

January 13, 2008

(Luke #5) The Missing Decades of Jesus Life – Twenty-Six Years of Silence?

Matthew 2:1-23 / Luke 2:41-52

In the matter of a mere 20 verses, we move from Jesus being 8 days old, to just over a month old, to 12 years old, to 30 years old — in less than half a chapter!

At forty days old we find Jesus, Mary and Joseph ***“returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth”*** (v. 39). And between that time of Jesus being just over a month old, to the time He's twelve, Luke gives us no information whatsoever, except to say in a general way, ***“The child grew and became strong, was filled with wisdom and the grace of God was upon Him”*** (v. 40).

That's it!

Matthew, on the other hand, does include one more account that Luke doesn't. He tells us that somewhere between 40 days and 12 years, Wise Men “came from the east to worship the Christ child.” And whereas Luke uses the Greek word ***“brephos”*** (that is infant, or a baby under a year old) to describe Jesus when the Shepherds arrive on Christmas Day, Matthew uses the Greek word ***“paidion”*** (normally indicating a child between 1-5 years old) when the Magi arrive—a date most scholars say was up to a year and a half after Jesus was born.

Why a year and a half later? Because Herod, when he seeks to do a sweep that kills Jesus, chooses to ***“kill all the boys...two years and under”*** based on ***“the exact time when the star had first appeared”*** (v.7). Had the star which appeared at Jesus birth appeared only a week ago, or 6 months ago, he would have had all babies 1 week, or 6 months and under killed, based on the ***“exact time the star first appeared.”***

So, if we harmonize the Gospel's correctly, Joseph, Mary and Jesus returned to Nazareth when Jesus was 40 days, or just over a month old. / But then, at some point shortly afterward (maybe within the year) they returned to Bethlehem — possibly to find work, stay with his relatives, or both.

During that time, when Jesus was about 1½ - 2 years old, the Wise Men arrive, as Matthew tells us, at the “house” (not the stable, or place Jesus was born). And when they arrive, “they find the child” (“paidion”— a year or older) with His mother Mary. Not lying in a manger, but probably standing next to her or holding her hand, and walk in, bow down, and worship him.

Then the holy family heads off to Egypt where they live as refugees, returning to Galilee for good, only after Herod died, Jesus being 2½ or 3 years old by then.

So what do we have? We have one little snapshot of Jesus at 8 days old being circumcised and dedicated at the temple. / Another passing reference of Him returning with Mary and Joseph to Nazareth at 40 days old. / We then jump forward to 1½ -2 years old and find Him meeting the Wise Men, and heading to Egypt. / Within a year or so Herod dies and we find Joseph and Mary taking Him back to Nazareth in Galilee — and then for the next 8-9 years there is **NOTHING!** / We get one more little brief snapshot when He shows up at the Temple at 12 years old / And then He **disappears off the scene completely for almost 2 decades (or 18 years)** only to reappear back on the scene at the age of 30 years old.

Which leaves us with what? About Twenty-six years of **TOTALLY BLANK SPACES!** / Over two and a half decades of **ABSOLUTELY NOTHING!** / Over a **QUARTER CENTURY** of Jesus life that we have absolutely no knowledge about whatsoever!

Yet you know what I've found? **FIRST**, I've found that people innately dislike large blank spaces! In fact, they dislike them so much that if they are left blank people will inevitably try to fill them in! We don't like not knowing anything about people who play such a prominent role in our lives. We are curious by nature, and if no information is given to us to fill in the gaps, we will tend to manufacture it ourselves.

I never realized just how prone people are to do that, until in 2001 someone from the U.S. Embassy in Honduras recommended me to lead a kidnap negotiation for a wealthy person in the city of San Pedro Sula.

And without going into great detail, let it suffice to say that after 10 days of intense negotiations, and verbal threats, and intense stress, and psychological mind games / Of being secretly put up in a hotel under a false name / and driven to the house each morning and shuffled into a side door so no one could see me / and hiding in rooms when the police came (who we were sure were involved in it) / and waiting until night and then being driven in a big black suburban, through stop signs and red lights and around in circles so as not to be followed / we finally talked the kidnapers down from 10,000,000 lempiras (\$800,000) to our settlement price of L 500,000 (\$35,000), 3 days before Christmas.

And because there were 28 kidnappings that year (and one that took place while we were doing ours), I asked the family that when Juan was released, and the newspapers showed up to cover the story, they not mention my name, or who I was, or even the fact that I had been there to lead the negotiation (because I didn't want to put my family in danger).

The problem was that one evening, about 5 days into the negotiations, things had gotten so intense and stressful, and we so needed a break, that the family took me to a high class club ("The Arab Club") in a well to do section of town, and at least 100 very rich people saw me with the family. So, when the family refused to give out any information about me (per my request), and the newspapers gave no information on me either, those people made up information of their own!

And the story that went around Honduras for about a year after the kidnap ended was this:

The U.S Embassy had recommended me because I was an expert in kidnap negotiations who really worked for the CIA.

In fact, Sergio (another man who helped out with the negotiations) even told me that one of the richest men on the north coast had come to the family to ask them if they thought I would be willing to train a SWAT team to deal with the kidnap problem in San Pedro which had gotten out of hand!

And the best story of all was this one — Sergio even chuckled as he told me:

The rumor was going around San Pedro that I was a special operations person, and an expert in kidnap negotiations who had come down from Washington D.C.. And the reason I disappeared off the scene as soon as a settlement had been achieved, was because I was needed to deal with the Al-Qaida problem in Afghanistan! Even I had to chuckle at that one!

And I know it sounds funny (though it wasn't at all at the time, as Nancy will tell you), but it did make it so clear that, when you don't give people the real information, or simply leave it blank, they make up their own information to fit their perceptions—info that can often be pretty fanciful, as my own story shows. (Though I must admit it was really fun to have people think I was a CIA operative who simply did the pastorate as a cover for my "real work!")

And I share that because that's exactly what people have done in relation to Jesus. In the 2nd century, and even as late as the 3rd century A.D., people were "writing gospel accounts" to try and fill in the blanks with regard to Jesus childhood. "Gospels" which, despite Dan Brown's opinions to the contrary in the Divinci Code, deserved to be thrown out at the Council of Nicaea.

Because far from being a "conspiracy" (though the popularity of his book shows people do love conspiracy theories!) it was honest, educated, intelligent, godly men looking at the material, studying it thoroughly, and then discarding that which bore the marks of the fanciful, or the marks of Gnostic thought (which diminished the humanity of Jesus and made Him into a little demi-god).

For instance: One of those books, called "The Infancy of Jesus," tells us that a woman was healed from her inability to speak by kissing the baby Jesus / A prince born with leprosy (which I don't think is possible) is healed by touching the water the baby Jesus was bathed in / A boy turned into a mule by a witch is healed and turned back into a boy by the baby Jesus sitting on him / A newly married man is healed of sexual impotency the night the baby Jesus sleeps in his house / And a dead boy is raised to life by smelling the baby Jesus clothes! (*A dead person who smells?! ☺*)

But what's the author doing? He's trying to fill in some of the gaps in Jesus babyhood! Then comes Jesus boyhood. And although the Gospel of John says that turning water into wine when He was 30 was Jesus first miracle, this book tells us that when Jesus was "7 years old," He made clay animals with His friends (donkey's, oxen, and birds). And when each boy boasted about his clay figures being the best, Jesus tops them all by making His clay animals come to life and walk or fly away! (At which point the other mothers think Him to be a sorcerer and refuse to let their sons play with Him again!)

Another book fancifully speaks of Jesus (at 5 years old) making a boy "*whither up all over*" because he broke the walls of the little pool Jesus had made / Playing hide and seek with some friends and turning two of them into sheep / At the prompting of others he heals a boy, but only partially, because he's a bad boy / And as He gets older, He uses His miraculous power to repair defects in Joseph's furniture, so that, "*Joseph had no need to finish anything with his own hands, being not very skilled in carpentry.*" Jesus would fix Josephs mistakes by "*stretching His hands*" over the defective furniture!

It even goes on to include stories of Jesus using His powers to kill a boy for grabbing Him by the shoulder and another boy for running into Him by mistake, and so forth and so on!

Why were they written? Because people just can't stand the thought that we know NOTHING of Jesus childhood, teen years, and early to mid-twenties. NOTHING! / So people, like the authors of these false gospels, ventured to do what most all people do by nature when it comes to empty spaces — they try to fill them in! / If not given information, they manufacture their own — which often ends up being far more fanciful than what really happened (as the stories I just shared show so vividly)!

Which brings me to my **SECOND** point — Scripture itself would lead us to believe that the reason the Gospel writers left the pages of His earlier life blank, was because there wasn't that much to

be said! It's not because they didn't have access to the information. Though Joseph had apparently passed away before Jesus started His public ministry at 30 years of age, they did have Mary, Jesus 4 brothers and at least 2 sisters, and all the people of Nazareth, whom they could have asked. No, the reason we have so little is most likely because so little of a noteworthy nature took place. During those years His life was not much different than any other young boy who was wise beyond their years, didn't exhibit any extraordinary powers, and didn't really get into any trouble. There's nothing there because there's nothing really noteworthy to share!

And that's not just conjecture. That's what the reaction of the people in His hometown of Nazareth more than implies when He goes there to do ministry and they hear of His reputation, and the miracles He's done, and then realize it's the Jesus who grew up next door! And what do they say?

"Where did this man get these things? What's this wisdom that has been given Him, that He even does miracles! Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son, and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't His sisters here with us? And they took offense at Him."

Now: Would they say all that if Jesus had been doing miracles all His life? Would they say that if extraordinary things had been Jesus everyday experience from birth? **NO!** The problem they are having is that the boy they'd known all their lives as the normal, likeable, well-behaved, "good kid next door" (and a mere carpenter at that) was now saying things and doing things that only special, standout from the crowd, or noticeably gifted people do! And in their estimation He hadn't been such a person!

Which means what? That according to the people who knew Him best, there was nothing about Him that would have made them think He would ever grow up to be someone great, say such amazing things, or do such amazing things. They simply hadn't seen it! That's the best explanation as to why no one ever wrote about it! Because it wasn't there to be written about!

Did Jesus play with His friends, and wrestle with his brothers in the house, or play hide and seek, or go adventuring in the hill country? Probably. (unless wrestling in the house was forbidden!)

Did He affectionately pull His sisters pigtails, grin and then run when they chased Him? Maybe. That's what kids do (and being playfully mischievous or kid-like is not sin)!

Did He give His parents a dreadful scare, and amaze the priests with His knowledge of the Bible at 12 years old? Yes, we know that for sure.

Starting at 13 would He have apprenticed with His dad, and gone out to the shop each day to build furniture? In accordance with Jewish culture, it would seem so.

Would you have found Him reading the Scriptures, and sitting in synagogue listening intently, praying often, or talking frequently about God? Yes — though not in such a noticeably intense fashion that others would have “pegged Him as God,” or a future, budding prophet and miracle worker (as the passage from Mark makes very clear).

So my point is this: Miracles probably **DIDN'T** happen by using the water he was bathed in! He probably **DID** play hide and seek (one of the oldest children's games known to man), but He **DIDN'T** find them by turning them into sheep and then listening for them to bleat!

And He **MAY** have made clay figures of birds and oxen at 7 years old. But He didn't make them come alive and start walking or flying away! / He **MAY** even have gotten upset if a boy broke down a little pool of water He had made, or ran into Him, but He wouldn't therefore have used His powers to wither or kill that boy!

In fact, since He didn't do His first miracle until He was 30, there was apparently nothing that would have made Him stand out as being that different from any other boy His age, except that He was very wise for his age, and exceptionally well-behaved. *That seems to be the Bible's answer as to why there is such a huge gap in the record of Jesus younger life — because there was nothing particularly notable to write about.*

Other than that, He was probably indistinguishable from any other child, unless God, by His Holy Spirit, enabled people to see otherwise. And the Gospel does stress that. The only people who seem to notice something different about Jesus in His earliest days are those enabled to do so by the Holy Spirit.

Of Elizabeth we are told: She was “filled with the Holy Spirit” and thus realized the baby in Mary's womb was special.

Of Simeon we are told: “the Holy Spirit was upon him,” (2:25), and again, “moved by the Spirit” (v. 27), He went into the temple and found Jesus, and spoke a prophetic word over Him (obviously again, prompted by the Holy Spirit).

And the same is true of Anna, the prophetess who lived at the temple day and night, fasting and praying. (She is a woman gifted by the Holy Spirit with the gift of prophecy) So the Holy Spirit speaks to her and she prophetically starts telling people what Jesus will do.

Despite the fact that there would have been crowds of people in the Temple, only two in the crowd notice anything special about Jesus, and the two that do are enabled to see it by the influences of the Holy Spirit.

WHY? Because Jesus didn't glow! / He didn't have a "halo" hovering over His head! / He didn't look any different or more divine than any other baby! And the only people who thought otherwise were led to that conclusion by the leading, filling or gifting of the Holy Spirit.

Which brings me to my **LAST** point. The one that also begs to be answered from our text for this morning: When was it that Jesus began to realize He was the Son of God? And the answer seems to be — on or around the time of His visit to the Temple at 12 years old. That's why Luke includes this story in his Gospel. Because it's a significant turning point in the life of Jesus. The awareness that He was somehow different, and that God was His Father, was an event noteworthy enough to be mentioned in the Gospel record.

In fact, to give you one of the best summaries of this passage; one that answers many of our questions in a relatively short account, let me quote William Barclay's Commentary on Luke (it's a bit lengthy but well worth hearing). He writes:

"This is one of the supremely important passages in the Gospel story. It was laid down by law that every adult male Jew who lived within twenty miles of Jerusalem must attend Passover...A Jewish boy became a man when he was twelve years of age. He became a 'son of the law' and had to take the obligations of the law upon himself. So at twelve Jesus for the first time went to the Passover. We may well imagine how the holy city and the Temple and the sacred ritual fascinated Him. When His parents returned He lingered behind. It was not through carelessness that they did not miss Him. Usually the women in the caravan started out much earlier than the men for they traveled more slowly. The men started later and traveled faster, and the two sections would not meet until the evening encampment was reached... No doubt Joseph thought He was with Mary and Mary thought He was with Joseph, and not till the evening camp did they miss Him... For Passover it was the custom for the Sanhedrin to meet in public in the Temple court to discuss, in the presence of all who would listen, religious and theological questions. It was there that they found Jesus... listening to the discussions and eagerly searching for knowledge like an avid student.

And now there comes one of the key passages in the life of Jesus. "Your father and I have been searching for you," said Mary. "Did you not realize I had to be in my Father's house?" said Jesus. See how very gently but definitely Jesus takes the name father from

Joseph and gives it to God? At some point in time Jesus must have discovered His own unique relationship to God. He cannot have known it when He was a child in the manger or a baby at His mother's breast, or He would have been a monstrosity and an abnormality. But as the years went on He must have pondered, and at this first Passover, with manhood dawning on Him, there came in with a sudden blaze of realization the consciousness that He was not as other men are, that in a unique way and special sense He was the Son of God. And mark one thing — the discovery did not make Him proud. It did not make Him look down on His humble parents, the gentle Mary and the hard-working Joseph. He went home and He was obedient to them."

So, what can we learn from all this? **THREE** quick things:

FIRST, that the dawning of Jesus definite realization of His divinity produced what R. Kent Hughes calls "*an unexpected and amazing phenomena: human obedience.*" Not exemption from the need to obey his parents, but a willingness to comply with and honor their wishes.

And in an age where teenage rebellion is all too common (even among Christian children) it is noteworthy that in the life of Jesus: *The dawning of the realization that He was a unique and special individual, and had elevated wisdom and intelligence, and possessed a divine nature, did not lead to a neglect or dishonoring of His earthly parents, but an increased honoring of them.*

Coming to realize He was divine and that God was His Father, did not cause Him to rebel against His earthly parents, but submit Himself to their rules. A fact which causes Barclay to say, "*The real man (or woman) of God discharges human duties with supreme fidelity.*"

SECOND, we are told Jesus "*grew in favor with God and man.*" Literally "*He grew in grace...*"

Which tells us what? That grace and obedience are not antithetical to one another! They enhance and feed off one another! Just as sin and rebellion and the shirking of responsibility to God and people can quench the Spirit, so also obedience, submission and carrying out our responsibilities enhances the work of the Spirit in our lives.

Jesus, we are told, "grew strong and the grace of God was upon Him." And by "strong," I believe it means strong in the strength of His inner person; in His sense of who He was; not strong in body — like Samson! There was a confidence about Jesus, mingled with humility and selflessness that earned Him the respect of others.

You see, obedience is a sign of honor and respect (Col. 3:20). Obedience is a sign of love (II John 6), humility (James 4:10), godliness (Rom. 6:16), and faith in a Sovereign God who ordains the authorities who hold the positions of power over us (Rom. 13:1-8).

In fact, the only time Christians should disobey is when we are asked to do something immoral, ungodly, hateful, abusive or unjust. That's what I think Paul means when he says to children, "***Obey your parents***" and adds the phrase, "***in the Lord***" (Eph. 6:1). That is, obey your parents as long as they don't ask you to do something immoral, or contrary to God's will.

For those lucky enough to have had godly parents, it's not an issue. But many have not. In fact (just to give you one example), I just reread a book called "**Overcoming the Dark Side of Leadership**," which discusses (in the chapter on how the dark side can develop in leaders), the story of Joe Kennedy, the father of John F. Kennedy and Ted Kennedy. (A family that has — for some inconceivable reason — been dubbed "**The Royal Family of America**.")

Joe had mafia ties / made his millions by illegally running rum during the prohibition / and was (quote) "***A known adulterer, often maintaining sordid relationships with numerous women, even defiantly flaunting them before his wife and family.***" And sadly enough, as the author goes on to point out, "***Joe encouraged his sons to demonstrate their manhood in the same way he did. The sons,***" he goes on to say, "***even provided young women for their father's pleasure, and on many occasions shared the women with him.***" And as history has gone on to show, the "sins of the father were visited upon his children" (and his grandchildren as well).

So, should they have obeyed their father? **NO!** Because what he asked them to do was not "in the Lord." It was immoral, ungodly and inexcusable — scarring the lives of his offspring to this very day. Meaning that sometimes God calls us to disobey our parents (and even our country for that matter) if such "authorities" ask us to do things that are not "in the Lord."

Which brings us to our **LAST** point: A godly, obedient, submissive and alluringly attractive inner spirit comes from knowing who we are. Knowing He was the Son of God produced in Jesus a profound humility and submission that pleased God and was pleasing to people. And even in our case (as Christians) when we come to grasp who we are as reconciled, forgiven, dearly loved children of God, who will one day be made like Him, it makes us more like Him (I Jn 3:3). The awareness that we are loved by God makes us want to please God, obey God and submit ourselves to others for His glory.

If I'm unsure of me, or unsure of my standing with God, my focus will incessantly be on me thus thwarting selflessness and humility.

But if I'm sure of me, and sure of who I am in Christ — loved, forgiven, secure in His family and precious to Him, I can take my eyes off me!

My focus can be outward instead of inward (or self-ward). I can be confident, selfless, and humble because I've settled the issue of who I am!

Remember, as C. S. Lewis said, "*Humility is not thinking lowly of yourself, but rather, true humility is not thinking of yourself at all.*" Something that happens from being convinced of God's love for us.

My question is:

Are you? / Do you know you're a forgiven, loved, adopted child of God, and precious to Him? / Do you? / Because if you're sure, it will produce in you a confidence, selflessness, humility, obedience, and desire to please God similar to that of Jesus.