as a man, in accordance with the will of God. He continued to grow, both, inwardly and outwardly, as a normal man ought to grow, and yet, without the taint or effects of sin, of course.

And then, Luke also here adds, that He grew in favor with God and men. As Jesus matured, He gained an increased respect from both God and man. He was well pleasing to all, not in an artificial sense, but in a godly, sincere and righteous sense. Now, does this imply that

God was less favorably inclined toward our Lord when He was younger, since God's favor *increased* toward Him. Of course not. It simply means that as our Lord aged, and faced all of the challenges that come, through each step of the maturing process, He obeyed perfectly in every stage, and gained the favor of all. For example, our Lord was not expected to think and act like a fifteen year old, when He was three. His mind experienced development throughout every stage, just like ours did, and at every stage, He perfectly met the requirement of obedience that suited whatever level of maturity He was at. He wasn't expected to take out the trash or do algebra at age three. But, He didn't hit His younger siblings and He shared with them, and God was well pleased with Him. But, when He hit thirteen, there were teenage and adult responsibilities that were expected of Him, and as He met those expectations perfectly, His favor with God and man increased...etc. And so, again, all in all, in these two summary statements (the bottom and top pieces of bread), Luke summarized all that was needed to show that Jesus had lived an ordinary, but perfect life, maturing and growing (inside and out) in accordance with God's designed expectations for man, from the beginning. He was fully man, and He was fully man, as God intended, leading up to His public ministry, where He would then be prepared to make the perfect offering for sinners. These two summary statements show that His entire early life was suited to prepare Him for what will unfold in the rest of the Book. And indeed, His preparation was a perfect success!

Now, what of the filler? What of this important and unique event, which Luke hones in on, and squeezes in between these two general summary statements? [Read verses 41-50 again]

Now, while we don't have time to consider a detailed exposition of this entire section, let me highlight the great relevant contribution that this event adds, to Luke's short recording of the early life of Christ. If we've seen Jesus as the ordinary, but perfect man, in the two surrounding summary statements that we have just considered, here we see Jesus as the unique and extraordinary Son of God, at the same time. In other words, our bottom and top pieces of theological bread have revealed to us the glory of the Son of *Man*. And this middle, filler section, reveals to us the glory of the unique, Son of *God*, teaching us that while Jesus was the ordinary human being (par excellence), He was also the extraordinary, divine Son of God! Luke would have His audience understand both of these critical truths, surrounding the Person and life

of Christ, as both natures of our Lord, were necessary for Him to fulfill His work as the Mediator, High Priest, and Perfect, worthy and complete sacrifice for sinners.

At this critical juncture of our Lord's life (12 years of age, one year away from His Bar Mitzvah and progression into adulthood), it was important for His parents (and us), to recognize that while this Blessed Child belonged to man, He also belonged to God, and God's design for Him needed to take the precedence, even over His earthly parents. And so, when Jesus remains back at the temple, and sits among the scholars, interacting with and learning from (and amazing) them, He was not being disobedient to His parents. Rather, He was beginning to emphasize the reminder, that He was not simply an ordinary child, and soon enough, He would have to bridge off into His primary calling as the Messiah; God's anointed.

I'm not going to focus on all of the "ins and outs" of the narrative here (what happened, whether or not His parents were culpable...etc), which I don't think serves Luke's primary purpose, at all, to be honest. What I would simply hone in on, brethren, is His response to the inquiry of His parents, concerning their question about why He had disappeared (so to speak).

Indeed, His parents were worried and concerned, and more than likely, all of us would have been as well. Remember, three days had passed! But, his parents had failed to look in the one place where they ought to have expected Him to be, if they were aligned with the calling that was upon this child from the moment Gabriel had addressed Mary, telling her that she would bear the Messiah, conceiving from the Holy Spirit. And as God had later preserved them (through dreams and His providence) from the likes of Herod, they could have known that He was indeed safe. As He was preparing to enter adulthood, within the confines of God's continued providence and blessing, they should have known that He was at the temple, where He was sure to be about His *Father's* business. And make no mistake about it, this was no insult to Joseph. Jesus treated Joseph with the utmost love and respect, as His earthly father. But, they had lost sight of His divine calling, at least for the moment, and Jesus had to remind them that He was also the divine Son of God, who belonged first to His Heavenly Father. We are told that they couldn't understand His response (vs. 49). Why was this the case? Because even Mary and Joseph did not understand what Luke's readers (including us) are meant to understand, after the fact. This Jesus is actually God, one with the Father in essence. And that is one of the reasons

why Luke crams this glorious filler into the midst of the two summary statements that speak of our Lord's perfect humanity. He was fully man and fully God, the perfect display of divinity and humanity; One Person with the full gamut of both natures (with everything that defines perfect man and perfect God)!

This necessary reality; this theological sandwich, then sets the tone for the glorious work of ministry that follows in Luke's account.

II. Conclusion

As I thought about this glorious section of Scripture, brethren, tears began to fill my eyes. I just thought, "In some way, I just wish I could have met the child Jesus, and watched and adored Him." And I mean *now* of course, and not when I was an unconverted child. I would have mocked Him and probably sought to harm and offend Him, in those wicked years of my unregenerate life. But, I just would have loved to have beheld that glorious combination of perfect humanity and divinity, following the years of His aging and maturing humanity. It would have been the most loveliest, awe-inspiring sight to behold! But, we will soon see Him in the greater glory of His now glorified state of exaltation in heaven, as the exalted God-Man, who has delved into our lives with intent, leading us to obtain our redemption by His cross, through the Holy Spirit's work of regeneration and sanctification.

But brethren, here's what it all comes down to. Behold, the early years of preparation, as the God Man was raised and matured unto becoming the perfect sacrifice for our sins. Those earlier years were critical, establishing the sufficiency of both the High Priest Himself, and the sacrifice, which He would offer for us. We needed a Lamb without blemish. And that's what we find, growing and maturing in those first thirty years. Why not just have Him lay down His life as a child? Well, aside from the establishing of His kingdom and the preparatory work of His Apostles, He needed to fulfill all righteousness, at every stage of human development. We didn't only need our sins removed, we also needed a merited righteousness. And those first thirty years were an intricate part of securing that active righteousness for us! Hallelujah, what a Savior!

Hallelujah, what a friend! [The Gospel; for children, as well]

Amen!!!

Benediction: Ephesians 3:14-21