

Sermon Christmas 2 2019

January 5, 2019

Luke 2:40-52

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson, previously read, especially these words: **“And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them.”**

As we are still in the season of Christmas, we are still in the mode of thinking of the incarnation of our Lord Jesus. Although the world has moved past this celebration, in the Church we haven't. He we are, we're still marveling at the fact that God has entered into the world, being born of a virgin, being God in the body of a human being. And as we think about this, as we think about the perfection of God, the perfection of Christ and His divinity, I think something that often jars me—and maybe it jars you too—is the description we get of Jesus sometimes. Sometimes we get phrases like we have in Philippians where it describes Jesus as “becoming obedient” to the point of death. Or like in Hebrews where it speaks of God “making” Jesus “perfect through suffering.” Or we have one of those phrases in our lesson today, **“Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.”** When we hear those phrases they're jarring because we ask how Jesus could improve. Right? How could God get better? How could the properly obedient Son, “become” obedient? How could the perfect God “be made” perfect through suffering? How could He “increase in wisdom and in stature?” All the more how could He “increase... in favor with God?”

Well, we don't want to spend too much time delineating between the two natures of Jesus. After all, He is One Christ, and it is good to maintain that unity. But, it is a reality that sometimes we have to make the point about how this works. What is improved in Jesus? Certainly not His divinity. No, only His humanity has that room for improvement. And that's what we see in those words there. In fact, we even have a concrete example of it in this lesson.

Obviously, this is a story we all know well. Joseph and Mary take Jesus up to the temple for the Passover. They're apparently with a large caravan of people, and they lose track of Jesus, assuming He's with some other family or friends. When they realize it, they search and search, finally going back to Jerusalem only to marvel at how He's impressing even the teachers there with His insight as a mere twelve year old. And there we can so easily see the point of this as a Christmas text. Here He is, this

twelve year old Jesus showing that He's God in the flesh by His wisdom for the teachers to witness. The glories of Christmas continue.

But there's something just as "Christmassy" in those words I said we'd be meditating on: "**And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them.**" Why do I say that, and how does that connect to what I've been saying? Well, look at the interaction before this. If I were just to read those words, it would be easy to think Jesus did something wrong, that He sinned. All the more, if you consider what Mary says. And I'm guessing you can put yourself in her shoes pretty easily. You can imagine the terror at having lost her child. You can imagine the "**great distress**" both she and Joseph had in looking for Him for three days! After all, it's bad enough to worry for three days that you lost your child, but all the more when this is the Messiah God entrusted to your care! So it's easy to interpret this as though Jesus sinned. Which, He didn't. And you can see that in His response. He was merely doing what He was supposed to be doing.

I think we can even picture this in view of how extremely intelligent children respond to their parents who may not be quite as intelligent as they are. "What else would I be doing?" And that's Jesus' response, "What else would I be doing, but what is right and attending to my Father's work." But yet, Luke under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit gives us this insight: "**And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them.**" It's as though this human side of Jesus had to learn: "Oh, while it is right for me to do what my Father says, He has given me these parents whom I am to honor, and it's honoring for me to submit to them because when I don't it causes them great distress. I am to love them and therefore do what they say."

In that, then we learn something not only about Jesus but about the Fourth Commandment, don't we? We learn something about what God is saying when He tells us "Honor Your Father and Your Mother." Now, I sort of began to touch on this a couple of weeks ago when I discussed God giving Joseph this authority over Jesus through the word of the angel. I mentioned how Jesus was submissive to Joseph perhaps even when He was wrong. I discussed it there to make the point that God used this authority to protect Jesus that your salvation would be protected. And that's important.

However, when we hear of Jesus being submissive, that's important for us to consider as well. I say this because I speak with some regularity about the Fourth Commandment. I talk with some consistency about how authority and it's relation to

this commandment and it's example in Christ show us that authority is properly for serving and not abusing. And I do this because we are so anti-authoritarian in our society. I do it to make the point that we can understand that we shouldn't be anti-authoritarian because if authority is understood properly it's a good thing and not a bad thing.

But the flip side of that is what we see in Jesus: **“And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them.”** You see sometimes when we are confronted with our rebellious and sinful nature, sometimes the best thing to hear is just outright law. The Law of God says do this, so do it. The Law of God says to submit to your parents, so submit. Luther says it like this: *To fatherhood and motherhood God has given the special distinction, above all estates that are beneath it, that he commands us not simply to love our parents but also to honor them. ... Thus he distinguishes father and mother above all other persons on earth, and places them next to himself. For it is a much greater thing to honor than to love. Honor includes not only love but also deference, humility, and modesty, directed (so to speak) toward a majesty hidden within them... that we respect them very highly and that next to God we give them the very highest place.”* In fact, he even makes the point that, *“they are not to be deprived of their honor because of their ways or their failings. Therefore, we are not to think of their persons, whatever they are, but of the will of God, who has created and ordained them to be our parents.”*

Now, as I say this, two things are noteworthy. First of all, hopefully you all know that as we look at Scripture, we see clearly that this honoring of father and mother is not just limited to parents. If that were the case, this commandment would have no bearing on a number of us here who no longer have living parents. But that's not the whole application. I think you all know that. It applies to other authorities too. It applies to husbands as the head of the household. It applies to government as the head of state. It applies to employers as masters. It applies to pastors. There is a structure to this authority and God says submit to it. Submit to it out of joy knowing that God has put authority in place to help you. It doesn't always feel like it. It doesn't always feel like it's a good thing to submit, but do it.

Now as I say that, the other noteworthy thing is something I am sure many of you are thinking: “but what about when the authority tells us to do something wrong?” To that we always say, “we must obey God rather than man.” That is an absolute. That is the appropriate response when we look at households, at jobs, at government, and

even under pastoral care. That's the appropriate response when we consider how the Germans responded to the Nazi Reich. But, I do think we need to be cautioning ourselves in view of the freedoms we have that we don't just jump on any and every opportunity to rebel.

In fact, I think this example of our Lord Jesus is ideal in this. Look at this submission as an act of love. Jesus loved Mary and Joseph so He submitted to them. He saw their care for being good authorities over Him, and He loved them and so submitted. And I make this point because, as I said when I talked about Joseph, I'm sure there were times that this submission showed itself when the authority wasn't seeking the best interest of Jesus. And yet this submission—when not called upon to sin—was still demonstrated. So for us to see, this is love.

In fact, as we reflect on this love of Jesus, this love as He is God in the flesh, we can't but reflect on the fact that this child grew to the man who showed even the submission to the Sanhedrin and their mock trial, to Pilate and his unjust ruling, finally it submitted to the unjust verdict of death. You see we are so often quick to rail against injustice—and we should seek the justice of others—but we are so quick to shout out when we've been treated unjustly, but in our Lord Jesus we see the submission to injustice that was by far the most unjust of all. And yet that's what He bore as this God in the flesh.

He bore it for you, for your rebellion, for your imperfection as authority too. That's what this perfect submission was for. It was for you. For your life, for your good. Because that is His love for you.

So in this Christmas, as you reflect on this Lord who is God in the flesh, consider Him as that One who submitted under the call of the Fourth Commandment, who submitted even to the curse of sin on the cross, so that this One born in the manger would be the Firstborn over the New Creation, raised for your resurrection. In that submission, then know that this humanity of Jesus was perfected, it was restrained and improved. And to understand that rightly, you can know that this was done so that your humanity that is broken by sin would be raised in His perfection, and it would be so that you would live eternally with Him. After all, that was His goal in coming in the world, that was His joy, and that was the cause of His submission to His parents and to all things to which He submitted Himself: your salvation. Amen.