

“And Jesus Increased in Wisdom and Stature, and in Favour with God and Man”

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A little over one month ago, we were all celebrating the glorious Christmas season. We were being filled with the greatest of all messages, that of the birth of our Lord and Savior. Little is written of his life from the time Joseph, Mary, and their wondrous son returned from Egypt until he began his earthly ministry almost thirty years later. Of the two accounts of the birth and early life of the Savior, Matthew lets us know of his return from Egypt to Nazareth, but Matthew’s next entry is the account of the baptism by John. Luke does give us one brief account of this early period of his life. Luke records:

And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him. [Luke 2:40]

Luke also gives us one brief account of one of the family’s annual visits to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of the Passover when the Savior was twelve years of age. This story tells that when Mary and Joseph started to return to their home, they discovered that Jesus was not with them, and they returned to Jerusalem to find him. After three days they found him in the temple sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them and asking them questions.

Luke records that all who heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers. The scripture then records:

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]

Using these attributes that described the Savior as he grew to manhood seems to be a good measure for your progress at this special time in your lives.

When the scriptures record that Jesus increased in stature, he was perfecting his physical body to house his eternal spirit. The physical body is something special to be cared for, watched over, and nourished. Paul, in writing to the Corinthians, said this:

Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?

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If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are. [1 Corinthians 3:16–17]

From the very beginning, the Lord has emphasized the importance of this mortal experience—of having a body and a soul associated together. The Prophet Joseph Smith instructed us in these words:

The first step in salvation of man is the laws of eternal and self-existent principles. Spirits are eternal. At the first organization in heaven we were all present, and saw the Savior chosen and appointed and the plan of salvation made, and we sanctioned it.

We came to this earth that we might have a body and present it pure before God in the celestial kingdom. The great principle of happiness consists in having a body. [Teachings, p. 181]

Recognizing the privilege of presently having body and spirit associated together, let us examine the other three attributes associated with the Savior’s early development. He increased in wisdom. Our heads are the housing of our marvelous brain. There has not been a computer developed that comes close to the input/output and storage capacity centralized within the housing of our heads.

The ears, the eyes, and the nose, as input devices, can all absorb information totally without a keyboard, optical reader, or any other type of equipment and have it recorded in the almost unlimited storage capacity of our brain. The information so stored can be retrieved almost instantaneously, without a set of complicated directions, as output in the form of speech, facial expression, or movement. Sometimes I wish, however, that the process was a little more complicated when I am in the presence of some who seem to have been built without an “off” switch.

Every one of us has been blessed with the marvelous instrument that sits on top of our

shoulders. How we use our heads is up to each of us to determine. I have a wife who has a temperature comfort zone that has such a narrow limit that if a room temperature is not between 74.75 and 75.25 degrees, she is uncomfortable. I am afraid that many of us have the same narrow focus when we use our heads; we want to limit its use to a narrowly defined comfort zone. We arrive for our university training having lived in a comfort zone without proper preparation for what we want to accomplish with our education. Precious time is wasted in making a decision on the course we should follow.

After selecting a major, the first time we bump up against a difficult class that is out of our comfort zone, we discard the time, effort, and money expended, change majors and start all over again. We note that a C is a passing grade. Such a grade fits into our comfort zone and will supply us with the same blue and white diploma as the A and B students when we graduate. Thus we miss the thrill of testing our enormous capacities by using the special brains we have been blessed with. The work ethic seems to be a foreign concept to many people. We don’t work as hard or as long as we should. Too many in this day and age have bumper stickers on their cars that read, “I’m in no hurry, I’m only on my way to school.”

In these marvelous brains we have, we need to input a basic set of instructions that will keep us on course. It is a set of values or standards that, if followed, will guide us to our ultimate destination.

There is a great story in the scriptures that illustrates how the Lord feels about having us input these basic instructions into our programs for successful living so we may be able to determine right from wrong. The account is contained in the opening chapters of the Book of Mormon, where it tells of a family who lived comfortably in Jerusalem and needed to get out of their comfort zone in order to grow and

progress—in fact, to save their lives. The scripture records:

And it came to pass that the Lord commanded my father, even in a dream, that he should take his family and depart into the wilderness.

And it came to pass that he was obedient unto the word of the Lord, wherefore he did as the Lord commanded him. [1 Nephi 2:2–3]

So Lehi took his family, leaving their comfortable home, and departed into the wilderness. They had only gone a short distance when the scriptures record:

And it came to pass that he spake unto me, saying: Behold I have dreamed a dream, in the which the Lord hath commanded me that thou and thy brethren shall return to Jerusalem.

For behold, Laban hath the record of the Jews and also a genealogy of my forefathers, and they are engraven upon plates of brass.

Wherefore, the Lord hath commanded me that thou and thy brothers should go unto the house of Laban, and seek the records, and bring them down hither into the wilderness. [1 Nephi 3:2–4]

When Lehi approached his sons with this great responsibility of returning and asking for the record, they thought it was a hard thing he had asked them to do. But Nephi stepped forward and said,

I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them. [1 Nephi 3:7]

Thus, the sons of Lehi set out to obtain the scriptures that they might have them to accompany them as they proceeded in the wilderness. They made three efforts to obtain the record. First, they just decided to leave it to

chance and cast lots as to who would go to the house of Laban. The lot fell to Laman, and he went to the house of Laban and talked with him. He sat in the house and told him he desired the record contained on the plates of brass. This angered Laban that he would ask such a thing, and he told Laman, “Behold thou art a robber, and I will slay thee” (1 Nephi 3:13).

That was enough for Laman. He fled out of Laban’s presence and came back sorrowfully to his brethren. Leaving events to chance did not produce the desired result. They were about to return to the wilderness when Nephi had another idea. Rather than going back in failure, why don’t we go to our house, the land of our father’s inheritance, for there we have much gold and silver and all manner of riches. Let us go and see if we can buy the record from Laban. So they returned to Laban and offered to purchase the record.

Laban was a worldly man, and seeing all the gold and silver coveted it. Then he looked at these four boys and at all of his servants. He could keep the record and also have the gold and silver. He sent his servants after the boys, and again they had to flee and were obliged to leave their property behind, which fell into the hands of Laban. Things of the world did not produce the record.

Now when they tried to regroup and think about their responsibility again, it was hard for Nephi to convince his brothers to return the third time. He reasoned with them this way:

Let us go up again unto Jerusalem, and let us be faithful in keeping the commandments of the Lord; for behold he is mightier than all the earth, then why not mightier than Laban and his fifty, yea, or even than his tens of thousands? [1 Nephi 4:1]

Of course, if they would go by faith, trusting in the Lord, he would deliver the record into their hands if he wanted them to have it. As Nephi obtains the record, he learns a great lesson, for he was instructed:

It is better that one man should perish than that a nation should dwindle and perish in unbelief.

And now, when I, Nephi, had heard these words, I remembered the words of the Lord which he spake unto me in the wilderness, saying that: Inasmuch as thy seed shall keep my commandments, they shall prosper in the land of promise.

Yea, and I also thought that they could not keep the commandments of the Lord according to the law of Moses, save they should have the law.

And I also knew that the law was engraven upon the plates of brass. [1 Nephi 4:13–16]

Thus, fundamental to this group proceeding into the wilderness was that they have the law of the Lord as a foundation for their growth and development so they would know good from evil, right from wrong, and be able to establish their lives on sound gospel principles.

The first challenge I leave with you today is to learn to appreciate the power and potential in your heads. Get out of your comfort zone! Expand your vision! Experience the satisfaction that comes from real, earned accomplishment. Use the foundation of the scriptures in your lives to lead, guide, and direct you on the right course.

Next, the scriptures record that Jesus increased in favour with man. The real joy of living is found when one turns from a life centered in self to one centered in service. James tells us:

Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world. [James 1:27]

In short, James tells us that true religion is devotion to God, demonstrated by love and compassion for our fellowmen coupled with unworldliness. Such a statement almost seems too simple to be significant, but in its simplicity it speaks an important truth. Restated, it may

be said that true religion consists not only in refraining from evil—that is, remaining unspotted—but in deliberately and purposefully doing acts of kindness and service to others.

King Benjamin recognized this principle. As he spoke to his people from the tower, he reminded them that he had spent his days in their service and said:

I do not desire to boast, for I have only been in the service of God.

And behold, I tell you these things that ye may learn wisdom; that ye may learn that when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God. [Mosiah 2:16–17]

The book of Matthew puts it this way:

Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. [Matthew 25:40]

The life of the Prophet Joseph Smith portrays the same attributes: service to friends, to his fellowmen, to all mankind, and to his God. I have always been impressed in the history of the Church how crisis or hard times seem to bring us closer together and bring about more compassionate service and an extra amount of teamwork. It is too bad that this same spirit of teamwork does not always exist.

This was demonstrated to me in a most interesting way when I was thrown into a situation upon returning from my mission, and it taught me the real value of teamwork. World War II was raging, and I had just joined the Marine Corps to fulfill my service obligation. As part of our training we had forced marches. Loaded with packs on our backs and rifles over our shoulders, off we would go on a little five- or ten-mile hike over the hot desert terrain of southern California. Following the long columns of Marine platoons would be a Red Cross truck to pick up those who could not

make it. To have one of your platoon members picked up by the Red Cross truck was a disgrace worse than anything you could possibly imagine. If one of your number was failing, you would help by carrying his pack or his rifle. If he was still failing, two others would share their packs and rifles with other members willing to carry them along with their own, and they would carry the failing buddy to help him to the end of the hike. The teamwork created was a bonding that was difficult to describe.

It is exciting to anticipate what would happen here if we could develop that same teamwork, if we could declare that no one in our apartment, no one in our quorum, no one in our Relief Society, or no one in our ward is going to fail while they are here as a student at Brigham Young University, either scholastically, emotionally, physically, or spiritually.

The second challenge I issue to you today is to develop a heart big enough to show real compassion to all of your fellowmen. Now next: “And Jesus increased in favour with God” (see Luke 2:52). The bowing of the knee has been a symbol of devotion, humility, solemn prayer, and obedience. From the Doctrine and Covenants we read:

And this shall be the sound of his trumpet, saying to all people, both in heaven and in earth, and that are under the earth—for every ear shall hear it, and every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess, while they hear the sound of the trumpet, saying: Fear God, and give glory to him who sitteth upon the throne, forever and ever; for the hour of his judgment is come. [D&C 88:104]

President Kimball has taught us there is a knowledge that our Father in Heaven wants each of us to have, and that is a personal witness that he hears and answers our prayers. He said:

I have always had a very tender feeling about prayer and the power and blessing of prayer. For this I thank our Heavenly Father and my dear parents and teachers, who taught me by word and example about righteous and heartfelt prayer.

I am sure that if we pray fervently and righteously, individually and as a family when we arise in the morning, when we retire at night, and around our tables at mealtime, we will not only knit together as loved ones, but we will grow spiritually through communion with our Heavenly Father. Each of us have so much need for his help as we strive to learn gospel truths and live them. We should be seeking his help in the major decisions of our lives, decisions involving schooling, marriage, employment, places of residence, raising our families, serving each other in the work of the Lord, and seeking his forgiveness and continual guidance and protection. Our list of needs is long and real and heartfelt.

I remember while I was in the service a story circulating among the LDS service-men about the courage of a newly inducted serviceman who had just returned from his mission. The first night he was in a large barracks lined with beds of servicemen in bunks, top and bottom. He wanted to kneel down to offer his prayers because that was his practice. He looked at the long rows of beds and wondered if he had the courage to do it. He decided that he needed the protection of the Lord more than he had at any other time in his life, so he would continue the practice. As the lights went out, he got out of his bunk and knelt in prayer. Soon there was a great uproar. A shoe was tossed at him, among other things. There were remarks ridiculing him for being in that position. Suddenly, the strongest, tallest, and largest man there jumped from his upper bunk into the middle of the barracks. He had been a football player, and muscles bulged from every part of his body. In a loud voice he cried, “The next one who causes any difficulty for this young man praying, I will personally see that

he is thrown headfirst through the bulkhead wall.”

Suddenly, everything became quiet, and the young man concluded his prayer. Every night this football player would call down to the returned missionary, “Are you ready for your prayers?” Then the missionary would get out of his bed and onto his knees. The football player would stand in the middle of the aisle so that everyone would be quiet. It wasn’t long until the example of this young man was felt by many others in the barracks, and they, too, would kneel and offer their prayers.

The bowing of the knee is also a sign of obedience to the will of the Lord. Willing, righteous obedience leads to celestial life. Indeed, there is no eternal progress without it. Yet obedience to the commandments of God seems to be one of man’s most difficult challenges. Some people do not obey because they feel their free agency is being trampled upon if they consider themselves subservient to Church authority. Others willfully choose an existence of being contrary to the nature of happiness. Still others produce an undisciplined life, persist in their weaknesses, and justify their course of action by struggling and saying, “That’s just the way I am.”

You have heard this before, and again I repeat a word of warning to those who are willingly disobedient to the code of honor you agreed to before receiving acceptance to Brigham Young University. I have never sensed in the First Presidency a greater determination to see that the standards are maintained here. The pressures and pleadings of honest, faithful members who want their sons and daughters to come to this university continue in ever-increasing numbers. Thousands will be turned

away because the enrollment caps must be met. This only intensifies the need that standards be maintained here as the only fair policy that can or ought to be followed. The few of you who choose to be disobedient should be ready to have your privilege of attending Brigham Young University severed whether you be one week, one month, or years away from completing your educational goals at this university. There are many others waiting to take your place who are willing and anxious to abide by all standards for the privilege of attendance at BYU.

My third challenge to you is this. Learn the deep satisfaction that comes from communication with God our Eternal Father through humble prayer and experience the great eternal joy that will fill your soul by being obedient to his will. You now find yourselves in the final phase of your major preparation for your life’s work. What will your journals record of this period of your mortal experience? Will the statements in your journal be similar to the words contained in the book of Luke regarding the example of the life of our Lord and Savior? Will they indicate that you “increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man”?

God grant that we will have the courage and the discipline to follow the course he has outlined for us, which carries with it the promise of joy in this life and the opportunity of experiencing the blessings of eternal life in the world to come. I bear you my solemn witness that God does live. He stands at the head of this church; it is not man-made. I say this in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.