

4. Between the Ages of 12 and 30

In our last message, we saw what the Bible tells us about the childhood of Jesus, including his visit to the temple when he was 12 years old. But for the 18 years that followed that event, we have practically no details about his life. All the same, we can learn lessons from some details that are given.

After the visit to the temple, Luke 2:51 says, “Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them, but His mother kept all these things in her heart.” In this, Jesus serves as a model for us. He was an obedient son and respectful toward his parents. The law under which Jesus lived, the law that God gave to Musa (that is, Moses) said, “Honor your father and your mother” (Exodus 20:12). The law under which we live says, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right” (Ephesians 6:1). If we want to resemble Jesus, we must respect our parents.

According to Mark 6:3, Jesus became a carpenter. Matthew 13:55 tells us that this was also the vocation of his adoptive father, Joseph. Some people have contempt for those who work physically, like carpenters or farmers. Some people do not respect work that is not done in an office. But Jesus’ example shows that there is nothing dishonorable in working with one’s hands as a worker or craftsman. On the contrary, the New Testament recommends to Christians:

“But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more; that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing.” (1 Thessalonians 4:10-12)

Apart from these few points, the only information we have on the life of Jesus between the ages of 12 and 30 years is contained in this short verse in the gospel of Luke: “And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men” (Luke 2:52). Jesus grew physically, intellectually, spiritually and socially. He was a well-balanced person. But the Bible doesn’t tell us anything about his ap-

pearance, his pastimes, his friends or many other points that could interest us.

THE DESIRE TO KNOW MORE

Men have always been curious about the years in the life of Jesus about which the Bible is practically silent. They have always wanted to know more. This desire is particularly strong among those who find a great pleasure in all things miraculous. They often think of all the miracles that Jesus might have done but which are not mentioned in the Bible. But Jesus never encouraged interest in the miracles themselves. Matthew 12:38-40 says:

“Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, ‘Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.’ But He answered and said to them, ‘An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.’”

To see a miracle just to see a miracle... just to experience the astonishment... this has no value. The miracles were supposed to teach us something about God—His nature or His will, or confirm for us an important truth. The miracle that surpasses all others in importance is the resurrection of Jesus after three days in the tomb—a miracle that is fully attested by the Word of God and by history.

But as we have already stated, many people have always been thirsty for miracles—to see them and to read about them. Consider, for example, how many of the faithful follow with joy testimonies that tell of miracles and extraordinary things, but are quickly bored when it comes to Bible study. There are books filled with testimonies of people who claim to have been sorcerers, or who claim to have been to hell or heaven and returned from there, books which describe all the illnesses the authors claim to have had and from which they received miraculous healing. These books sell like hot cakes. But very few people buy books that could help them understand this or that part of the Bible.

There have always been people who exploit this thirst for miraculous things. Some of these exploit people for their money, others to promote their own philosophies or doctrines.

THE APOCRYPHA

This is what is at the origin of some of the books that began to circulate among Christians after the time of the apostles. These books, which contain so-called gospels, the acts of such and such apostle, and epistles, were called by the church “apocryphal” writings. That is to say, non-authentic, questionable or suspect. They were not recognized as inspired by God. They were not written by those to whom the authors wanted to attribute them. These books tried to fill the gap left by the four recognized versions of the gospel—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—by furnishing us with details of Jesus’ childhood and youth, and, of course, by telling us about the miracles that Jesus supposedly performed during this period of his life.

The so-called Gospel of Thomas is one example. In this book, the child Jesus was playing one Sabbath day, making pigeons of clay. When an adult came to scold him, he clapped his hands and the pigeons flew away, transformed into real birds. When another child who was running through the village accidentally bumped Jesus on the shoulder, he cried out, “You will not finish your errand.” And the other child fell over dead. When the parents of the child came to reason with Jesus about the wrong he had just done, they were struck blind. We see here an interest in miracles but no concern for morality or justice. Of course, Jesus never did such things.

In reality, we plainly see in the gospels that are in the Bible that Jesus did not perform miracles as a child. First, there is the fact that the gospel of John says about Jesus changing the water into wine at the wedding in Cana: “This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him” (John 2:11).

Next, we see the astonishment of the people of Nazareth at the miracles that Jesus was doing after beginning his public ministry. This shows that they

did not associate such acts with Jesus while he lived among them.

“And when the Sabbath had come, He began to teach in the synagogue. And many hearing Him were astonished, saying, ‘Where did this Man get these things? And what wisdom is this which is given to Him, that such mighty works are performed by His hands! Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us?’ So they were offended at Him.” (Mark 6:2-3)

ROSICRUCIANISM

Nowadays, some groups such as the Rosicrucians claim to have information on the life of Jesus before the beginning of his ministry. It says, for example, that Jesus supposedly traveled to certain other countries where he acquired special knowledge and the powers that he used on his return to Palestine. Surely, the purpose of these claims is to attract followers by emphasizing hidden knowledge available only to the initiated—allowing them to prevail over their circumstances and to discover unknown powers.

But all of this is contradicted by the Bible, which shows us that the works and knowledge of Jesus came, not from studying with certain people in a faraway country, but rather from the Spirit of God within him. It was at the time of his baptism that the Spirit descended on him. Listen to the words of John the Baptist:

“And John bore witness, saying, ‘I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, “Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.” And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God”’ (John 1:32-34).

It was after this moment that Jesus began preaching and performing miracles. Later, he would clearly say in Matthew 12:28 that it was by the Spirit of God that he was casting out demons. The claims of those who speak of secret knowledge acquired abroad have no foundation.

WHY THIS LACK OF DETAILS?

Why did God not reveal more about the life of Jesus before age 30? It is not because there was nothing to say: "And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written" (John 21:25). But God has revealed what was necessary for us, and from what He did write we can find the origin of Jesus, his mission on earth and his role in our lives.

The emphasis is placed on the reason Jesus came. The Lord said in Mark 10:45, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." When we see the importance of the death and resurrection

of Jesus, we are not surprised to see that a quarter of the gospel according to Matthew, a third of the gospel of Mark and half of the gospel of John are devoted to the last week of the life of Jesus. If these accounts seem to neglect the childhood of Jesus, it is to fix our attention on his ministry and especially the death he endured to save us.

CONCLUSION

What God revealed to us in His Word about the life of Jesus is sufficient for us to be saved. When it comes to the life of Jesus between ages 12 and 30, we don't have many details, but this fact should not trouble us. The Lord, in His infinite intelligence, has told us what we need to know. Let us trust Him. Let us be humble enough to realize that He knows better than we do what is necessary.