

The Christmas Family

Jesus

Luke 2:52

Rev. Freddy Fritz

December 29, 2019

Jesus

Scripture

This Christmas I am taking a brief look at the three key human persons in “The Christmas Family”: Joseph, Mary, and Jesus. Last Sunday we looked at Joseph. On Christmas Eve we looked at Mary. And today we will look at Jesus.

When Jesus was twelve years old, his parents, Joseph and Mary, took him to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. Perhaps Jesus had accompanied his parents every year to the Feast of the Passover, but this year was important because the following year, as a thirteen-year-old, Jesus would officially become a “son of the law,” a full member of the synagogue, similar to the modern custom of *bar mitzvah*. Because of this, Jewish leaders suggested that fathers should train their sons in the observance of the Passover a year before they turned thirteen years old.

It would have been a wonderful time for Jesus. Jerusalem was a city of about 30,000 residents swelled with over 200,000 pilgrims during the Feast of the Passover. When the feast was ended, Joseph and Mary started their journey back home to Nazareth. Unfortunately, they did not realize that they had left Jesus back in Jerusalem. At the end of the first day’s journey, Joseph and Mary discovered that Jesus was not traveling with them. So, they returned back to Jerusalem. After three days, they found the twelve-year-old Jesus in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Jesus were amazed at his understanding and his answers. When Joseph and Mary found Jesus, she expressed their distress at Jesus being missing. Jesus simply replied, “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” These were the first recorded words of Jesus. The Greek text in Jesus’ second question is literally, “Did you not know that *it is necessary* for me to

be in my Father's house?" Jesus had come to understand that he was the Son of God, and that God was *his* Father. His study of God's word enabled him to understand that all of the Old Testament prophecies about God's Deliverer found their fulfillment in him. And so this was a profoundly revealing moment for Jesus.

Nevertheless, even though Jesus now knew that he was God in human form, he went down with Joseph and Mary and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. This is astonishing! Jesus knew that he was God in human form, and yet he humbled himself in obedience to his earthly parents.

Then, we read a striking statement about Jesus in Luke 2:52, our text for today:

⁵² And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man. (Luke 2:52)

Introduction

Most of us have had the experience of seeing a child again after many months, and say to them, "My, how you have grown!" This past week I met a boy, about ten years old, that I had not seen for almost a year. Frankly, I did not recognize him because he had grown so much. In fact, his grandmother said that this past year he had grown about four feet! Well, not quite four feet, but he had grown a lot.

As we come to the end of 2019, and the end of a decade, and head into a new year, and into a new decade, will anyone be able to say of us a year from now, "My, how you have grown!" Many people make New Year's Resolutions. A resolution is a commitment to act or do or achieve something. Resolutions are goals that they may want to achieve in the coming year. I would like to encourage each one of us to make a commitment to grow in the coming year as Jesus grew.

Lesson

The growth of Jesus in Luke 2:52 teaches us how to grow this coming year.

Let's use the following outline:

1. We Need to Grow Mentally (2:52a)
2. We Need to Grow Physically (2:52b)
3. We Need to Grow Spiritually (2:52c)
4. We Need to Grow Socially (2:52d)

I. We Need to Grow Mentally (2:52a)

First, we need to grow mentally.

Verse 52a says, **“And Jesus increased in wisdom....”** I would have preferred my first point to be something like, “We need to grow *wisdomly*,” so that it could parallel the rest of my points. I suppose I could have said that “we need to grow wise,” because that is really the area in which we need to grow.

Note that Luke did not say that **Jesus increased in knowledge**, or understanding. No, he said that **Jesus increased in wisdom**. Knowledge and understanding are prerequisites for wisdom, but they are not the same as wisdom.

Biblical wisdom may be defined as “practical skills associated with understanding and living a successful life.”¹ Wisdom involves both knowledge *and* the ability to apply that knowledge in different circumstances. Proverbs 9:10a says, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” So, how does a Christian grow in wisdom? Let me suggest several steps.

First, a Christian grows in wisdom by learning. If the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, we need to learn more about God. In his letter to the Colossians, Paul notes how he prays for

¹ Martin A. Shields, “Wisdom,” ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

them, and also that they will grow in the knowledge of God. He writes in Colossians 1:9–10, “And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and *increasing in the knowledge of God*.” We learn about God primarily in his word. Yes, while it is true that we can learn some things about God in nature and history, we learn God’s own thoughts in the word of God. So, we need to read God’s word. Do you have a plan to read God’s word systematically this coming year? You will not even begin to grow in wisdom if you do not read his word regularly and systematically.

Second, a Christian grows in wisdom by memorizing. Do you remember after Jesus was baptized, at the beginning of his ministry, he was then led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry (cf. Matthew 4:1-2). And Satan came and tempted him. There were three temptations thrown at Jesus by Satan. Each time Satan tempted him, Jesus responded by quoting Scripture to Satan. If Jesus, the Son of God, needed to quote Scripture to resist the temptation of Satan, how much more do we? Are you memorizing Scripture? Do you know enough Scripture to get yourself out of trouble? Do you know enough Scripture to keep yourself from getting into trouble? You will not grow in wisdom if you do not memorize God’s word.

Third, a Christian grows in wisdom by understanding. To understand is “to perceive the meaning of something; to grasp the idea of something; to comprehend.” It will do you little good to learn God’s word and memorize God’s word if you do not understand God’s word. That is why the Psalmist wrote, “Let my cry come before you, O Lord; give me understanding according to your word!” (Psalm 119:169). Sometimes, Christians say something like, “There is so much in God’s word I don’t understand.” And so

they give up even trying to understand it. And, of course, they don't grow in wisdom because they are not working at understanding the word of God. The problem for Christians, frankly, is not what we *don't* understand; our problem is that we don't live in accordance with what we *do* understand. May I let you in on a secret? The more you learn and memorize and understand, the more you will discover that you still need to learn and memorize and understand. God's word is a mine of treasure of unfathomable depth. Even in eternity we will be learning and growing in wisdom. One of the best ways to grow in understanding is to participate regularly in a Bible study. Make a commitment this coming year to attend the Women's Bible Study, Men's Bible Study, Adult Bible Fellowship, Sunday school, or some study where you can ask questions and grow in your understanding of God's word.

And fourth, a Christian grows in wisdom by application. Application is putting into practice what one knows and understands to be true. It will do you little good to learn God's word and memorize God's word and even understand God's word, if you do not apply God's word. It is at this point that Satan and his demons go wrong. They know, understand, and can even quote God's word, but they do not apply God's word to themselves. Dr. Haddon Robinson, the dean of preachers, illustrates the importance of clear application:

In the American frontier days, there was a settlement in the West whose citizens were engaged in the lumber business. The town felt they wanted a church. They built a building and called a minister. The preacher moved into the settlement and initially was well received. Then one afternoon he happened to see some of his parishioners dragging some logs, which had been floated down the river from another village upstream, onto the bank. Each log was marked with the owner's stamp on one end. To his great distress, the minister saw his members pulling in the logs and sawing off the end where the telltale stamp appeared.

The following Sunday he preached a strong sermon on the commandment "Thou shall not steal." At the close of the service,

his people lined up and offered enthusiastic congratulations: “Wonderful message, Pastor.” “Mighty fine preaching.” “Keep up the good work.”

It wasn’t the response he expected, so he went home to prepare his sermon for the following Sunday. He preached on the same text, the same commandment, but gave it a different ending. He said, “Yes, thou shall not steal, but thou shall also not cut off the end of thy neighbor’s logs.” When he got through, the congregation ran him out of town.²

Wise Christians are those who apply God’s word specifically, clearly, and directly to their own lives. They are mindful of James 1:22–25, which says, “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets *but a doer who acts*, he will be blessed in his doing.”

II. We Need to Grow Physically (2:52b)

Second, we need to grow physically.

Verse 52b says, “**And Jesus increased...in stature....**” The Greek word for **stature** (*helikia*) has a range of meanings including “age, full-age, vigor, stature, size.”³ When our children were young, we would put a mark on the pantry door to show how tall each child was on his or her birthday. It was fun for us—and for them—to see how much taller they had grown each year.

Obviously, children ordinarily grow taller each year. But, we adults have reached our full height. In fact, some of us are starting to shrink and get shorter!

² See <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2014/april/6041414.html>.

³ Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

On Christmas day I received an email from my campus minister's wife. She sent out their annual Christmas greeting to all their friends, family, and supporters. I always enjoy reading their news because of the impact they each had on my life. It is also a "newsy" newsletter. Scattered among the various tidbits was a picture of Garfield, the overweight cat cartoon character. It had "Garfield's wisdom," and read as follows: "We get heavier as we get older because there's a lot more information in our heads. So I'm just really intelligent and my head couldn't hold any more, so it started filling up the rest of me."

I would say the commitment we should draw from increasing **"in stature"** is that we should take care of our stature. That means that, as far as possible, we should seek to be healthy. We should eat a good diet, get proper rest, and exercise. All things in moderation will go a long way for each of us.

III. We Need to Grow Spiritually (2:52c)

Third, we need to grow spiritually.

Verse 52c says, **"And Jesus increased...in favor with God...."** In his humanity, Jesus developed his relationship with his heavenly Father. The expression in the Greek is interesting. Literally, it says, **"And Jesus increased...in grace with God...."** Of course, **grace** has to do with the unmerited favor of God. Jesus never had any demerits, and so he was never out of favor with God. But, we need the grace of God every day in our lives.

How does this happen?

First, we grow spiritually by apprehending the grace of God personally. We must know experientially that we have a personal relationship with God. We are Christians not because of what we have done for God, but because of what God has done for us. God has placed our sin on his Son, Jesus, so that he has paid the penalty for all our sin. God has then given us faith to believe that Jesus is our Savior.

And God has forgiven us, and adopted us into his family. We are now his beloved children. And our great desire is to love and please and get to know our heavenly Father better and better.

Second, we grow spiritually by reading God's word. I have already mentioned the importance of reading God's word. But, dear friends, it is really, really important to have a systematic plan to read God's word. Not because you *must*, but because you *want* to read it. When two young people fall in love, they want to spend as much time as possible with each other. Then, one of them has to go to another country for an extended period of time. When the letters arrive, do you think that they are thinking, "O dear. I *must* read this letter now." No! The person cannot wait to rip open the letter and read what his beloved has to say. If you are a child of God, God's word is his love letter to you, and you *want* to read it.

Third, we grow spiritually by praying. Whereas reading the word of God is God speaking to us, our praying is us speaking to God. It is helpful to have a systematic way to pray. Some people use the acronym ACTS—Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication—as a guide for prayer. Others use the Lord's Prayer as a guide. And yet others use the Psalms as a guide. A couple of months ago, I felt that my time of prayer was getting to be rote and just working through my systematic list in order to get through it. So, I tried something different. However, after a few months, I found that I was not praying for significant things for which I had previously prayed. And so I returned to my previous pattern for prayer, and what a blessing it has been to do so.

And fourth, we grow spiritually by walking in obedience to our Father. As we learn what is involved in being a disciple—a follower—of Jesus, we must practice what he teaches us. So, for example, it will involve worshiping each Lord's Day, giving faithfully to the Lord of our time, talents, and treasures, resisting temptation in every area of our lives, and so on. For many years, I used to pray, "Lord, help me to understand your word so that I may obey it." But, in

fact, that is backwards. It is *as I obey* God that I grow in understanding. This truth was brought home to me when I started running marathons a few years after finishing my undergraduate degree. South Africa's most important marathon is the Comrades Marathon. Actually, it is an ultra-marathon, a distance of 55 miles. In order to qualify for the Comrades Marathon, one has to complete a standard marathon. Once I started training for the marathons, I also started subscribing to and reading several running magazines. I read them carefully to learn about the right kinds of shoes, the right diet, the best training regimen, and so on. When I got injured, I pulled out the magazines that dealt with injuries. I was invested in learning as much as I could to run as well as I could. But, once I stopped running marathons, the magazines had less and less meaning for me. That is why obedience to God's word is a precursor to understanding. It is because I am committed to doing that which pleases my Father that has me wanting to understand what he requires of me.

IV. We Need to Grow Socially (2:52d)

And finally, we need to grow socially.

Verse 52d says, **“And Jesus increased...in favor with...man.”** Jesus was once asked, “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 22:37–40). Love for God. And love for neighbor. The entire Law of God is summarized in these two commandments. We love our neighbor when we regularly practice the “one another” commands of Scripture. Commands such as: “love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing

honor” (Romans 12:10); “Live in harmony with one another” (Romans 12:16); “welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you” (Romans 15:7); “be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32); and many more similar commands.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the growth of Jesus as set forth in Luke 2:52, let us commit to growing this coming year.

In 1738, the literary giant Samuel Johnson wrote in his diary: “Oh Lord, enable me to redeem the time which I have spent in sloth.” Nineteen years later, he wrote, “Oh mighty God, enable me to shake off sloth and redeem the time misspent in idleness and sin by diligent application of the days yet remaining.” He wrote a variation of this prayer every year after that. Finally, in 1775, 38 years after his first resolution, he wrote, “When I look back upon resolution of improvement and amendments which have, year after year, been made and broken, why do I yet try and resolve again? I try because reformation is necessary, and despair is criminal.”⁴

Johnson describes so many of us. We start each year making resolutions. We make commitments to growth and change each year. But, then, twelve months later, we are disappointed.

Friends, the gospel is the good news that while we do fail and fall short, Jesus does not. We are weak, but he is strong. His love and devotion and commitment to us will not fail.

So that is why we are encouraged to make commitments to grow mentally, physically, spiritually, and socially. Because even if we fail some days—as we surely will—Jesus will pick us up and cheer us on to keep growing. So, let us make a commitment to grow this year, so that a year from now, we will be able to encourage each other and say, “My, how you have grown!” Amen.

⁴ See <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2014/december/7122214.html>.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can
be found at:

1. www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons.
2. www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp.
3. www.sermonaudio.com/source_detail.asp?sourceid=FreddyFritz.

Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church (PCA)

Answers for Life!

Address: 19911 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33647

Telephone: (813) 973-2484

Fax: (813) 973-4673

Email: Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org

Web site: www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org