

The Child Who Was God

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Luke 2:36-52

Someone said that “The boyhood of Jesus was like a walled garden, from which we have been given one, single flower.” I like that picture. It is found in the Gospel of Luke. Although it’s only one, single flower, that flower fills our hearts with wonder and amazement, as we look at Jesus the boy in the Temple, both hearing and speaking to the leaders of the Jews about His knowledge of God’s Word.

Our passage really has no break from where we last left off. But there are two main sections in our passage today. The first section is in verses 36-38. It is where the infant Jesus meets Anna. Jesus had already met Simeon; and Mary, Joseph and Jesus are still in the Temple; and Simeon had still been prophesying. But at the same time that Simeon was speaking his Nunc dimittis, his departing message, Anna the prophetess comes into the Temple, and she too begins to speak and prophesy concerning the Christ child. The second main section is in verses 39-52, where we see the boyhood of Jesus in the city of Nazareth, in the Temple and then with His family in the area of Nazareth.

Now let’s look first at verses 36-38, when Jesus meets Anna. Luke says, “Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity; and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And coming in that instant....” That is a reference to when Simeon was still prophesying, so Simeon and Anna divinely arrived at the same time and saw the Christ child. Then “She gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.”

Her name was first given to us in verse 36. Anna is a beautiful name. It’s the Greek, New Testament equivalent of the Hebrew, Old Testament Hannah. The name means “grace” or “God has been gracious.” Who was she? She is described for us in verse 36 as being a prophetess.

Don’t misunderstand that. She didn’t have the office of a prophet; there were no prophetess offices in the Old or New Testaments. Rather there were women who were Spirit filled, full of the Word of God who prophesied, meaning they spoke forth the Word of God. There is a list of other women in the Old Testament who were known as prophetesses. In the New Testament, Philip the Evangelist had seven daughters who all prophesied. The word “prophecy” simply means “to speak before.” It not only meant to prophesy future events, but it also meant to speak before the people the Word of God.

So most likely Anna was speaking forth the Word of God. Her heart was full of Scripture like Mary and Elizabeth. She also was a woman devoted to God. She came to the Temple daily and shared the Scripture with others.

Anna also was the daughter of Phanuel. He is mentioned in Genesis 32:30 as the place where Jacob, before he met his brother, Esau, wrestled with the angel that night. It is one of my favorite stories in the Bible. They are in Phanuel by the brook Jabbok, one of the tributaries of the Jordan River. So that is the area where Anna was from.

And she was from the tribe of Asher. Asher was Jacob's eighth son. Jacob had 12 sons, which comprised the 12 tribes of Israel, one of which was Asher. The tribe of Asher became one of the 10 tribes that broke away in the north of Israel and later came back to Judah in the south. We hear of "the lost tribes"; not so. She was of the tribe of Asher.

It also says Anna was "of a great age." What does that mean? She had lived as a married woman for seven years. We don't know her age when she got married, but women in those days got married very young, as teenagers. And then it seems to say—we can't be sure in the Greek—that she had been a widow for 84 years. So she would have been at least 100, and most likely, 105-110. But the way it was written in the text, she could have been a widow who was 84 years old.

But the real focus and what is important is the kind of woman she was and her character. Verse 37 says that she "did not depart from the temple." That meant she literally lived in the temple area. They had apartments for the priests, and there is speculation that she might have lived in one of those apartments, since she was there every day. Or she might have lived nearby and showed up every morning and spent the day there. Either way, she spent all her time there in the temple, the house of God.

She also served in God's house, verse 37. She "served God." And how did she serve God? "With fastings and prayers night and day." So she lived in God's house, she served in God's house and she fasted and prayed. In every way, she was a Proverbs 31 woman. She was a woman who feared the Lord and was to be praised. Proverbs 31 says, "Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised." That was Solomon's mother telling him what kind of a woman he should find for a wife. If anyone can tell a young man what kind of woman to look for in a wife, it's his mother. She gave it all there in Proverbs 31.

The New Testament talks about what we call "widows indeed," in that they are widowed, they have no family to help or support them, they are devoted to God, serving the saints, ministering to the Lord—they should be provided for and taken care of by the church. We have social systems today that take care of women. We have retirement funds and things like that, so it's not as necessary. But Biblically speaking, if you have a woman who is widowed, has absolutely no family, no way to support herself and is a godly woman serving the Lord, then we, as the church, should take care of her. The Bible is very clear. That's a pretty heavy thing.

So this woman, Anna, was living in God's house serving the Lord. She was fasting and praying, and I think it's important that we be planted in the house of the Lord like Anna.

Anna also had a thankful heart, verse 38. “She gave thanks to the Lord.” She was widowed and lived alone, but she grew better and not bitter. She turned sweet. She had a thankful heart.

And I like the expression in verse 38 that she “spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.” She told others about Jesus, the Messiah. And she looked for the Redeemer in Israel. “Those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem” is a figure of speech about those who looked for and anticipated God’s promise of the coming Messiah.

So all this is a beautiful description of this saintly, godly woman named Anna. And all this has application to us as believers today. I believe we should be planted in God’s house. Every year Mary and Joseph took the Child Jesus from Nazareth to Jerusalem for the Passover Feast. And they stayed there to celebrate the Feast. So they went to church together as a family.

Nothing is more important for us as individuals or as a family than to be planted and grounded in the church and in a relationship with God in the house of God. Find a good church and get your family rooted, grounded and planted and growing in a good church, in the house of the Lord.

Anna also served, so we should also be serving in the house of the Lord. We should be praying, fasting, singing songs of praise, telling others about Jesus and looking for His soon return. So all these qualities should be applicable to us as believers.

I also like the fact that since Anna had been widowed, she experienced bitterness in her life, but she grew better and not bitter. She grew sweeter not sour, even though she went through hard times.

Sometimes as we grow older and age and experience some of the reverses of life, the hardships of life and bitterness of life, we can grow bitter, hard, cantankerous and grumpy. Let’s not get grumpy, bitter and cantankerous. Let’s grow sweeter as the years go by. Let’s grow more like Jesus and be used for His glory. What a blessed woman Anna was.

Now the story moves, in verses 39-52, to the boyhood of Jesus. This is where we get this flower from this walled garden that we can look at. We will see Jesus in three areas: in Nazareth as a boy, in the Temple as a young boy of 12 and in the family living in Nazareth once again.

In verses 39-40, we see the story of Jesus in Nazareth. “So when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord...” Remember that Jesus was circumcised, Mary was purified and they no doubt paid the five-shekel tax to redeem Jesus back. And they did it all “according to the law of the Lord.” “They returned to Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth. And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.”

This passage, in verse 40, is the first of two summary statements, the second of which is in verse 52. They are bookends to this section of the boyhood of Jesus. It summarizes how He grew as a young child. We will see His humanity and His deity. Jesus was a sinless fully-man,

and He was also divine. That's why I titled this message "The Child Who was God."

In verses 38-39 we have a big gap of things that took place that aren't recorded by Luke that I want to make mention of. There would be the wise men who visited, there would be the flight to Egypt and there was the slaughter of the innocents decreed by Herod, all of which are recorded in Matthew 2. All this takes place between verses 38 and 39, when Jesus goes from a baby or infant or toddler to being 12 years old. Then He disappears again back in Nazareth for 18 years and is missing in the Scriptures until He appears in His public ministry announced by John the Baptist and is baptized by John in the Jordan River.

The wise men came to see the baby Jesus before Mary and Joseph went back to Nazareth. We have manger scenes in which we have the shepherds, Mary, Joseph and the baby and the three wise men. But the Bible doesn't say there were three wise men. Where we get the number three is that they brought gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, so we figured there must be three of them. But there might have been more. The wise men came from the East, saw the baby, Herod inquired of them where the baby was born and what time, and then Herod had all the innocents slaughtered in Bethlehem.

Mary and Joseph were also warned before this by an angel of the Lord to go to Egypt. So when I say "flight to Egypt," I don't mean they went to the airport, booked tickets and got on a plane and flew to Egypt. They went from Bethlehem to Cairo by fleeing to Egypt. Then the Lord said it was safe for them to return. They knew Herod had died, but one of his sons reigned in his stead, who was cruel as well. So they finally went back to the city of Nazareth. All these happenings are in this gap period in verses 38-39.

Then the summary statement is in verse 40. "And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him." Now verse 52 says, "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men." So Jesus grew intellectually, physically, spiritually and socially. So in between these two summary statements, we have the story of Christ in Jerusalem at 12 years of age.

I like what William Hendriksen said. He said, "The development of the child was therefore perfect. This, along every line—physical, intellectual, moral, spiritual. From the beginning to the end, progress was unimpaired and unimpeded by sin, whether it be inherited or acquired." Jesus Christ was perfect humanity at every stage of His growth and development.

Can you imagine having a sinless two-year-old?! Our son and daughter-in-law have a two-year-old. He's actually named after me; his name's John Miller. They said he's really been acting up. I thought, No; he's my grandson! Can you imagine a two-year-old who is just perfect?! A four-year-old?! A five-year-old?! Can you imagine the bumper sticker on your chariot? "My Child is the Son of God. He's perfect!"

This whole passage is one of the most difficult to preach, because the truths are buried in this simple story. To think that Jesus had to grow in His awareness of His Messiahship and that He

was the Savior of the world! He wasn't a five-year-old standing up and saying, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me," John 14:6. No; He didn't have that comprehension then. He had to learn to walk, to talk, learn His alphabet, to read, to learn His Scriptures. In every way, He grew up as a perfect, sinless man. So He was the sinless, child-boy Jesus, true and perfect humanity.

Now we see Him in the Temple. This is the story we're most familiar with, verses 41-50. Let's first look at verses 41-43. This section is the last reference to Joseph in the Bible. After this we don't hear of Joseph again anywhere in the Bible. "His parents..." referencing Mary and Joseph "...went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover."

There were three, annual, Jewish feasts that only the male Jews were required to attend in Jerusalem: the Passover, referred to in our text; Pentecost; and Tabernacles, or the Feast of Booths or sometimes the Feast of Succoth. Mary and Joseph went every year to the Passover. Mary didn't have to go, but she went with Joseph and took Jesus. By the time Jesus was 12, He probably went with some of His siblings, because Mary and Joseph had other children.

At the Passover, Jerusalem would swell to over 200,000 pilgrims. There would be the slaughter of the lambs for the sacrifice. And it just makes you wonder what Jesus was thinking, as He grew older every year and watched the ceremony, that He was "the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world," John 1:29. And their journey would take about three days from Nazareth to Jerusalem. It was about 75 to 80 miles. They would travel in a large caravan.

Verse 42 says, "And when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast." They would also stay for the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which came a week after Pentecost. And notice the phrase "went up to Jerusalem." Whenever you went to Jerusalem from any direction, all roads ascended to Jerusalem; you ascended the mountains up to Jerusalem.

Verse 43, "When they had finished the days, as they returned, the Boy Jesus lingered behind in Jerusalem. And Joseph and His mother did not know it." We chuckle a little bit there. But don't laugh so hard; you've forgotten your kids before.

My wife and I had to always drive separately to church. She would bring the kids to church, but sometimes they would jump in Dad's car and ride home with me. There were many days when she thought the kids had jumped in my car and gone home with me, but I expected her to take the kids home. When we both got home we would get a call saying, "Hey, you left your kids at church." We just said, "We'll get them next Sunday." No; we had to go down and pick them up.

So Mary and Joseph would travel in a large caravan with the women in one group and the men in another group. The children would be with the women, and the men would be behind them. Naturally Joseph thought Jesus was with Mary, and Mary thought Jesus was with Joseph. They couldn't communicate, so they just assumed. After a days journey from Jerusalem, striking camp, they realized Jesus wasn't with them. Panic struck. They realized that they left

Jesus in Jerusalem.

Verse 44, “But supposing Him to have been in the company, they went a day's journey, and sought Him among their relatives and acquaintances.” So in these large caravans they would travel with their relatives, who also didn't know where Jesus was. And since they were a day out, they would have to spend the night there and then spend another day going back to Jerusalem. They would have arrived in the dark, so it was the next day before they would find Jesus, a total of three days since He went missing.

Verse 45, “So when they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem, seeking Him.” Now isn't this amazing that He who came into the world “to seek and to save that which was lost” was Himself lost. The One who would be the Savior of the world needs to be found. It's bad enough when you lose your kid, but when the Savior of the world is lost—“We've lost the Savior!” So they went back to seek Him.

Verse 46, “Now so it was that after three days...” What a panic they must have been in! “...they found Him...” Where else? “...in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers...” This would be the rabbis, the religious teachers, the great scholars and many extra ones gathered there because of Passover. “...both listening to them and asking them questions.” This was the Jewish custom; the rabbis would sit down, and the students would sit around them. It wouldn't just be a monologue teaching; there would be a dialogue of questions and answers.

Verse 47, “And all who heard Him...” the 12-year-old boy, Jesus “...were astonished at His understanding and answers.” Now this has all been His humanity, as the boy Jesus learned the Scriptures. They were “astonished” or “struck out of themselves.” The same word is used in verse 48 for “amazed.”

Continuing with verse 48, “So when they saw Him, they were amazed; and His mother said to Him, ‘Son, why have You done this to us? Look, Your father...” This is Joseph, who is His legal father, not His biological Father. “...and I have sought You anxiously.” This is a very strong word; they were greatly upset. “And He said to them, ‘Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?’” Some translations say, “in My Father's house.” Verse 50, “But they did not understand the statement which He spoke to them.”

So they had an angel announce to them His birth, Mary had the immaculate conception in her womb, they had the visiting shepherds and the wise men, they heard Elizabeth and Simeon and Anna—all this confirmation. But when Jesus said to them, “I must be about My Father's business,” they didn't quite fathom or comprehend or understand. We have here parents who are sinners and a Son who is perfectly sinless. But we will see that Jesus lived in submission to His earthly parents.

One lesson I want to make in verses 41-43 is that Joseph and Mary went together to worship, and they took Jesus with them. So parents, be an example to your children to love God and be in God's house on a consistent, regular basis. Your children are watching you. Every year they

went faithfully to the Temple together as a family. You should go to church together, pray together and serve the Lord together. The family needs the church, and the church needs the family. So Joseph and Mary were committed.

I like verse 49, when Joseph and Mary finally discovered Jesus sitting in the Temple listening to the doctors of the law, answering questions and asking them questions, “He said to them, ‘Why do you seek Me? Do you not know that I must be about My father’s business?’” There is no indication in the text—and we know from the Bible that Jesus was sinless—that He sinned when He said this to His parents. He wasn’t being a bad boy. He wasn’t being naughty or mischievous. Mary wasn’t trying to scold Him; she was just expressing their worry about Him. She just said, “Son, why have You done this to us? Look, Your father and I have sought You anxiously.” Then Jesus immediately replied, “Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?”

This is the first time Jesus speaks that is recorded in the Bible. Some of His last words recorded on the Cross are, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do,” Luke 23:34. And in Luke 2:46, He said, “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.” So He opened with “My Father’s business,” and He closed with, “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.” And there is so much packed into this first statement of Jesus that we can’t exhaust. But He did call God His Father.

And not only is this the first recorded time in Scripture that Jesus speaks; it is the first time in all the Bible that anyone called God their personal “Father.” God was called “Father” to Israel, but no one would think of calling Him “my Father” as an individual. So it’s the first time that the word “Abba,” for God, was used on an individual, personal basis.

This is revolutionary what Jesus brought in when He said, “When you pray, say: ‘Our Father...’” or “Abba” “...in heaven, hallowed be Your name,” Luke 11:2. And Jesus referred to God not only as His Father, uniquely, but that God was our Father, who cared for us. So this is the first time He mentions the Father as being His own Father.

And note that when Jesus said, “My Father,” that Jesus was claiming to be the Son of God, which is a claim to be divine. When the Bible says that Jesus is the, not a, Son of God, that is a clear affirmation of the deity of Jesus. Every time the Bible says “the Son of God,” it means He is God. “Son of” describes His nature and character. And in the unique way that no one else can say, God is His Father.

Also, when Jesus started His public ministry and He was baptized, the heavens opened, the Holy Spirit descended on Him in the form of a dove and His Father said, “You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased,” Luke 3:22. So the Father audibly spoke to Jesus and said, “You are My beloved Son.” So Jesus is the Son of God, He is divine and He is the only, unique Son of God. And as we see in our text, Jesus was in His Father’s house doing His Father’s business.

Then Jesus expressed an awareness of and a compulsion for His divine mission. He said, “I

must be about My Father's business." Notice the "I must." This is one of many "musts" used by Jesus in the Bible. In John 3:14, Jesus said, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up." Jesus also said, "I must be crucified...I must be buried...I must rise again the third day...I must preach." In Luke 24:7, the angels said to the disciples, "The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again."

This "must" was a divine awareness that Jesus had that grew and developed with Him over the years that He was the Son of God. Now He is 12 years old, and at 13, He would actually become a son of the Law, spend the next 18 years in Nazareth and then He began His public ministry. But Jesus had a sense of a divine "must"; He understood His calling as the Son of God. He was in complete harmony with God's will for His life. But in verse 50, Jesus was not understood by His family. He said "I must." So He came to this awareness of who He was.

In verses 51-52, we see Jesus living the hidden years in Nazareth with his family. "Then He went down with them..." meaning He left Jerusalem "...and came to Nazareth..." way up in the north "...and was subject to them, but His mother kept all these things in her heart." So basically she's keeping a baby book. And now we see the summary statement in verse 52: "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men."

So Jesus knew He was the Son of God, that God was His Father and yet He was subject to His earthly parents. If you were 12 and knew you were God, would you obey your parents? If you were God, you would. But there are a lot of 12 year olds who think they're gods.

Think about this again. Jesus was a perfect baby, a perfect infant, a perfect toddler, a perfect adolescent, a perfect teen, a perfect young man—perfect in every way. Yet He subjected Himself to His parents. The Bible says that Jesus "was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin," Hebrews 4:15.

obey your parents. If Jesus had to submit to Joseph and Mary, we too should submit to our parents growing up.

Now what was Jesus doing during those 18 years in Nazareth that are hidden from view? The answer is in verse 52: He was growing up. He "increased," which meant He grew up in the following areas: "in wisdom..." intellectually "...and stature..." physically "...and in favor with God..." spiritually growing in relationship to His Father in heaven "...and men." And as a man, He was growing socially with others around Him.

People would say, "Man, that Jesus is the best carpenter around! If you need a really good yoke for your oxen, '[His] yoke is easy and [His] burden is light.' If you need a coffee table, it was the best coffee table I ever had made!" He was working with His hands. Jesus had blisters and cuts on His fingers. Jesus sweat by the brow. He worked and labored.

In Nazareth, Jesus submitted to His parents and worked in the carpenter shop. It speaks of the value of manual labor. Christianity sanctified manual labor. The Greeks despised manual labor,

but Christianity, with its roots in Judaism, elevated manual labor. God became a man, He was a boy and He submitted to His peasant parents in the little town of Nazareth working in the carpenter shop. And no doubt when Joseph died, Jesus had to take over the business.

So what was He doing during all these years? Growing up, living in subjection to His parents, working in the carpenter shop, keeping the law of God, going to Jerusalem for the Passover Feast.

Thus, Jesus can understand us. God, in Christ, “pitched His tent among us.” That’s what John means in John 1:14: He “dwelt among us.” In every way, He went through life and can relate to us. So when you’re tired from working hard and trying to make ends meet, when you’re laboring on your job and say, “Lord, this is difficult,” Jesus understands. The fact that God became man in the Person of Jesus Christ means that He understands. Someone said, “In every pain that rends the heart, the Man of sorrows has a part.” There is nothing that we go through in life that He can’t relate to, or understand or have compassion for.

We should also learn the lesson of not despising our time of preparation. Jesus was finally coming to the self-realization of who He was and His mission in the plan and purpose of God. That’s why He said, “I must.” There was no option there. “I must go to Jerusalem...I must be crucified and slain...I must be buried...I must rise from the dead.” God the Father had sent God the Son. God the Son came willingly, but He had a mission to fulfill. At 12 years old, He was already aware of the fact that “I must be about my Father’s business.” And that business would lead to the Cross and His death by Crucifixion for the sin of the whole world.

I believe that we, as God’s people, also have a divine “must.” What has God called you to be? What has God called you to do? What is that “must” that God is calling you to? I think that one of the most important things you could ever discover and become aware of in your life is who you are in Christ, what your calling and mission is in life and then setting your face like flint and saying, “‘I must be about my Father’s business.’ I must be doing what God has called me to do.”

It was 51 years ago that I first opened the Bible in a home Bible study and taught the Bible. I began to sense that God called me to preach and to be a pastor. I was still trying to figure out my calling and purpose in life, where I’m going in life when I became more and more aware that God had called me to teach the Word, to preach the Bible and to pastor His church. God was raising up this church in our home, and I pastored there for 39 years. As I read this passage, I was thinking about my whole life and that basically God had a “must” for me. “I must preach His Word. I must be faithful to what He has called me to be.”

And I believe that each one of us has a divine “must.” What is it that God has called you to be? What is it that God has called you to do? You “must be about [your] Father’s business.”