

## The Sunday School Lesson.

SERIES FOR 1896.—FIRST QUARTER.

Studies in the Gospel According to Luke.

## THE BOY JESUS.

January 12, 1896.

Lesson II.: Luke II. 40-52.

## INTRODUCTION.

The evident object of Luke, in writing the Life of Christ, is to tell the story of a Son of God who, in his maturity, became a Witness of God and the Saviour. He therefore passes quickly over the early years of Jesus. He reproduces the pre-natal traditions; he recounts from previous records the marvellous incidents attending his birth and infancy; then, with a single exception, he leaves the succeeding thirty years of his life in obscurity.—The single exception to the prevailing silence as to the preparatory years of Jesus, is our lesson to day. We have one scene in the boyhood of Jesus; and the purport of this scene is its evidence that Jesus, however exceptionally born, was a true Son of Man. He shared the limitations of our common humanity. His spiritual life, like his bodily stature, was a growth.—"His development," says Farrar, "was a strictly human development. He did not come into the world endowed with infinite knowledge; but as Luke tells us, he was gradually advanced in wisdom." He was not clothed with infinite power, but experienced the weakness and imperfections of human infancy. He grew as other children grow, only in a childhood of stainless beauty,—as the flower of roses in the spring of the year, and as lilies by the waters. There is for the most part a deep silence in the evangelists respecting this period; but what eloquence in their silence. May we not find in their very reticence a wisdom and an instruction more profound than if they had filled many volumes with minor details?"

## LESSON STORY.

If direct light on the formative period of Jesus' life is not abundant, side-light, gained by modern research, clothes with visibility much of his early experience.

The house he lived in was such as carpenters of Nazareth have lived in ever since; for fashions are staid in the East. A stone house, thirty feet long, nearly as wide; with a flat roof to which stairs ascend on the outside; with no windows in the walls, the door serving alike for ventilation and for light. The one room of the house was a carpenter's shop, a parlor, a kitchen, a bedroom. The furnishings, aside from the carpenter's tools, were a stool or two, with which to occasionally vary the custom of sitting upon the earth floor; some mats or mattresses which served for beds; some sacred leaves of the Law were the sole ornament of the walls.

In such a place, surely in a place no more luxurious than this, Jesus passed his early years.

But some modifying facts are to be remembered. Life in Nazareth was an open air life. There were no hard winters with their indoor confinement. Home-love and home-associations sanctified the humble dwelling. "Be it ever so humble, there is no place like home." Jesus lived with brothers and sisters; and while they may not have fully shared his deeper life, he doubtless found joy in their companionship, and entered heartily into their innocent sports and daily employments.

The scenery surrounding the village of Nazareth must have been an important factor in Jesus' education. Nazareth was a village, then as now, containing about three thousand inhabitants. Flowing through one of the streets from the westward hills, was a stream of pure water; in the market or green, this stream fell into a reservoir.

Here was the center of the village social life. The outlook from various openings in the craggy borders of the village, has awakened many a beholder to an inexpressible sense of the beautiful and sublime. Robinson, in his "Researches," describes the view from the plateau above the town, and the suggestions of the scene: "Seating myself in the shade of the rock, I remained for some hours upon the spot, lost in the contemplation of the wide prospect, and of the events connected with the scenes around. In the village below the Saviour of the world had passed his childhood; and although we have few particulars of his life during those early years, yet there are certain features of nature which meet our eyes now, just as they once met his. He must often have visited the fountain near which we had pitched our tent; his feet must have wandered frequently over the adjacent hills, and his eyes doubtless gazed upon the splendid prospect from this very spot. Here the Prince of Peace looked down upon the great plain, where the din of battles had often rolled, and the garments of the warrior been dyed in blood; and he looked out, too, upon the sea over which the swift ships were to bear the tidings of his salvation to nations and continents then unknown. How has the moral aspect of things been changed. Battles and bloodshed have indeed not ceased to desolate this unhappy country, and gross darkness now covers the people; but from this region a light went forth which has enlightened the world and unveiled new climates; and now the rays of that light begin to be reflected back from distant isles and continents, to illumine even the darkened land where it first sprang up."

While Jesus was not "learned,"—that is, he was not a graduate of one of the great schools in Jerusalem where the

scribes and the priests were taught,—yet he was not without early school privileges. Connected with the one synagogue at Nazareth was a school, taught by a duly qualified scribe; in this school Jesus doubtless gained a substantial education. The literature taught was the best then in the world; it has been preserved to us in the Old Testament. Various other proverbial sayings which were in Jesus' day impressed upon the memory of the young, have come down to us. This is one of the sayings in the synagogue-schools: "Make the best of your childhood; youth is a crown of roses, old age a thorn." Here is another of these sayings: "Do not fear death; it is only a kiss if you fear God." Here is another of these sayings, which suggests the great hope which was afterward made effective in the Gospel. "Trust in the mercy of God, even if the sharp sword be at your throat: He forsakes none of his creatures to give them up to destruction."

Religion was the fountain of his home-life; it was the central theme of his school-study; and with his inner life the peaceful influence of nature harmoniously blended. The grace of God was upon him.

1. Jesus Accompanies his Parents to the Passover in Jerusalem.—vs. 40-42.

At twelve he reached the first crisis in his life. At this age all Jewish boys must be set to the learning of some trade. He was now required to fulfill all the religious duties imposed by the Mosaic law. He was now first privileged to accompany his parents in their pilgrimage to Jerusalem to attend the greatest national feast, the Passover.

That he was eager to see the great city; to behold with his own eyes the wondrous temple, where he had been by his parents dedicated in his infancy; that he had even hilarious joy in the foot journey of seventy miles from his home to the capital, mingling with the hundreds of thousands going on the same joyous religious errand, is all implied in the brief descriptive touches given in the record.

2. He Became Absorbed in the Teaching of the Rabbis in the Temple Court.—vs. 43-50.

Note what chiefly interested the youthful Jesus at the feast. It was customary on certain of the feast days for renowned teachers of the law to teach the people in the Court of the Women. The instructions of these doctors at other times could be obtained only for a price. Now the whole Hebrew population was invited to freely share the instruction which only such teachers as Hillel and Gamaliel could impart. The people were even invited to ask questions; to state their personal difficulties in their religious experience. The learned teachers endeavored to supply the need of popular religious guidance.

To mingle with the hearers of these recognized teachers of the Jewish religion was the most interesting and absorbing of all the attractions which Jesus found in the holy city. To be among the inquirers, to state the problems which had already become his inner companions, this was the pursuit in which Jesus at once engaged. In this pursuit he forgot the passing of time.

After two days, the sacrifices having been meanwhile offered, the pilgrims were privileged to return to their homes. It seems to have been pre-arranged that Joseph and Mary and Jesus should thus early start for Nazareth. But Jesus had been from the first left to himself. He was a boy, surely, who could be trusted. He had found some shelter in the city; or to sleep in the open air would have been to him no hardship. His food bag or some friendly person supplied him with sustenance. He was accorded a temporary independence. And he could not leave the feast in its midst, while such a privilege was his of learning from the Jerusalem schools, which were otherwise barred from him all his life. It was his duty to profit by the manifold boon which had now come to his inner life.

Joseph and Mary, on the third day of the feast, started homeward. It shows the free life Jesus lived in his youth, and the parental confidence which was reposed in him, to be told that they had gone a full day on their journey before they learned that he was not of their company. Then, inquiry among their kinsfolk and neighbors in the caravan failing to give them any news of their son, they returned to Jerusalem. Arriving in the city they searched a full day among the people and in the places where they expected to find him, but not in the temple enclosure.

At last they went to the temple. And there, among the adult pupils of the great teachers, they saw their son. They could but observe that the young boy had an unwonted deference paid to him. His questions betokened a religious experience unparalleled for depth and breadth in one of his years. *Son*, said his amazed mother, *why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold thy father and I have sought thee, sorrowing.* Child, he is mingled with reverence in these wondrously maternal and beautiful words. His reply (THE FIRST RECORDED WORDS OF JESUS) possesses a like natural charm: *How is it that ye sought me? Why did they seek him in the city, and not in the temple? Wist ye not that I must be in my Father's house?*

That the parents did not comprehend this saying, in the sense of comprehending it, we cannot think strange. But that their boy was now beginning to

feel a mysterious call to the divine mission of which they themselves had had in the same temple court in his infancy remarkable premonition, we cannot doubt.

3. He returned Home with his Parents.—vs. 51-52.

Such was the quality of the early life of Jesus. Great truths and great purposes were beginning to stir in him. Nevertheless, his time to enter upon his mission was not yet. It was the Jewish law that one should not be a public teacher until he was thirty years old. Jesus knew it was wise for him to abide by this law, and employ all the years preceding in preparation for the work which was in due time to become known to him.

So he went down again into the common paths of life, and fulfilled all the home virtues and daily duties, and ennobled all his tasks. In this obscurity he grew year by year in stature and in the wisdom which a pure heart only apprehends.

## TEACHING POINTS.

INTRODUCTION.—By a specimen scene from the boyhood of Jesus we are left to judge of his life during the first thirty years.

(1.) v. 40-42, Jesus' life in Nazareth. He had a good yet humble home; he had religious parents. Nature taught him the lessons. He had the benefit of the synagogue school.—It was the era of the synagogue, the precursor of the Christian church.—Jesus was well-born and well-bred.—We have in the few touches given of his early life the picture of a PERFECT BOY.

(2.) v. 43-50. His experiences in the temple. The going of Jesus with his parents to the Passover Festival in Jerusalem signifies that he was emerging from the period of childhood. The responsibilities of life were now placed upon him.—His preference for the instruction of the scholars in Jerusalem, above all the other attractions of the city, exemplifies his character.—We see in him no disobedience of his parents; but behold him entering upon a life of consecration which his parents cannot fully understand.—He would now (according to one rendering of the original) be about his father's business; according to the revised version, he was henceforth to be found in his Father's house. The word itself was therefore to him his Father's house.

(3.) v. 51, 52. He was subject to his parents. The patience of Jesus during the long period of his preparation is moral heroism.—It may be that the reason why he was eighteen years at his work as a carpenter, and but three years in his public ministry, is that he might show in his example the comparative dignity and greatness of humble and obscure tasks.—His mother believed in him. Her heart treasured all the prophecies of his exceptional future.

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