

## “Growing Into a New Year”

1 Samuel 2:18-20; Luke 2:49-52

Chan Willis – F.P.C.-L.C./Welsh  
December 30, 2018

As you all are painfully aware, I am one who is very conscious of the use of words. No, not just the *abundant* ‘use’ of words. But more about HOW we use those words in our communications. Their **meaning**. As I considered our two passages for today, from 1 Samuel in the Old Testament, and Luke’s Gospel in the New Testament, I found myself reflecting on the simple word ‘OLD.’ ‘O-L-D.’ You know, akin to another 3 letter word, ‘A-G-E.’ The top 3 definitions according to my pal ‘Noah’... Webster, that is... ‘old’ refers to that which is *‘dating from the distant past’*... as in ‘**ANCIENT**’ times. Like, ‘OLD’ traditions. The second one was *‘persisting from an earlier time.’* As in an ‘old ailment,’ or an ‘old argument.’ The third definition was *‘of long standing.’* Like an ‘OLD friend.’ To avoid any correlation with ‘a-g-e,’ I have gotten in the habit of referring to an ‘old’ friend as my ‘long-time’ friend. 😊

We all know, however, that there is much more to how a word is interpreted than its **definition**. There is also the **connotation**, the **implications**, that come to different people’s minds. When one uses the word ‘old’ to describe an object, it could be seen as having less **value**, less **worth**. **Not as useful**. And YES, such feelings of diminished value or usefulness might also be associated with PEOPLE as well. Certainly NOT from where I stand! (Hey, I may be a little nuts, but not *crazy!*) I kinda like that ‘wine’ analogy -- we’re not getting ‘old’... we’re just getting BETTER with age...

Yet as we consider the ‘left’ and ‘right’ side of ‘The Book’ (literally, not politically!), it can be easy to fall into that notion of the ‘OLD’ Testament to be of less value, less worth, not as useful as the ‘NEW’ Testament. SURE, the N.T. relates to **Jesus**, our Savior, the One whose miraculous birth we have just celebrated is SO consequential, SO ‘pivotal’ in world events, it is used to divide all of recorded history into two parts: ‘B.C.’ (‘Before Christ’) and ‘A.D.’ (‘Anno Domini,’ ‘the Year of our Lord.’) And YES, I will always remain ‘old school’ on this division. I refuse to give into the ‘neutralization,’ the ‘political correctness,’ if you will, of ‘C.E.’ (‘Common Era’) and ‘B.C.E.’ (‘Before Common Era.’) It’s like that old joke about the King James Version... if it was good enough for Jesus, it’s good enough for me... 😊

But as we read the Luke passage in the N.T., it didn't take a 'rocket surgeon' to see the direct correlation between it and the one from 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel in the OLD Testament. That even though one was talking about a great human leader of Israel back in the 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> Century B.C., and the other concerning the Son of God almost 1000 years later, they both express an **identical thought**: that these two 'heroes of the faith,' Samuel and Jesus, when they were young, '**grew in mind, body, and spirit**... before the Lord **God** and **mankind**.' And particularly, how that **growth** took place in the context of the **church family** (well, *synagogue*, to be exact)...

And so, as we today stand at the beginning of a new year, I want us to ALSO be mindful of the importance of young people in the life of our church, and the impact that we are to have on them. That we who live our lives by 'ancient' Words of **Faith** which have 'persisted' from the 'earliest times' of history have MUCH to share of 'value,' of 'worth,' to help others to grow into a 'long-standing' faith that will be 'useful' throughout their lives. Let us consider what our small Christian church can learn from the examples of TWO young Jewish children, Samuel and Jesus, as we strive to also be "**Growing into a New Year.**"

First, there is the boy **Samuel**. One who was destined for greatness from the very beginning of his life. His mother, Hannah, had a powerful **prayer** encounter with God in the previous chapter... a prayer that has marked similarities with another young mother-to-be of a 'significant' leader in the faith, Mary. Her "Magnificat" Prayer is, of course, in the other book we are considering today, *Luke*. I would encourage you to go back and read Hannah's prayer in that first chapter of *1 Samuel*. The fact that **Samuel's** name can be translated "*He who is from God,*" "*Name of God,*" or even "*Son of God*" says a LOT about his importance! As we've noted before, one's name in Scripture is usually an indicator of their character, their nature. AND that his Mom handed this long-awaited child over to the 'OLD' **priest Eli**... at the 'ripe old age' of about THREE... to raise him in the 'ancient' traditions of the church temple speaks volumes as to how important GOD was to this family. Of how grateful they were for the gift of life, and to show that **gratitude** would dedicate their son's life to serving that good God.

Samuel's future leadership is also foreshadowed even in the seemingly obscure comment about his **clothing**. "**A boy wearing a linen ephod.**" (*1 Sam. 2:18*) Sound familiar? Do you recall when King David danced before the Ark of the Covenant as it processed into the

Holy City of Jerusalem? Remember what he was wearing? ***“A linen ephod.”*** ‘Coincidence?’ HARDLY. Such ‘OLD’ imagery would NOT be lost on a people who held David in such high regard...

OK, so aside from the significance of Samuel and his family to his Jewish community of faith THEN, what does his life mean to us NOW? Well, for one, just as Hannah appreciated the miracle of life that God had answered for her, so too should we appreciate those ‘miracles of life’ that we have been entrusted with. How are we taking seriously our role in ‘dedicating’ the lives of children to service to God?

It may be our own children. Or GRANDchildren. Or young people who are our next-door neighbors. Or those students we tutor, or teach, in school... or in church. We demonstrate to God just how IMPORTANT our faith is to us by communicating that faith to others... adults and children. With all of the negative, secular, damaging influences on our young people today, what are YOU and I doing to offset those with the GOOD NEWS of a life in Christ? And in Christ’s CHURCH? As the ‘priest-hood of all believers,’ how are we, like Eli, helping children like Samuel to ***“grow both in stature and in favor with the Lord and with the people”*** (1 Samuel 2:26)?

Which brings us to **Jesus**. Now, I know that there are some distinct differences between Samuel and Jesus. First and foremost, Jesus was FULLY GOD. Duh. That being said, we must always hold that in tension with the truth that Jesus was also FULLY HUMAN. A holy mystery, to be sure. But as a flesh-and-blood human ‘bean,’ he yet dealt with all of the struggles and trials that we do. Like being a young child. Like learning how to deal with parents and peers.

And just as Samuel ***“ministered before the Lord”*** at a very young age, so too did Jesus ‘minister,’ ‘speak,’ in the **Lord’s name** at a **young age**. When his earthly parents were so flustered, so panicked in looking for Him (which, of course, is QUITE understandable!) Jesus told them, ***“Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?”*** (Luke 2:49)

Now, just WHAT did Jesus mean by this? Well, if we’re not sure, that’s OK... for it says that even his PARENTS didn’t! ***“They did not understand what he was saying to them.”*** (Luke 2:50) (Gee, imagine that. Parents not understanding what their child was saying to them. Looks like those ‘ancient’ words can indeed be pretty relevant to our ‘modern’ times.) Did

Jesus say this because He knew of his distinct identity as the Son of God, and that the best place for a 'son' to converse with his 'father' is in the 'house?' Well, we know from Jesus' prayer life later in ministry, he could go off into many different 'houses', secluded wilderness 'sanctuaries,' in order to talk with His Father. He didn't need a man-made temple in order to do so.

Remembering that he was 12 years-old, perhaps what Jesus was saying that it was especially important for a young child of God to come and be in the Lord's house of worship and prayer. The Scriptures say that when Mary and Joseph found him, Jesus was ***"sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions."*** (Luke 2:46) Even though He knew Himself to be 'fully God' (as well as a 12 year old could conceive of that concept), the 'fully man' side of Jesus sought to know more about being in more full relationship with His Heavenly Father. That He could grow closer to that Father by being in conversation with other 'children'... well, 'once removed'...

As an aside, I also really appreciated the statement that ***"Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them."*** (Luke 2:51) Even though 'his parents didn't understand him... gee, that common childhood complaint throughout the years... ***"He... was obedient to them."*** He showed his earthly parents the kind of respect that His Father in heaven had decreed in those commandments to Moses: ***"Honor thy father and mother."*** Even when they *don't* understand. Even when they get emotional. Even when they make mistakes. Even when they're... **HUMAN!** Whether it was with regard to His 'vertical' relationship... or his 'horizontal' ones... in his younger years, ***"Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man."*** (Luke 2:52)

Whenever I hear/read those words of Luke 2:52, I am reminded of a curriculum that we used at a previous church I served, entitled **"252 Basics."** The name, as you 'might' guess, comes from that *Luke* passage... that as Jesus grew in wisdom, stature, and favor, so too should we instruct our children to do the same. The three guiding principles of this curriculum is 1) the need to make **wise choices**; 2) to **trust in God** no matter what; and 3) to **treat others the way we want to be treated**. It even has a color theme: **ORANGE**. Why 'orange?' Well, If you consider the **family** to be the 'life blood' of society (RED) and you bring that family together with the **church** of Jesus Christ, the 'Light' of the Word (YELLOW), what do you get? **ORANGE**.

Why do I share this with you? Well, it is my hope that in this year to come, we might embrace these same principles. Ones that we could ALL benefit from, no matter our 'age or stage.' In this 'Year of our Lord,' 2019 **A.D.**, may we make wise choices, both individually and collectively, as a church. May we 'treat one another as we would want to be treated.' And above all, to **trust in God no matter what!** May these be *timeless* traits... ones that know *no* age... that we hand down to generations to follow us. Let us pray God's providence for 'orange' opportunities to bring families in closer relationship with Christ. The same relationship that has helped us to 'persist' through the years. As we seek to follow in the example of young Samuel and Jesus... to grow in wisdom and in favor with God and man... may God bless us by **"Growing into a New Year"...**

#### CHARGE

When confronted by his distraught parents, Jesus asked them, ***"Why were you searching for me?"*** Why? Because of their LOVE... their CONCERN. Because of their desire to PROTECT their beloved child. Just as WE should show OUR love and concern for God's Son. And the good news is that we don't have to 'search' through the roadways and towns to find God's Son. We find Him in Scripture. We find Him in our heart. And it is our calling by God to help those who are also searching... for fulfillment, meaning, purpose in their lives... to find Jesus. The One who will protect those that He loves. May we too guide and protect those who we love...especially our **children...**

**As we consider the importance of guiding children into a fulfilling relationship with Jesus, let us remember the words of that same Jesus to His first disciples on that subject:**

***"little children being brought to Jesus so that he might lay hands on them and pray. ... disciples spoke sternly, but Jesus: do not stop them. It is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.'* And he laid his hands on them and went on his way."** (Mt. 19:13-15)

***"Do not stop them. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it."<sup>16</sup> And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them."* (Mk 10:15-16)**

***"People were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them...Do not stop them."<sup>17</sup> Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it."***

**Jesus admonished his followers then, 'Do not stop them.' He also speaks to us today...**