

# The Message of the Silent Years

by Dr. J. Vernon McGee



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(800) 65-BIBLE  
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When we come to the life of the Lord Jesus Christ, there is a yawning chasm, a hiatus between His birth and the beginning of His public ministry at the age of thirty years. We have only a few scraps of His biography, de void of factual continuity.

We are told that nature abhors a vacuum, and likewise men have rushed in to try to fill this divine pause with tradition, folklore, and fable. Here imagination has run riot and fancy has been substituted for facts. One church teaches that the boy Jesus performed miracles. For example, they say that when He played with other little boys in Egypt who were making clay pigeons, He touched the clay and the pigeons flew away. We know that such traditions are untrue, for when our Lord went over the hill from His hometown of Nazareth to attend a wedding in Cana of Galilee, He performed His *first* miracle by turning water into wine. Of this the Gospel writer states:

***This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana, of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him. (John 2:11)***

Since we must dismiss tradition, can we know any thing of these silent years? When Scripture is examined closely, we discover that the boyhood of our Lord has been adequately covered by the divine reporter, the Holy Spirit. He has told us a great deal about this period. “But,” you say, “we haven’t much to go on.” That is true. Yet we have three scraps of evidence that we shall examine. We shall take these three capsules of facts, open them, and examine the contents very carefully. First we shall look at a physician’s chart, then we shall listen to the public comment, and finally we shall read the prophet’s copy. That is all we have, yet it covers this period and covers it adequately.

### **A Physician’s Chart**

The physician is Dr. Luke, called by Paul “the beloved physician” (Colossians 4:14) – a wonderful title for this man. Luke, a medical doctor, used more medical terms in his scriptural record than did Hippocrates, the founder of medicine, in his written records. Dr. Luke is the obstetrician who recorded the birth of Christ. His is the longest record of the virgin birth, and properly so. I am not impressed when a so-called theologian in a famous seminary in New York City says that the virgin birth is a biological impossibility. Such a statement reveals his ignorance of biology and his ignorance of impossibilities. Dr. Luke, a medical doctor of the first century, gives us a most comprehensive account.

Not only is he the obstetrician, Dr. Luke is the pediatrician, for he gives us the only account of the boy Jesus. Again, this is properly so. After the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ, the shepherds went back to their flocks on the hillside; the wise men disappeared into the mysterious East; the angels returned to heaven and shut the door for almost thirty years; and Joseph took the young child with His mother down into Egypt. How long did they stay there? I do not know. I only know that Matthew tells us that they did return:

***But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel; for they are dead who sought the young child’s life. And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land***

***of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judaea in the place of his father, Herod, he was afraid to go there; notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee; and he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth; that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.*** (Matthew 2:19-23)

Matthew gives us the information that when they came out of Egypt they went up to Nazareth, at which point he drops the record until Christ began His public ministry at thirty years of age. The other Gospel writers do the same thing – with the exception of Dr. Luke.

### ***The Child***

From the moment they come out of the land of Egypt, Dr. Luke takes the case. He is the pediatrician. First let us look at the period of childhood – from birth to adolescence. Dr. Luke lets us look first at his medical chart where the first twelve years are covered by this statement:

***And the child grew, and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon him.*** (Luke 2:40)

Then from twelve years of age through His teens, here is the statement that is made:

***And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.***  
(Luke 2:52)

The word for “grew” in verse forty is not the same word as “increased” in verse fifty-two. “Grew” is a word that Dr. Luke uses very carefully. It is a doctor’s word that indicates physical growth. “The child grew, and became strong in spirit” is growth without any sense of responsibility except obedience to authority.

One cause of what is known as juvenile delinquency in our day can be traced back to the parental attitude in the home before the child is twelve years of age. A mother of a six-year-old said to me, “I always call my Willie in and explain to him the reason for everything.” What explanation does a six-year-old need? He is to be taught obedience to authority. When he learns obedience to authority until he is twelve years of age, he will not have trouble in his teens. This is child psychology according to God’s Book – not very popular, but mighty good. During those first twelve years, Jesus just grew. Everything was not explained to Him. His mother said, “You are to run on this errand.” She did not have to sit down and give Him a lecture on why He should run the errand. The “why” was that He was to obey His parents! Learning obedience in the home insures obedience to God and other authority when a young person leaves his home.

A mother was reading a Bible story to her little boy. It was a story about Jesus. At the conclusion, she did what a mother invariably will do – she said, “Now why can’t you be good like the little boy Jesus?” The six-year-old had the answer. He said, “Because He’s God and I’m just *your* boy.”

Though Jesus was God, He grew those first twelve years as any child should grow – without responsibility *except obedience to authority*.

## *The Adolescent*

When Jesus was at the age of twelve, Dr. Luke thought it was proper to tell us one occurrence in His life that marks a change from childhood to adolescence. It is an isolated incident, and we do not want to miss it, for it is given to bridge the gap from His birth to the time He began His public ministry.

The Law said that three times a year the males were to go to Jerusalem. The incident given to us by Dr. Luke was during the Passover feast when Jesus was twelve. They traveled to Jerusalem, as was their custom, together with a great company. It was an informal sort of going, and I do not think there was anything out of the ordinary in the fact that on the return trip they did not miss Jesus until they had gone a day's journey. But suddenly they did miss Him. You can imagine the thoughts that must have passed through the mind of Mary. They traced their way back to Jerusalem and found Him in a most unusual place – in the temple, with the doctors of the Law, the scribes, and the Pharisees around Him, marveling at the questions He could ask and the answers He could give. But all this was not impressive to Mary. She barged right in, as a mother would.

***And when they saw him, they were astonished; and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? Behold, thy father and I have sought thee, sorrowing.*** (Luke 2:48)

“Son” is not the word used for “child” in verse forty, nor is it the word used in verse fifty-two. It is a term of endearment – her mother-word for Him. She called Him Son in a way that no one else could have called Him: “Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us?” Now note this: “Behold, thy father and I have sought thee, sorrowing.” *Father?* Yes. By virtue of the fact that he was the husband of Mary, he was Jesus’ father. Probably that little boy up to the time He was twelve years old called Joseph “father.” However, Jesus was no longer a child, He had reached adolescence.

***And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? Know ye not that I must be about my Father's business?*** (Luke 2:49)

In other words, Jesus said, “Mother, you should have known. It wasn’t necessary to look for me.” Up to twelve years of age, when Joseph said, “Go and get that two-by-four,” little Jesus ran and got the two-by-four. But He is twelve now; He has reached the age of adolescence, the age when He has a will and mind of His own. He says now, “I must be about my Father’s business.” Up to this point, He had been taught the Word of God, but I am not sure if He ever had been asked to make any kind of decision. But at twelve years of age He said in effect, “I am now ready to assume my responsibility. From now on I am about my Father’s business.” The will of Jesus is now bent to the will of God. What will He do?

When I was fourteen years old I used to set traps along the Pennington River in southern Oklahoma. It used to be a good place to trap. We would catch ‘possum and sometimes skunk, too. Each morning I used to run the traps. One Saturday morning, after I had made the rounds, I decided that since I was fourteen years of age and in business for myself (I had just sold some skins for \$1.30), there was no use of my getting home to eat breakfast with the family. When I

finally came home, my dad was waiting for me. He said, “Son, when breakfast is put on the table by your mother, you are to be here.” I said, “Yes, sir.” He was very emphatic and emphasized his words physically. He added, “When you get old enough to make your own living, and you don’t eat here at my table or sleep in my bed, then you will make your own decisions. Until then, you will do what I tell you to do.” He was a regular old meanie – wasn’t he? Yet I attribute the firmness of my father to be one of the factors that kept me out of jail.

Now we see Jesus at the time of adolescence. What will He do? Leave home? Go out on His own? Is He going to start running a gang? No. He will do His Father’s business, His Father’s will. What is His Father’s will? We read on:

***And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them.*** (Luke 2:51)

As long as He is a teenager, He is subject to His parents. Such is His Father’s will. Modern psychology has gotten us into terrible difficulty by running counter to this principle.

Then we come again to Dr. Luke’s notation in his physician’s chart that covered the period from the beginning of adolescence to manhood:

***And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.***  
(Luke 2:52)

He increased in wisdom, mentally – the one who is omniscient grew in wisdom! He increased in stature, physically, growing as any other boy grows. He increased in favor, in grace, with God and man. That is spiritual growth. In all three areas of His total personality as a human being He grew normally from the time He was twelve years old until He came to manhood. He grew mentally, physically, and spiritually during that period. My friend, a child who does not grow in all three areas will surely have trouble growing later on. Many letters come to my desk from folk newly saved. They ask questions that to you would sound stupid. But they are not stupid; they are baby questions that should have been answered in their teens. Someone failed to give them the Scriptures when they were young.

I wish we could visit that carpenter shop in Nazareth. I see a little boy around there helping His dad. I see Him at sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, then at some time during His young years Joseph probably died, and I see Jesus assuming the responsibility for which He had been prepared.

### **Public Comment**

Let us listen to public comment now. While this is not a man-on-the-street survey, we do have the public reaction to Jesus. The public always makes an estimation of a man. It may be faulty, but it is a general impression, usually determined by emotion rather than fact.

The opinion of Jesus is seen in the reaction of His hometown when He went into the synagogue of Nazareth.

***And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up to read. And***

*there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet, Isaiah. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears. And all bore him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, Is not this Joseph's son? (Luke 4:16-22)*

### ***Joseph's Boy***

His hometown was not large; everybody knew Him. As He grew up, they had recognized in Him only a normal boy – that is all. When He came to manhood and began His ministry, He came back to their synagogue and read to them the Scriptures. They were amazed and said, “Why, this is Joseph’s boy!” That is not all. He not only read to them that day but, oh, how He spoke to them. Resentment arose in their hearts.

*And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, and rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong. But he, passing through the midst of them, went his way. (Luke 4:28 -30)*

His hometown mobbed Him at the beginning of His ministry. If it had been possible, they would have killed Him. Why? Well, they said, “We know Him. This is Joseph’s boy, and listen to Him talk!”

At this time He was thirty years of age, and He was perfectly human.

### ***Only a Carpenter***

Will you notice that when our Lord gave those wonderful mystery parables recorded in Matthew, the reaction of the public was the same. “Is not this the carpenter’s son?” (Matthew 13:55). And when Mark was recording it, he got another remark, “Is not this the carpenter?” (Mark 6:3). When Jesus walked out at thirty years of age and began His ministry, the comment was not, “He is a theologian” or “He is a scribe” or “He is a great religious leader.” They said, “He is a carpenter!”

May I digress to say that labor has never been reached with the gospel since the industrial revolution. That is unfortunate, but it is true. In the early days when the gospel first started down the Roman road, slaves and poor folk were those who first came to Christ. Paul could say, “Not many wise...not many mighty, not many noble, are called; but God hath chosen the foolish...the weak...and base things” (1 Corinthians 1:26-28). As far as I can tell, no effort is being made today to reach labor. Christianity, unfortunately, has been labeled “capitalism’s religion.” I have read that Calvinism was responsible for our present system of capitalism in this country. I

think that is accurate and it is good, but I think it is unfortunate that labor has been bypassed. And it is a strange development, for Jesus was a carpenter for thirty years. He knew what hard work was.

The politician speaks of the calloused hands of toil. I am weary of politicians who are millionaires. He who has been born with a silver spoon in his mouth, whose soft hands never have been soiled by earning one day's living, does not know my problem. When a head of government talks of sacrifice, I wonder how many Dior gowns his wife will give up. I wonder if he knows what it is to live in southern Oklahoma and be poor, to come out in the summertime and look down a cotton row filled with crab grass, cockleburs, and Johnson grass in the corners. I wonder if he has hoed down the cotton rows when the afternoon sun seemed to stop for hours. I wonder if he has stood with a cotton sack in his hand instead of a hoe and looked down those same old cotton rows a few months later when they were white. It is cold after the first frost; those burs stick in a cold hand. I hate picking cotton worse than anything in the world, and I had to pick a lot of it. A wealthy politician could not possibly understand me, but Jesus knows how I feel. He worked, too. Those hands that were nailed to the cross were calloused. He was a working man.

Oh, to look in at Nazareth. You say He is a great teacher. Yes. But during those silent years He was a good carpenter, too. I rejoice in His manhood. He is my Lord and my God, but He was a man, a laboring man. We have looked now at a physician's chart, and we have heard the public's comment. Now let us look at the prophet's copy.

### **The Prophet's Copy**

The prophet is David, and his copy is Psalm 69. Some say that David is writing of his own experience in this psalm. He is, yet it is not only the experience of David, for he could never adumbrate all that is said here. This is a Messianic Psalm. In the New Testament it is quoted eleven times as referring to Christ. It is all about Him. In fact, this psalm is quoted more than any other, with the exception of Psalm 22, the great psalm of the crucifixion.

As I read Psalm 69, I have the feeling that it relives the earthly experience of the Lord Jesus. As He hung on the cross, His suffering intensified by the beating sun and the jeering and ridicule being flung in His face, His mind (perhaps in delirium) went back over His entire life.

#### ***Overwhelmed***

We begin with Him way up north at Nazareth. We hear the heart sob of a little boy, a teenager, a young man:

***Save me, O God; for the waters are come in unto my soul. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing; I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me. I am weary of my crying. My throat is dried; mine eyes fail while I wait for my God. (Psalm 69:1-3)***

#### ***Reproached***

If you will let those silent years speak to you, it will be a roar in your ears. Listen to Him:

***Because for thy sake I have borne reproach; shame hath covered my face.***  
(Psalm 69:7)

That is quoted as referring only to the Lord Jesus.

### ***Alienated***

***I am become a stranger unto my brethren, and an alien unto my mother's children.*** (Psalm 69:8)

Notice that it was not His father's but His mother's children. You see, Mary had other children. Perhaps one day her boys, Judas and Joses, said to her, "Mother, we heard somebody down the street talking, and they said that Jesus is not really our brother. They said that nobody knows who His father is...."

Someone has said that God made the country, man made the city, but the devil made the small town. I believe that. If you have lived in a small town, you know that a little town can be cruel. A lovely girl came to me who had been engaged to one of the finest boys in the town where I was pastor. She said, "Dr. McGee, his father and mother have broken off our engagement. What shall I do?" Do you know what was the matter? She did not know who her father was. I said to her, "I wish I had spoken to you before. A little town like this will not accept you. I advise you to go to a city and start all over again where you are not known." She did as I suggested and met a fine boy there whom she eventually married.

Nazareth was a little town that would not accept the Lord Jesus because it would not believe the fact that He was the Son of God.

### ***Ridiculed***

***I made sackcloth also my garment; and I became a proverb to them.*** (Psalm 69:11)

This one who was the stalwart carpenter of Nazareth made sackcloth His garment and was ridiculed to the point of becoming a proverb, a byword.

***They that sit in the gate speak against me, and I was the song of the drunkards.*** (Psalm 69:12)

Those who were sitting in the gate were the high officials of the town, the judges. Thus we see that the best people in Nazareth also spoke against Him.

Down on skid row they made up dirty little ditties and sang them about Him and His mother. I'm sure you can imagine what name they used for Him – it's still in the vocabulary of the present hour. *That* is what they called Him in Nazareth. My friend, this is the reason I cannot follow the crowd that denies the virgin birth, for to do so would be to join the Nazareth crowd in name-calling.



*But as for me, my prayer is unto thee, O LORD....Thou hast known my reproach, and my shame, and my dishonor; mine adversaries are all before thee. Reproach hath broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness; and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none. (Psalm 69:13, 19, 20)*

### **Crucified**

*They gave me also gall for my food, and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink....For they persecute him whom thou hast smitten, and they talk to the grief of those whom thou hast wounded. (Psalm 69:21, 26)*

### **On Our Behalf**

My friend, you have no notion what He endured for thirty years in order that you might have a clear title as a legitimate child of God. I want to be very careful at this point. None of that suffering paid for our sin. Even when He ascended the cross, during those first three hours, He was not paying for the sins of the world – He was suffering at the hands of men. It was not until God put the blanket of darkness down upon that cross for the last three hours that His soul was made an offering for sin. Those last three hours no man can penetrate.

But none of the ransomed ever knew  
How deep were the waters crossed;  
Nor how dark was the night  
That the Lord passed through  
Ere He found His sheep that was lost.<sup>1</sup>

During those last three hours, He suffered as no one has ever suffered. At that time He paid the penalty for your sin and mine. Yet for thirty years He suffered down here. You have not been through anything that He has not been through. He can sympathize with you in every trial, in every testing.

*Wherefore, in all things it behooved him to be made like his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to help them that are tempted. (Hebrews 2:17, 18)*

He not only perfectly understands you, but He loves you, and He stands ready to be your Savior. This one who is very God and very man was “despised and rejected of men” (Isaiah 53:3).

In those silent years, I see a young man growing normally in Nazareth; I hear the sound of a carpenter’s hammer; I hear the sob of His soul. He is my Savior. He is my God. Is He yours?

## Notes

1. Elizabeth C. Clephane, "The Ninety and Nine."