

"And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them; but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart.

"And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man."

-- Luke 2:51,52

Genesis 2:8-25

Luke 2:40-end

Psalm 34

New Book of Worship, Psalm 34, pp.54-55

From the time of the Lord's return from Egypt, where He had been taken to escape the wrath of Herod, to the time of the beginning of His public ministry, this incident of His visit to the Temple at the age of twelve and His return to Nazareth to be subject to Mary and Joseph is the only incident mentioned.

We think of Him as spending these twenty-five or more years at His home in Nazareth. There He lived in safety and prepared Himself for His work. Nothing is said in the Scriptures about His external life and activities during this period, but He was undergoing temptations and overcoming in Himself all tendencies to self-seeking. At the age of twelve He had marvelous powers, astounding the learned men with His wisdom. With the enthusiasm, confidence, and idealism of youth it must have been a temptation to Him not to go forth and show His powers. But the time was not yet. "Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall; But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength." We cannot realize our ideals in our own strength. We must learn to wait upon the Lord, to depend upon Him. We can think of this long stay of the Lord in Nazareth as the period of preparation when He was gaining those inward victories which made possible His active ministry.

As children we are subject to our parents. There are times in our early enthusiasm and self-confidence when we should like to break away, but this desire is folly until we are prepared to be subject unto our Heavenly Father and desirous of doing His will. And to attain this state of life takes years, years filled with patient effort. While at Nazareth "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man." The Lord passed through all the states through which we pass, and the life in the home was one of them. So He was at Nazareth until He was ready to go forth not in the power of His finite self but in the power of the Father within Him, to do the Father's will.

The home is the fundamental institution of human society. It represents the most precious interests and the most permanent joys of human life. But the home begins in marriage and so, in considering the home, we must start there. And we must look at marriage from its spiritual side. It must be regarded as a Divine institution.

We read in the tenth chapter of Mark: "From the beginning of creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; and they twain shall be one flesh." Sex does not mark a mere difference in bodily organism; it is primarily a difference in mind, and only secondarily of the body. A man is a man outwardly because he is a man inwardly, and a woman is a woman outwardly because she is a woman inwardly. "In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made he him; male and female created he them; and blessed them, and called their name Adam (man) in the day when they were created." These words disclose to us how deep and vital this distinction is; it has its source in the very inmosts of our being.

But although they were created male and female, they were created to be united, for it is written: "He called their name man." They are to be united inwardly as well as outwardly. Viewed in the light of Scripture, marriage is the normal condition of life. It is not an accident or a temporary feature of earthly life. It is necessary to a full and complete life, essential to the highest usefulness and happiness of every human being. And it is not limited to life in this world. Men in this world are men in the next, and women in this world are women in the next, and the loves and affections of each go on to eternity. It is because of this basic internal relationship that offenses against marriage bring so much unhappiness, suffering, and disease into the world.

Marriage is spiritual in its origin and has primary regard to our regeneration. It is inseparably connected with the family and the home and the love of children. It was instituted in order that the affections of men and women might be taken off from self and directed toward others. Examine the arguments for easy divorce and for birth control, and you will find selfishness and worldliness at the bottom of every one of them. If each individual lived for self alone, the virtues of unselfishness could not be attained. Genuine love is not self-love. Genuine love is always unselfish. There is no true love which is unwilling to make sacrifice for others. Parents who love their children make self-sacrifice of small account. They willingly give up their desires and plans. They willingly sacrifice their health and their fortunes. Marriage is the school in which the character is purified and perfected; it is instituted of God as a means to the reception of His love in our hearts. Boys and girls, young men and women should know this as a protection from wrong and worldly ideas and thoughts about marriage. Marriage has a Divine purpose and is a means to life's greatest happiness and blessings, and the perversion of marriage leads to life's greatest disasters. Dependence upon the Lord and the desire to do the Lord's work together is the only sure foundation for a happy marriage and a happy home. As marriage has its origin from the Lord, so men and women must be led into and in it by religious rather than by worldly motives.

And there must be in marriage the love of children. The gift of children is not always granted, even in a true marriage, but there are many wilfully childless homes, most of them a tribute paid to the love of ease and to worldly ambitions and desires.

Children bring so much happiness with their innocence, their dependence, their trustfulness! They bring out our best qualities. In them we live over the happy days of our own childhood. Life is not narrowed and restricted by the coming of children, but immensely broadened and deepened. Our love for others is strengthened. The home should be the happy center of child life, and in the faithfulness of parents in preparing their children for an obedient and true life the objects of our creation are attained, and the frets, worries, and worldly ambitions come to appear insignificant. Indeed, if one cannot find happiness in the home, there is no place where he can find it.

We should look upon marriage and the home as the ideal state of human life. All the good things of human life spring from this center. Its purity and prosperity are the strength and glory of the nation. No people can long endure whose homes have become corrupt and degraded. In the welfare of the home is found the test of government, the aim of education, and the pledge of progress. If the state fails to protect the family and the school fails to foster the domestic graces and virtues - industry, purity, reverence - then the day of judgment is surely near at hand.

Children should be brought up not to think of marriage as an exciting experiment. It isn't an accident. It isn't a step in the dark. It is a crowning achievement to be waited for, worked for, and sacrificed for, and to be preserved at all costs to self. It does not come suddenly and without effort. It is worth waiting and sacrificing for.

The only sure foundation for a good and happy life is the recognition of the fact that the purpose of life is to do the Lord's will and not to serve one's self, that life is not just for this world but is eternal, and that eternal happiness depends upon our choices and our life here.

Only when two young people enter into marriage with the purpose of helping each other to make a happy home and to advance the Lord's kingdom do they have a safe start in their married life. Happiness for children, for young people, for each one of us can come only from the Lord, and it can come only as we learn of Him and try to do His will. He said:

"If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.

"These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full."

Amen

Fryeburg, February 4, 1934.