

Luke 2:39-51

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Date: 06 January 2013

[0 : 00] I expect, like many of you may have done, we spent Christmas with our family.

Our son and his family live down in Penzance in Cornwall, so it's quite a drive. But it was great to see our three granddaughters. It's only four months since we last saw them.

But in those four months, they seem to have shot up. No longer are all of them looking up. Some of them now look eye to eye with me as they've grown so fast.

In fact, from the very moment of our conception, don't we? We all grow. We grow physically, we grow spiritually, and we grow mentally. Our physical growth, I suppose, comes to a completion, really somewhere towards the ends of our teens.

Although some continue to grow outwards, if not upwards, of course. But our mental growth, our learning, our understanding, is something that continues throughout life.

[1 : 05] It doesn't matter whether you're three or thirty, or sixty, or ninety. We still continue to develop in our learning and understanding of the things of God.

When we became a Christian, it was a new birth. We're born again. And from that point, we start to understand something of the kingdom of God.

We start to realise that we have a Father in heaven who is close to us and who we can pray to. We can cry out to him, Abba, Father. And we know that we need that spiritual food to grow.

Peter puts it like this in 1 Peter chapter 2. He says, Like newborn babies crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you've tasted that the Lord is good.

If you know something of Christ, then you want to grow in your understanding. Going back to our family, it's almost frightening sometimes when you look at them and you see all the characteristics of their parents, and even if you're their grandparents in the children.

[2 : 15] It's something we do, isn't it? As we grow and develop, we take on those characteristics. Sometimes physical similarities, sometimes similar emotional and mental characteristics.

But for the Christian, the growth in the Christian life means becoming more like our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. He's our great example.

For Jesus is truly man. And he grew to be the perfection of what we should be. And this morning and in the next two weeks, God willing, I want on Sunday mornings to look what it means to grow in grace as a believer.

And in it we'll try to understand something of how the gospel affects our lives and what it means to grow in grace. We were talking about New Year resolutions. And this is a good one to have, that we might grow in our understanding of God, develop in our maturity, and that we might grow in grace as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And there's no better place than to begin with and to see how the Lord Jesus himself grew to spiritual maturity. We've no doubt heard the Christmas story many times in the last week or so, thinking about how God came to this earth, Emmanuel, God with us, came in the flesh as Jesus, as that baby.

[3 : 51] But Jesus didn't stay as a baby. We don't have very much information about his childhood up to the age of 30. Just that little passage that I read in Luke chapter 2 of events of when he was 12 years of age.

But we do grasp something of how he grew and developed. He needed to grow physically. He needed to grow mentally.

He needed to grow emotionally. And he also needed to develop spiritually as the man Christ Jesus. In Luke 2 verse 40 we read, And the child grew and became strong, and he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.

And then in verse 52, Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man. Because Jesus himself experienced what we experience, he's able to help us through our struggles, in our development, and into our spiritual growth.

So this morning I want to devote our time to look at the ways in which the God of heaven, the Father, brought Jesus to spiritual maturity. I believe it's wrong to think that when Jesus was born, he had all knowledge and mental capacity as a man, and spiritual capacity.

[5 : 17] No, he grew and developed in the same way as we do, because he is truly man. Firstly then, my first point, which is on the sheet if you have it, Jesus grew in wisdom and understanding.

As we read through the New Testament, with this in mind, we see a number of ways in which the Lord grew personally as a servant of God. Firstly, Jesus grew in the fruit of the Spirit.

Jesus grew in the fruit of the Spirit. Now, Paul gives us that glorious definition of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians chapter 5.

And we read in verses 22 and 23, but the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

What we have there is a picture of the character of the Lord Jesus Christ. We see his love in giving himself, giving his life, as a ransom for many.

[6 : 31] If you're a Christian here this morning, it is because the love of God was such that he sent Jesus so that his love would take him to the cross, and that he might die in the place of sinners like you and I.

We think of his joy. There is the great shepherd carrying home the lost sheep. Well, that's what we are. If you're not a Christian here this morning, you're a lost sheep.

You need to come to Jesus. He's the great shepherd. He invites you to come to him. We think about his peace. We think about his patience with his disciples.

How often they failed to understand what he was saying. And I'm sure if I'd been there, I would have wanted to give them, I don't know, a clip around the ear or something and say, wake up.

But he was infinitely patient with them, encouraging them to understand. We think of his kindness to those who were sick and in need.

[7 : 31] Think of his goodness of life in his public ministry. Men and women were astounded and amazed at this man, Jesus Christ. Think of his faithfulness to his father and to his disciples.

We think of his gentleness with those who were broken hearted or bereaved. He dealt gently with those in need.

We think of his incredible self-control. In front of his accusers and those who mocked him. And all these characteristics are summed up there for us by Paul in Galatians as the fruit of the spirit.

So that when we read that Jesus grew in grace and wisdom, we see him developing all these characteristics that we find called the fruit of the spirit.

And these are the characteristics of our spiritual growth. If you're a Christian here this morning, it is the characteristics that you should be developing. It's always interesting in that passage in Galatians.

[8 : 37] It doesn't talk about the fruits of the spirit. It's singular, the fruit of the spirit. If you're a Christian, you should be looking at developing love and gentleness and kindness and patience and self-control and all those characteristics.

Catholics. Sometimes we think of growth in other terms. Sometimes we think of being zealous in the work we do for Christ or in the church.

Those things, of course, are an important part of the Christian life, but they're never a substitute for the fact that the fruit of the spirit is something that needs to be developed in our characters.

A knowledge of God's word and an understanding of doctrine is essential, is vital, is important. But if they become a substitute for faithfulness to the church and to Christ and to our friends, if they replace gentleness and patience, we're more concerned about getting the minutiae of doctrine correct than showing love and kindness to others.

if our relationships with others are accompanied by lack of self-control, then we have to say that our learning and understanding is really of little permanent profit.

[10 : 06] God wants us to grow in grace and knowledge of our God. again, Peter writes in 2 Peter 3, 18, he says, but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

That's his command to us. That's the word of God. We are to grow in grace and knowledge. And that's not a matter of just information.

it is an issue of personal fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Sometimes Christians get a bit negative over certain things, particularly relating to the Christian life, raising concerns the way other believers live and we can think of examples that some of these of course are important issues but

they're not to be pursued in isolation.

We are to let our light shine before people. That the light is the life of Christ within us. This is how we influence the world in which we live.

Perhaps today more than ever more it's not our words that are important it's our lives. Does our life show that fruit of the Spirit? Do we live in such a way that people ask the reason why we live as we do which gives us the opportunity to share this gospel of Christ?

[11 : 43] We are to daily seek to be more like Christ. Secondly, Jesus grew through the difficulties of life. Spiritual progress is made as we work through the obstacles and difficulties and trials of life that come upon us.

sometimes it is those who've had to go through particular trials who have made extraordinary headway in their spiritual development.

Jesus grew in all the positive graces of the Spirit but his spiritual character if I could suggest is all the greater because of the greater severe obstacles and trials that he faced.

Jesus grew spiritually as he faced temptation of every kind. In Hebrews chapter 4 and verse 15 we read for we do not have a high priest who's unable to sympathize with our weaknesses but we have one who has been tempted in every way just as we are yet was without sin.

So do you face temptations? We're talking about New Year's resolutions. It's obviously when we think of a New Year resolution if we're trying to cope with things it's because we want to do away with the temptations that we so easily succumb to.

[13 : 04] And then we read a passage like this which tells us that Jesus suffered all the temptations that we have yet he was without sin and sometimes we think well is that really true?

Did Jesus really be tempted? I know that Jesus was tempted but did he experience what I'm having to face? Perhaps in my family?

Perhaps in my workplace? Perhaps amongst my friends? Surely he didn't have to experience all of that but reality is the truth is the other way round.

We will never experience the depth of what he did because we ourselves are sinners. Because we do give in to temptation. We do falter from time to time.

the powers of darkness need never apply the pressures to us that they did to Jesus because we so easily succumb. We are much too easy a target.

[14 : 04] But Satan could get no foothold in Christ. All of the evil powers and all of the energies that Satan used were exhausted in his onslaught against Christ.

Christ. And then we find Jesus experiencing rejection and misunderstanding. That's a painful experience isn't it?

There was a day when Jesus was preaching to the great multitudes. He'd fed the 5,000 and the great multitudes were there and they were listening to him and at the end of that time they said oh this is too hard a teaching and they went away and then we just left with 12 disciples with him.

We must have thought well if we'd been in that case we'd have done situation we'd have done everything to keep the crowd but they rejected him. They turned away from him. What you were like when you first became a Christian?

When you first knew the reality of a relationship with God through the Lord Jesus Christ? you come to him in repentance for your sin.

[15 : 19] You come in faith trusting for what Christ has done. And you're so thrilled. Your heart is so warmed, so excited over what's happened to you.

You can't wait to get home and you share it with your parents who perhaps are not Christians or brothers or sisters or friends. And they look at you as if you're out of your mind.

They don't understand what's happened to you. They can't think there's any reality. I can remember my own mother saying, well, okay, you're just going through a phase, you'll grow out of it.

Well, that was 50 odd years ago and I've still not grown out of it. But such things become hard when those who are close to us start to reject us and start to accuse us of all sorts of things.

Brothers, sisters, parents, such things test our patience and our love for them. Sometimes, of course, we aggravate the situation ourselves by an insensitive approach.

[16 : 25] But when we face rejection and misunderstanding for the sake of the gospel, we need to see the shining example of Jesus. Jesus himself grew in grace in the way he responded to the misunderstandings.

I read that passage, didn't I, from Luke chapter 2. There he was, Jesus, just 12 years of age, been with Mary and Joseph at the feast of the Passover. The feast had come to an end.

They were on their way home. They'd gone a full day's traveling when Mary and Joseph suddenly realized Jesus isn't there. You might say, well, that's quite a long time to realize your son is not with you.

They'd assumed he was with others in the party, so they start searching for him and he's not there. And so they go back to Jerusalem and eventually they come into the temple courts and there he is, surrounded with the teachers of the day and he was reading God's word and he was discussing those things with him and Mary rebukes Jesus.

Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you. And Jesus responds with these words. Why were you searching for me?

[17:47] Didn't you know I had to be in my father's house? As we read in verse 50, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. They couldn't understand their child Jesus.

There was something about him which was so different. there was something about him that was so full of grace and understanding. Of course that wasn't the last time their misunderstanding of Jesus by his family.

Back in Mark chapter 3 and verse 21 we read on one occasion when his family heard about this they went to take charge of him for they said he's out of his mind.

Jesus faced rebuke, rebellion, misunderstanding from his own family. Just think how often his own disciples seemed more like hindrances than helps to his ministry.

The misunderstanding Christ suffered was that which of course would ultimately lead to his death. Paul sums it up so well in 1 Corinthians chapter 2 and in verse 8 when we read none of the rulers of this age understood it for if they had they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

[19:14] People do not understand the gospel. There is so much confusion in the world in which we live. Sad to say that so many of our religious leaders spend more time debating whether we should have women or gay bishops or whether we should allow same-sex marriages and all the rest than seeing what the truth of the scripture is and declaring the glorious riches of Jesus Christ.

They do not understand. The world doesn't understand and how is the world going to understand if so many of our religious leaders spend all their time discussing these things rather than trying to convey the gospel of Christ.

And so Jesus kept showing the fruit of the spirit. He didn't raise his voice against his oppressors. And here again is our example as we seek to grow in grace.

Thirdly, and I must move on more quickly, Jesus grew in obedience. Obedience lay at the very heart of the life of Jesus. This was the key to understanding his work. He is able to be our saviour because he obeyed God throughout his life.

This was God the Father's plan for our salvation that we should be redeemed because of what Christ did on the cross. And Jesus knew from the word of God what the Father required of him.

[20:52] And so he gave his life and suffered the punishment for our disobedience by his obedient death. The obedience of Jesus was unique.

It was God's special plan that he alone should lay down his life for others. And in this he did the will of his Father. But Jesus also placed himself under law.

Under the law of God by which our lives are governed. Think of the example of Jesus in the home of Mary and Joseph.

Here he is. He is the Son of God. He is the one sent by the Father. He was the one who was to die as Mary and Joseph's own saviour.

And what do we read? Verse 51 of chapter 2 of Luke. Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. He honoured his parents.

[21:59] Even when hanging in agony on the cross, remember he made arrangements with the apostle John that his mother would be cared for. Here is obedience to the will of God at its finest.

Jesus obeyed all the commandments of God to perfection in his own life. And if we would grow in grace, if we would develop in our communion with God, if we would grow as Christians, if we would be more like Christ, then we need to start right here in obedience to the word of God.

Fourthly, Jesus grew through experience. Jesus grew through experience. We frequently read of how Jesus responded to different situations.

They remind us of the wide variety of human experiences he had. He experienced hunger and thirst. He experienced weariness. He experienced disappointment. He saw the needs of the people and all of those things. And all through these experiences, Jesus goes from spiritual strength to strength.

[23 : 13] They're part of his own development as he is portraying to us that he is the son of God. The passage that Graham read to us earlier on this morning from Hebrews chapter 2 reminds us that Jesus was our high priest.

He came to offer a sacrifice to God for our salvation yet he himself was a victim. As high priest he prayed and cared for his people.

He needed to be like us. The sacrifice of animals never took away a single sin. We needed someone like us in every way.

And that of course was to be found in the Lord Jesus Christ. So we read in Hebrews chapter 2 verse 17 for this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people because he himself suffered when he was tempted he's able to help those who are being tempted.

So in wholehearted obedience to his father Jesus tasted every experience in some form. He responded with grace and the fruit of the spirit in every case.

[24 : 50] He grew in stature as man. He grew in favour with God and men and all for our sakes and as an example to us and for us.

he is able to help us in our weaknesses. So that raises the question. And the second main point this morning is how did Jesus grow?

How Jesus grew? As a man Jesus did not possess any special means of spiritual growth that are not available to us.

us. Let me say that again because I think we often misunderstand here. We think of Jesus as the man, as one who had all special qualities and we're nothing like him but that's not the case.

He was like us in every way save for sin. Jesus did not possess any special means of spiritual growth that are not available to you and I.

[25 : 55] if we are to understand Jesus and to become like him then we must realise this. And as we look at the life of Jesus we see the means by which he grew spiritually and that these means are available to us.

Firstly here Jesus searched the scriptures. Jesus searched the scriptures. We look to the scriptures to find out the meaning of life and the ministry of our saviour.

We look to the scriptures for our rule of life and the way that we should behave. We look to scriptures to define all the various actions and laws that are needed.

Again so many of the religious peoples of our day fail to turn to the scriptures. If we could debate these things on the basis of what the scripture says they will come to a different conclusion.

I do not mean that in any arrogant way at all. But you can only come to certain conclusions that are prominent today by ignoring the word of God.

[27 : 11] Jesus never did that. He searched the scriptures through the understanding of God's word. This was how he grew in knowledge and appreciation of the will of God for his own life.

We have seen how Jesus identifies with the suffering servant we read of in Isaiah. He searched the scriptures and he saw his own life and ministry.

He saw all that need to be fulfilled and he lived in a way that fulfilled the very scriptures that spoke about him. And this is where we find God's will for our lives.

Often found young people come up and say well how do I know the will of God for my life? I say it's very easy it's in the scriptures. Yeah but how do I know? Well I said turn to the scriptures what does it say?

The will of God for you is that you be sanctified. In other words that you become holy so that's the basis upon which you're working. Is this direction is this job is this school is this college is this relationship as my relationship with my family and my friends is it all that which is to my good and holy life.

[28 : 40] We've seen how Jesus identifies with these things. we need to ourselves to be growing in the knowledge of God's word. We find specific directions and principles and examples which enable us to grow in obedience to God and to increase in our knowledge of him.

Young people if you've been recently converted and older friends too you're not going to know it all overnight. Sometimes it's a temptation isn't it to think well I you know I'm a Christian now I sort of know it all.

Now Jesus had to spend 40 days in the wilderness as part of his spiritual development. Moses spent 40 years in the wilderness before he was ready to lead the people of God.

Paul spent 14 years from his conversion till he started his ministry. There is a time to understand and to grow and to develop.

Think as how Jesus facing the temptations of Satan there in the wilderness. You don't have time to look at them this morning.

[29 : 52] Read them for yourself. They're in the Gospels. The Lord revealed a depth of knowledge and insight into the book of Deuteronomy. That's what he does. Jesus knew the whole book of Deuteronomy.

When Satan comes he quotes scriptures at Satan and it is that which defeats him. Such knowledge and understanding of God's word was linked with a humble obedience.

It's such things that always lead to growth in the Christian life. Secondly here, Jesus found fellowship with God. Jesus had fellowship with God.

Here he is the son of God. He's the son of man. He's truly man. We know he's truly God. But yet there was a relationship between Jesus and his father.

The whole of the life of Jesus was one of prayer. That startles some people that Jesus prayed. But we find frequently as we look at these last three years of his life that he was found in prayer.

[30 : 59] Regular periods of prayer. So much to pray for. A world to pray for. A preparation of his disciples to pray for.

Times of fellowship and loving communion with his father. You ever wonder how Judas found Jesus so easily in the garden of Gethsemane?

How did Judas know that that's where Jesus would be? I would suggest it's because he knew that Jesus prayed regularly and that was the very place that he would come in prayer.

How did this prayer fellowship with his father help Jesus to grow? Well we read in scripture that sometimes he meditated on the greatness of his God and his father.

He drew on the resource of God his father. One of the things which Jesus prayed for was that the father would glorify his name. We have that recorded for us in John chapter 12 and in verse 28.

[32 : 18] Father glorify your name prayed Jesus. Then a voice came from heaven I have glorified it and will glorify it again.

In other words the whole glory of God was uplifted by this relationship with Jesus and his father in heaven. As Jesus kept his heart in tune with God his love and devotion to his father gained in energy and power.

love and love one of the commentators said this isn't it one of the qualities of love is that it grows as it is used.

As we express love for one another as Jesus expressed his love for his father it grew and developed as we understand more of our great God in heaven as we think upon him and meditate upon his word and his attributes then there is a love that emanates from us it's a love of course which God has put there in the first place but as we think more of our God it grows and grows as it is used.

Then finally this morning Jesus looked for fellowship with God's people. We find that perhaps a little astonishing to think that Jesus needed people like his disciples to have fellowship with.

[33 : 52] We find him at 12 years of age he was there in the temple asking questions discussing wrestling with the great issues of God's word. When he was 30 years of age he chooses out 12 disciples he would prepare them eventually he planned to send them out into the entire known world to take this gospel of love of God to men and women.

But in Mark chapter 3 we read that he chose them to be with him. He didn't want to need companionship for his own sake they needed him but reverently I'm suggesting that he needed them to grow in fellowship.

He delighted in the fellowship of his disciples. Remember when he went up on the Mount of Transfiguration he took Peter, James and John with him. He took them to witness his suffering there in Gethsemane.

We read on one occasion he went to Bethany. Why did he go there? Undoubtedly he found spiritual fellowship with Mary and Martha and Lazarus they were his friends. So we see Jesus growing in wisdom and grace and understanding.

We see all of that was the great preparation for the great work he had to do on the cross. If you're morning you should praise God that he sent Jesus through all of this so that he might attain a salvation to all who will come and trust and believe.

[35 : 34] Jesus grew in wisdom and grace and understanding by the knowledge of God's word. By communing in prayer with his father and through the fellowship of God's people. And we need to see these same means of grace by which Jesus matured into full spiritual union with his father as being that which is available to us.

We are to grow in our grace and understanding and wisdom through God's word, through prayer, through the fellowship of God's people.

These means of grace are there which God has given us and praise God that we have them. And so on this first Sunday of 2013 as we look to a year we do not know what's going to happen this year.

Economically it could be a disaster. There could be all sorts of problems. We may find some of the laws which are being spoken about coming to be fulfilled and that could give us much grief and heartache.

But our prime concern is that we might be more like our saviour. Let that be our new year's resolution. That we follow our master's example so that we might become increasingly more like Christ our Lord and saviour.

[37 : 06] May the Lord help us and bless us in these things for his namesake. Amen. Amen. Amen. And his servant yet sang my head rose, O stable throne.

And to God's rich, the angels let them all fall and sing in his womb.

And to God's love, beyond the praising of all our sin became us, and still be so low as sinners raising, and worth by the eternal power.

And to God's love, beyond all praising, hopeful and slain became us now.

Father of God, beyond all praising, Savior and King, we worship thee.

[39 : 06] Emmanuel, within us pray, make us what love has done us need.

Thou who art God, beyond all praising, Savior and King, we worship thee.

Amen. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church, and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and forever. Amen.

Amen.