

# GROWING IN WISDOM AND STATURE

## Luke 2:41-52

This is a great text for showing us the interplay between the human and the divine natures of Jesus.

In His human nature, Jesus treads on the edge of disobedience to his earthly parents.

He was “born under the law,” Paul tells us, and the law includes the Fourth Commandment, which is: *“You shall honor your father and mother.”*

He remained in Jerusalem without letting them know and caused them a great deal of worry which could be considered disobedience.

But Jesus was “without sin,” so that’s impossible.

It seems like a conundrum, but over the years I’ve found that Scriptural problems like this one are treasures to be mined, because often in the Bible it’s precisely where our human powers of understanding fall short that God’s wisdom breaks through and teaches us something we never could have figured out for ourselves.

The first difficulty with the text that needs to be resolved is one of translation.

The original Greek words in verse forty-nine (εν τοις του πατροσ μου) can be translated “*Did you not know that I had to be in my Father’s house?*” or “*Did you not know that I had to be about my Father’s business?*”

Some translators take it one way and some the other.

The NIV opts for translating it “house”: “*Did you not know that I had to be in my Father’s house.*”

This translation has certain advantages.

First it answers the question of where Jesus was.

Second, it makes the important point that whoever is involved in the Lord’s work must honor and regularly inhabit the Lord’s house.

If Jesus, at the age of twelve, felt it necessary to be in God’s house, then we should be there too.

On the other hand, “*Did you not know that I had to be about my Father’s business?*” is probably a better translation and generates even richer applications for us.

First of all, the expression “*my father’s business*” was an Aramaic idiom for “*a man’s work.*”

At age twelve, a boy was considered to be ready to enter the adult world of work and responsibility, so he began working side by side with his father.

In using this expression Jesus is asserting his manhood, identifying God as his true Father, and describing the work to which he had been called.

Now just stop and think of how that contrasts with our contemporary society!

In first-century Palestine, the object of life was to grow up.

In twenty-first century America, the object of life for many is to stay young.

Their society respected maturity; ours worships youthfulness.

In their society a twelve-year old boy aspired to become independent and take on adult responsibilities.

In our society, young men still live with their parents and believe that they should be forgiven loans they received at age eighteen.

Sixty year old men and women try to recapture their youth by buying sports cars and wrinkle-removing creams and getting facelifts and hair transplants.

The pursuit of eternal adolescence has become the goal of life for many Americans.

This vain quest proceeds from the assumption that the main goal of life is to be happy, and that all of our activities should be directed toward that goal.

But that's not Christianity; that's hedonism, pure and simple—the continual pursuit of pleasure.

True, the *Declaration of Independence* states that all men have a right to happiness and calls that right “*God-given*” and “*inalienable*”—and who wants to argue with the *Declaration of Independence*?

Well, nobody's suggesting that the right to pursue happiness doesn't exist, right along with the right to liberty and the right to life.

But having the right to life doesn't necessarily guarantee that we'll lead a good life.

And having the right to liberty doesn't guarantee that we will use our liberty wisely.

In the same way, having a right to happiness doesn't necessarily mean that happiness should be the main goal of our lives.

The whole thing was put very well by a rabbi I once heard discussing parenting on a TV talk show.

When he said that he demanded hard work and strict adherence to the rules from his children the host asked him if that didn't make his children unhappy.

He responded, "Our job as parents is not to make our children happy, but to raise responsible adults.

If you make a child industrious and responsible, he'll experience happiness along the way.

Happiness," he said, "is the icing on the cake.

But if you make the whole cake icing, it will collapse.

Only a child will want to eat it—and it will make him sick if he does.

There's a Yiddish word that describes what we should raise a child to be: a mensch, a responsible adult.

The wisdom the rabbi was expressing was Scriptural.

The purpose of life, from a Biblical point of view is not to bask in happiness but to be productive in the work which the Lord has called us to do.

If we dedicate ourselves to doing that, happiness will come as a byproduct.

But if we put the pursuit of happiness and pleasure ahead of responsibility to perform the work the Lord has called us to do, our joys will be fleeting and our pursuit will be in vain.

That, I believe, is what today's text is all about.

The point of Jesus' reply to his earthly parents, is that there is a time for us to grow up.

Just as we are designed by God to grow physically, emotionally and intellectually into adults, we are intended to grow spiritually into adults as well.

C. S. Lewis once said, *“God isn't as interested in keeping us happy as He is in helping us grow up.”*

And the way men grew up in first century Israel was to be about their father's business.

Paul says that when we were spiritual infants, we were fed on spiritual milk, but that there is a time for us to move on to solid food.

The problem is that growing spiritually—like all other forms of growing—means experiencing growing pains.

We don't grow by pursuing happiness; we grow by dealing with adversity.

Luther once said that a Christian grows through three activities: prayer, study and struggle.

Prayer, study and struggle in a life based on faith in Jesus Christ are enterprises that are empowered and blessed by God.

That means, among other things, that we should never construe the presence of adversity in our lives as evidence that God is either absent or doesn't care.

God not only allows us to experience adversity, sometimes **he sends it** to help us grow in our faith.

He leads us through the valley of the shadow just as he leads us beside still waters.

He prods us forward with his rod just as he restrains us with His staff.

How does this play out in our Christian lives?

Well, first of all, being about the Lord's business cuts into our secular activities, and we tend to place a higher priority upon our secular activities than we do on being about the Lord's business.

How many days have there been when you haven't found the time to pray?

To avail yourself of the greatest power that you can possibly bring into your life?

How often have you been too tired for an evening devotion with your family—or just given up having them at all?

More often than not, “being about the Lord’s business” forces us to make a choice—a choice we have the opportunity to make on almost a daily basis.

Being about the Lord’s business never seems to integrate conveniently with our priorities.

Have you ever failed to attend Sunday worship or Bible study because you had something more important to do?

What might that have been?

Was it more important than growing in faith and wisdom and stature?

Third, the way things are going in the world—and in our own society as well—the time may come when you will be faced with a choice between remaining obedient to earthly authorities like government or employers or being obedient to God.



For the most part we've been spared from having to make this choice so far in our country, but times are changing.

Increasingly the courts are restricting the free exercise of religion.

Somehow they keep managing to find that while blasphemous art and vulgar language are protected under the first amendment and therefore allowable in the public arena, while religious expression is not.

Employees in both the public and private sectors have been fired for displaying Christian messages in their work spaces.

Hopefully this will not happen to you, but it could.

When the law of man conflicts with the law of God, we must obey God rather than man.

Easier said than done.

In order to mature in your faith, and to grow in wisdom and stature under God's tutelage, you will find yourself repeatedly faced with various forms of the same basic choice: the choice between picking up your cross and climbing the hill of prayer and study and struggle, or languishing in a milk-fed faith which is always looking for the next mountaintop experience, the next "spiritual high."

Neither the choice nor the struggle that follows the right choice is easy.

Still, we can make the right choice if we consider the path our Savior marked out for us.

As today's Gospel lesson states, Jesus was able to remain in subjection to all earthly authority, including his parents, yet be about the work, the business of his Father.

According to his divine nature He was able to amaze the rabbis in the Jerusalem temple.

According to his human nature, he grew throughout his life in wisdom, in stature, and in favor before God and men.

And so can we if we avail ourselves of the forms of nourishment that God has provided—worship, prayer, the study of His Word, Christian fellowship, the sacraments and daily devotions.

If we put ourselves on a diet of adult spiritual food, it will supply us with all the nourishment we need to grow.

There is a verse in one of our Christmas hymns that goes like this:

Yet with the woes of sin and strife the world has  
suffered long  
Beneath the angel-song have rolled two-thousand  
years of wrong  
And man at war with man hears not the love song  
which they bring  
And ever o're its Babel sounds the blessed angels  
sing.

Amen.