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A MESSAGE OF GRACE TO BE FOUND IN LUKE II. 49 — "MY FATHER'S BUSINESS"

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IT is doubtless widely known that the Lord Jesus Christ is portrayed in the various books of the Word under various guises, no one of which is devoid of vital significance.[1] Among these several records, no group is probably better known than that comprising the first five books of the New Testament. Thus:—

In Matthew,	Christ is revealed as	the King of the Jews,— rejected.
In Mark,	" " " "	the Servant of Jehovah.
In Luke,	" " " "	the Seed of the Woman, the virgin-born Son of Man.
In John,	" " " "	the Son of God,— risen.
In Acts,	" " " "	the ascended Lord and Christ.

Of these the Gospels show Him in His earthly career, while Acts (transitional in scope) is largely retrospective.

In Matthew,	we see Him as an	infant.
In Mark,	" " " " "	adult.
In Luke,	" " " " "	infant.
In John,	" " " " "	adult.

It is beautifully appropriate that Matthew (recording Him in His kingly function) and Luke (recording Him as the Son of Man) should introduce Him as an infant; in strong contrast with Mark (who portrays Him as the Servant of Jehovah) and John (as the Son of God), in each

[1] For example, Christ is the Lamb of God (Exodus), the Captain of the Lord's Host (Joshua), Our Kinsman (Ruth), Our Mordecai (Esther), the Wisdom of God (Proverbs), the Messianic King (Daniel), the Lord our Righteousness (Romans), the Head of the Church (Ephesians), etc.

of which, maturity in service and the plenitude of His divinity warrant our first vision of Him equipped with fully developed powers.

While Mark and John in their special records have given us therefore no prenatal facts nor genealogic tables, how significant and appropriate it is that in Matthew, who deals with His royal function, and in Luke, who presents Him as the virgin-born, we find mention made both of prenatal facts of importance and detailed genealogic records, — in the one case important for regal establishment, and in the other for outlining and defining His position in the midst of the human race.

Examination will show a difference in the genealogies of Matthew and Luke. Matthew begins with Abraham, the racial head of Israel, and ends with Joseph, the legal head of the earthly family of the Lord. Luke, on the contrary, begins with Joseph, the son of Heli, and ends with "Adam which was the Son of God." [1]

For the purpose of the present study it does not seem advisable to develop the evidence by which the conclusion is reached that the table of Luke is the maternal genealogic record of the Master, as contrasted with the paternal record of Matthew. Suffice it to mention that as husband of Mary (daughter of Heli), Joseph would be held to be, legally, a descendant of Heli. In both tables we find Him recorded as Son of David and Abraham, though the paternal record runs through David and Solomon; while the maternal record is traced through David and (another son) Nathan.

[1] The word "supposed" (in the parenthetic phrase "as was supposed") of Luke iii. 23 fails to convey the correct shade of meaning from the Greek. The word *nomizo* signifies to regard or acknowledge as custom, to have or to hold as customary; hence to assume, to suppose. Note, also, that "the Son" is in italics, and hence does not occur in the original. Thus Joseph is seen to have a genealogic relation to Christ, but of a purely legalistic character. This is of high significance in correctly understanding Luke ii. 48, 49; also as a successful counter to the infidel thrust regarding the customarily held humanistic origin of the Lord.

From a purely technical standpoint, therefore, Joseph was doubtless held to have had a legal paternal relation to the Master (the probable payment of the five shekels redemption money of Luke ii. 39 has been suggestively noted in Things to Come, London, September, 1907, by A. S. W., as affording additional strength to this technical relation existing between Joseph and Christ).

In spite of these and other bits of evidence, that might be more or less elaborated along this line, we are confronted with the unyielding fact that the Lord Jesus Christ sustained no personal, that is fleshly, relation to Joseph. The testimony of the Scripture is most explicit, that the divine phase of the Master was derived, specifically and solely, from the Holy Spirit ("The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee," — this from Luke, who, of all the Evangelists, lays the heavier stress upon the humanity of Christ); while the human phase was derived from Mary, wholly independent of man. Nor have we evidence that Joseph arrogated to himself an undue portion of paternal authority, nor on the other hand demanded of the Master a life policy or a filial obedience consonant with such customary human relations; — with the possible exception of the noteworthy scene in the Temple, following the absence of Christ from the pilgrim band returning from Jerusalem, on the occasion of the Passover feast.

This Temple scene is filled with teaching of richest import, and much time might profitably be spent in consideration thereof. But at present attention is directed to a single thought.

Again taking the record of Luke ii. 39–52, we read the reproach of the parents as voiced by Mary,[1] "Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? Behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing," and that marvelous reply of the Son, — so full of tender pity for their ignorance and

[1] Whose indifferent fulfillment of parental duties enabled the Child to pass from their observation, their knowledge, and their care, for a full day (cf. Luke ii. 43–45).

heedlessness, and yet so definite and decisive in its maintenance of His divine paternity, with its consequent stern brushing aside of even the faintest insinuation of the paternity of Joseph, — "How is it that *ye* sought *me*? Wist ye not that *I* must be about *my father's* business?" [author's italics].

It might well be asked why should not Christ have permitted the phrasing of His mother to have passed without rebuke; in that Joseph held not only a positive social relation to Mary, but, at least traditionally, a definite legal or technical relation to Himself. In addition to the obvious need of sternly repressing any possible confusion of mind on so vital a matter (as noted above), together with such other patent reasons that might readily spring to mind, the following seem worthy of consideration:—

Christ came to fulfill the Law. He lived under the reign of the Law. He submitted Himself to circumcision, baptism, and such other Hebraic ordinances and customs that in no way conflicted with His mission. He lived under the Dispensation of Law; and not until Calvary had completed its dreadful task was the Dispensation of Law superseded by the Dispensation of Grace.

Blessedly and truly was He about His Father's business" in His daily and hourly fidelity and submission to His Father's Law.

Wonderfully, in His life of voluntary humiliation which culminated in His death (that supreme sacrificial act which "redeemed them that were under the Law"), was He fulfilling in most minute detail His "Father's business."

Marvelously, in this His life of obedience to the Law and His Father's will (honoring His Father and magnifying His Father's Law by His life and by His death), did He close in exquisite perfection the days of the stern Dispensation of Law; — and by His death usher in the blessed Dispensation of Grace, of which He Himself was both the divine Forerunner, the living Embodiment, and the perfect Fulfillment.

Apart from the fact that Joseph was the husband of Mary, his entire personal relationship to Christ rests solely on a technicality developed through, and warranted by, the legalism under which Israel historically existed. By contrast, the very presence of Christ on this sin-cursed earth was tangible and sentient evidence of the Grace of the Father thus vested in His incarnation. This priceless gift to humanity was absolutely the outflowing of Divine Grace, one of the manifestations of which was the redemption of "them that were under the Law," to the end that upon them might be bestowed the very liberty, and holiness, and sonship, inherent in Christ Himself. No question of a mere human claim, nor no mere technicality, with its veil of confusing legalism, must be permitted to obscure the glory of the Grace of the Father. The Dispensation of Law is about to close; the glorious Dispensation of Grace is about to be ushered in; and He Who on the one hand was the Fulfillment of Law, and on the other hand was the Incarnation of Grace, the very "image of the invisible God," — He, even He, in these childhood days, at one and the same time vindicated the Glory of His Father, established His own divine paternity, and proclaimed the overthrow of legalism and its replacement by Divine Grace, when He replied, "Wist ye not that *I* must be about *my father's* business?" [author's italics].

What an illuminating insight do these words give us into the life-work of the Master, how the "Father's business" is unfolded to our minds, revealing untold store of Love and Grace!

But how tragically significant the contrast, — invariably typical of man devoid of spiritual vision; — "They understood not the saying which he spake unto them"!