

## From Wonder to Wisdom – Luke 2:40-52

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Have you ever had a time in your life when you were filled with a sense of wonder and awe at something you had long waited for or dreamed of or worked towards and were now, at long last, finally experiencing? If you've put your finger on the kind of experience I'm talking about, you probably felt like a child in a wonderland: breathing in and noticing everything around you, touching and feeling and handling everything, and just allowing yourself to be swept up into the enjoyment and experience of it all. Your senses were on full alert. Believe it or not, I sometimes feel this way when I return home to Alaska. There are so many smells and sights and familiar things that bring back a flood of memories and experiences that for the first couple days I'm usually just trying to breathe it all in and notice everything and just enjoy the feeling of being in the one place on earth that feels most like home.

Recently I've been reading the book, *Undaunted Courage*, by Stephen Ambrose...a book that focuses on the Lewis and Clark adventure into the unknown American West, viewing it through the journals of Meriwether Lewis. In the book, after many, many years of planning and dreaming about undertaking this daunting, but thrilling journey into the unknown; and after more than a year of difficult traveling along the portions of the Ohio, Mississippi and Missouri Rivers that had already been traveled and explored by others; there came that moment when Lewis and his Corps of Discovery left the Mandan Indian villages in North Dakota and started down the upper Missouri River to where no white man had gone before. Listen for a moment to how Mr. Ambrose describes Lewis' experience at this moment:

“[Lewis’] journal entries were lyrical. On April 15, eight days out of Fort Mandan, the expedition passed the farthest point upstream on the Missouri known by Lewis to have been reached by white men...Lewis was now stepping into the unknown. For all he had heard from the Hidatsas about what lay ahead, for all that he knew the distance to his destination –

as the crow flies – he was as close to entering a completely unknown territory, nearly a half-continent wide, as any explorer ever was...”

“He was entering a heart of darkness. Deserts, mountains, great cataracts, warlike Indian tribes – he could not imagine them, because no American had ever seen them. But, far from causing apprehension or depression, the prospect brought out his fullest talents. He knew that from now on, until he reached the Pacific and returned, he would be making history. He was exactly what [Thomas] Jefferson wanted him to be, optimistic, prudent, alert to all that was new about him, and able to describe the flora and fauna, the native inhabitants, and the skies above with scientific measurements. His ambition was boundless. His determination was complete. He could not, would not, contemplate failure. Lewis had come to a point that he had longed for, worked for, dreamed of all of his life.”

“He was ready, intensely alive. Every nerve ending was sensitive to the slightest change, whether what the eye saw or the skin felt or the ears heard or the tongue tasted or the fingers touched. He had an endearing sense of wonder and awe at the marvels of nature that made him the nearly perfect man to be the first to describe the glories of the American West. He turned his face west. He would not turn it around until he reached the Pacific Ocean.”

Have you ever had this kind of experience in your life where you were filled with a similar sense of wonder and awe that caused you to notice everything and simply breathe in and absorb everything around you? Well today, as we return to our study of the Gospels, we’re going to view the only snapshot of Jesus’ life we’re given in Scripture between the ages of 2 and 30, and I’ll think you’ll agree that in this passage we see in Jesus that same sense of wonder and awe and alertness to everything around him that we’ve just been talking about. And there’s something profound we can all learn and apply to our lives about what we see in Jesus here. Turn with me in your Bibles, if you would, to Luke chapter 2, where we’ll be focusing today on verses 40 through 52. Today’s message is called, “From Wonder to Wisdom.”

## II. THE BOOKENDS OF JESUS' YOUNGER YEARS (vs. 40, 52)

But before we read the main section of this passage, I want to focus on the first and last verses, which give us what I would call the bookends of Jesus' younger years...the period of his life between ages 2 and 30. In verse 40 we read the one-sentence summary of Jesus' life between the time he returned from Egypt and began living with his family in Nazareth and where we pick up his life today at age 12. The one-sentence summary of those 10 or so years is found in verse 40 and says this:

***The Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.***

Then listen to the one-sentence summary of Jesus' life that covers the period from ages 12 to around 30 years old, found in verse 52. It says this:

***52 And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.***

Those two one-sentence summaries sound quite similar, don't they? Both of them contain three important facts about Jesus' life during those 28 years. First of all, they tell us that Jesus experienced the normal, healthy growth of real, human boy. He grew, became strong and got taller over the years. In other words, Jesus experienced the ordinary aches and pains of human growth. He was not born a super-hero. Rather he experienced ordinary life and growth like we all do and can thereby relate to all of our challenges and difficulties. He probably even had pimples!

Secondly, these 28 years of Jesus' young life were characterized by ever increasing wisdom. Notice that reference to increasing wisdom was stated twice. This tells us that Jesus had to learn and study like everyone else. He didn't come pre-programmed with the complete Bible already in his head, but had to learn it and study it and meditate on it and memorize it just like we do. Of course, he had the advantage of not having a sin nature like us, so he wouldn't have allowed anything to distract him or draw him away from that regular, prayerful study of Scripture. And very likely it took a lot more effort and planning for Jesus than it does for us, since he would have had to go to the local synagogue in Nazareth in

order to study and memorize Scripture. He couldn't do it from the comfort of his own home. After all, it would be more than 1,500 years before the printing press was invented and people would finally be able to have a copy of the Bible in their own homes. Yet nonetheless, this didn't stop Jesus from continually increasing in wisdom as he regularly studied Scripture and learned from the priests in the synagogue. We're going to learn shortly about the powerful method Jesus used that brought about such an astounding increase in wisdom that even at age 12 amazed the religious leaders.

And the third fact we learn about Jesus during his younger years is that the grace of God was upon him and ever increasing along with his wisdom. Now we often define that word, "grace," as "unmerited favor." But in the case of Jesus, this grace or favor was actually merited. Being sinless and living life in full pursuit and continual seeking of his Father God, Jesus experienced the fruit that results from living life this way; and that is, the amazing and empowering grace of God! The meaning of the word translated, "grace," in verse 40, is probably better described here as "the power of God." As God promises in 2 Corinthians 9:8 to do for ALL who earnestly seek him with a heart of humble trust and obedience, he was making all grace abound to Jesus, so that, having all sufficiency in everything, he would have an over-abundance of power to carry out every good work God called him to do! And this is certainly what we see in the life of Jesus that's recorded so beautifully for us in the Gospels.

And if you look at verse 52, the word translated, "favor," is actually the same Greek word translated, "grace," in verse 40. It's the Greek word, *charis*. In the context, it gives us the idea that God's favor was being expressed to Jesus in his great empowering of him and that this work of God within him was being noticed by the people around him; as Jesus is also described as increasing in favor with men. God's powerful work within Jesus as he lived in full pursuit and grew exponentially in godly wisdom was bringing favor from the people around him as they began to notice that there was something very different and special about this young man.

### **III. 17 DAYS IN THE LIFE OF JESUS AT 12 YEARS OLD (vs. 41-51)**

So now you have a good, concise picture of the overall character of Jesus' life between the ages of 2 and 30. But now, let's zoom in and get the one and only

clear moving picture of an actual event in the life of Jesus during these 28 years. And it all takes place in just 11 verses that cover about 17 days of Jesus' life at age 12. So pay close attention! Here we go, beginning in verse 41 of Luke chapter 2:

***41 Now His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. 42 And when He became twelve, they went up there according to the custom of the Feast; 43 and as they were returning, after spending the full number of days, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. But His parents were unaware of it, 44 but supposed Him to be in the caravan, and went a day's journey; and they began looking for Him among their relatives and acquaintances. 45 When they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem looking for Him. 46 Then, after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. 47 And all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers. 48 When they saw Him, they were astonished; and His mother said to Him, "Son, why have You treated us this way? Behold, Your father and I have been anxiously looking for You." 49 And He said to them, "Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's house?" 50 But they did not understand the statement which He had made to them. 51 And He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and He continued in subjection to them; and His mother treasured all these things in her heart.***

That's it folks! That's the only event you get to find out about for those 28 years' of Jesus' young life. But it definitely has some special significance and we can learn a lot about Jesus from it. It begins with a trip for Jesus with his parents from Nazareth to Jerusalem for the Passover Feast, a trip Jesus seems to have made every year since he moved to Nazareth. The trip would likely have taken about 3 days, considering the distance from Nazareth to Jerusalem and the traveling speed of typical caravan. And we see displayed here again the godliness of Joseph and Mary who were continuing to live in obedience to the terms of the Mosaic Covenant, which stipulated an annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Passover Feast.

In Deuteronomy 16, verses 1 through 8, Moses laid out the instructions and requirements for the Passover Feast which was to last for 7 days and be celebrated only in the place God would choose, which later was revealed to be in

Jerusalem. Moses gives us a good description of the Passover Feast in verses 5 through 8 of Deuteronomy 16. He says:

***5 "You are not allowed to sacrifice the Passover in any of your towns which the Lord your God is giving you; 6 but at the place where the Lord your God chooses to establish His name, you shall sacrifice the Passover in the evening at sunset, at the time that you came out of Egypt. 7 "You shall cook and eat it in the place which the Lord your God chooses. In the morning you are to return to your tents. 8 "Six days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a solemn assembly to the Lord your God; you shall do no work on it.***

The Passover was to be celebrated on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the Jewish month of Abib or Nissan, always a Friday. And it was to be followed by 6 days of eating unleavened bread, and then finished on the 7<sup>th</sup> day with a solemn assembly to God with no work allowed on that 7<sup>th</sup> day. So this is what Jesus and his parents had traveled to Jerusalem for when he was 12 years old and we're told that they stayed for the entire Feast. I wonder at what point in Jesus' life he realized that the Passover was pointing to what his Father was calling him to do on the cross? That must have been a startling revelation, whenever it occurred!

Well, all seemed to be well and proceeding according to plan at the end of the solemn assembly on the 7<sup>th</sup> day, and on the 8<sup>th</sup> day the caravan to Nazareth started the return trip as planned. It was quite common at this time for people to travel in caravans to offer protection from robbers and the historian Josephus even describes entire towns traveling together in caravans to attend the Jewish feasts (*IVP Bible Background Commentary*); which seems to be what's happening here. So Joseph, Mary and Jesus, I'm sure, were all well aware of the caravan's departure date and time for returning to Nazareth, and Joseph and Mary evidently assumed Jesus could be trusted to be there at the appointed time and stay with the group. But what they had failed to realize was the wonderland Jesus had entered at the temple in Jerusalem and the journey of discovery that was unfolding for him there and consuming his full attention at the young age of 12. It wasn't until the end of that first day of traveling with the caravan that Joseph and Mary began looking for Jesus and suddenly realized he wasn't with the caravan.

Probably every parent in this room has experienced or can imagine the panicked feeling that must have hit Joseph and Mary at that moment. How many parents here have experienced the panic of a missing child?! It's one of the worst feelings in the world. And for most of us it only lasted for a few minutes, but for Mary and Joseph they were heading into 3 long days of stress and anxiety, and I'm sure much self-condemnation for not making sure their Son was with the caravan. And imagine how magnified all this must have been, knowing how significant their Child, Jesus, was in God's plans, and how he had entrusted Jesus to their care. You can just imagine the intense conversations they were having with God and themselves during those 3 awful days of searching the city of Jerusalem. But fortunately God was still in control of the situation, as He always is!

Now we don't know the exact circumstances and thought processes that caused Jesus' to stay behind in Jerusalem, but considering what he's doing when his parents finally discover him in the temple, I picture him as completely lost in the wonder and awe of realizing he's in his own Father's house! I picture him fully consumed with the amazing opportunity of learning about his true Father from those in the temple who supposedly know his Father's Word better than anyone else. And perhaps in that state of wonder and awe and breathing in the overwhelming reality of what he was experiencing and learning, Jesus overlooked a few of the ordinary expectations and responsibilities of human life...like making his way to the caravan before it departed for Nazareth.

We would assume that by the evening at least, when the priests were retiring for the night, Jesus must have realized that he had long ago missed the caravan. Perhaps he realized it much sooner in the day, or maybe he intentionally stayed behind at the direction of his Father. But whatever the case, it certainly wouldn't have been safe or prudent for him to try and catch up with caravan after it had already left, traveling alone as a 12-year-old boy. And with no cell phones, of course, probably all he could do at that point was wait for his parents to return and find him. Jesus also seems to have believed that his parents were in tune enough with him to know that the first place to look for him would be in the temple, the place he had come to realize was his own Father's house...the closest thing to his true home on this earth! One thing we know for sure: Jesus did not intentionally dishonor or disobey his parents, and when they arrived he quickly gave up his temple wonderland and returned with them to Nazareth in complete obedience.

So after 3 days of anxious searching, Joseph and Mary finally decided to check the temple and as they arrived and found their Son, didn't they react to him the way we all would? "***Son, why have you treated us this way?***" That was actually pretty mild, I think. I probably would have said something like, "Don't you EVER do that to us again! Do you know what kind of misery you've put us through for the last 3 days and nights! I just lost 10 years of my life in only 3 days!" But isn't it interesting how Jesus responds to Mary? You can see that he's so lost in his wonderland of discovery that he's oblivious to the fact that his parents have been desperately searching for him and stressing out beyond imagination for 3 days. He's become so in tune with what God is teaching and showing him about who he is and his mission in life, that he just assumes his parents are on the same page and would have automatically known he was in his Father's house, the temple. But unfortunately, his parents weren't quite at the same point after 3 days of stress, and Jesus' statement about his Father's house went way over their head, though Mary did take note of it and it made sense to her later in Jesus' life.

Have you ever been so focused on full pursuit of God that a few ordinary realities and responsibilities temporarily went by the wayside? Jesus was a lot like another Mary here; the Mary from the Mary and Martha account; sitting with full attention at the feet of his Father God, absorbing and breathing in and noticing everything he could...and in the process neglecting a few of the ordinary expectations of life in order to do so. And in this picture we get of Jesus in the temple, we get a rather profound roadmap for increasing in godly wisdom like Jesus did.

Notice that as Joseph and Mary burst into the temple, they found Jesus calmly doing 3 things: ***sitting, listening and asking***. He was sitting in the middle of the rabbis, the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. In sitting, he had stopped and set aside his ordinary activities and responsibilities so that he could fully focus on learning about his Father God from the teachers. In listening, he was paying full attention, hearing and absorbing everything the teachers said. And in asking questions, he was fully engaging with what he learned, applying it to his life, examining the implications, and getting a full understanding that would stay with him and guide his choices and actions in the future. This was Jesus' path to increasing wisdom, and it's the same path we each need to take in our interactions with God and his Word.

#### **IV. APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION**

Are you regularly sitting with God and his Word, listening carefully as you pray and study it, and asking questions to determine what it really means and how it applies to your life? Sitting involves stopping for a time the regular things you're doing in order to fully focus on God and his Word. It's going to require you to say no to some other things you may want to do or think you need to do. You may even have to neglect or drop some of the assumed expectations and duties of life in order to have time for it. But beware: if you really sit down and fully engage on a regular basis with God and his Word, you're going to enter a wonderland that will transform the way you think and live and the choices you make. It will affect the way you spend your time. If you really listen to what God tells you in his Word and as you walk in relationship with him; if you ask questions and dig deeper and are willing to put into practice what he teaches you; then you're going to experience a great out-pouring of God's wisdom and power in your life!

Learn to approach God and his Word with that same sense of wonder and awe that characterized Meriwether Lewis as he stepped into the uncharted territory of the American West. Take your time; breath it in and out; observe every detail; handle it; touch it; listening carefully; write down what God teaches you. And as you regularly take the time to sit and learn and ask questions, you'll experiencing the joy of knowing God as he is, understanding the depth of his personal love for you, and receiving the wisdom and power of the One who created it all and knows exactly how it all works!

Jesus, in this brief snapshot of his 12-year-old wonderland in the temple, showed us a beautiful picture of how to do this. And in his life as a whole, he also showed us how to do this within the ordinary responsibilities and duties of human life and existence. Jesus, you may remember, didn't start his full-time traveling ministry until he was in his 30s. Though at 12 years old, he was coming to a profound realization in the temple of he was and his mission in life, he spent another 18 years as an ordinary young man carrying out the normal responsibilities of life and even working just a regular job as a carpenter. And yet, as Jesus lived in the ordinary circumstances and responsibilities and duties of human life, his true focus always stayed on full pursuit and seeking of His Father God and submission to his purposes.

And with this heart attitude and focus and willingness to sit, listen and ask questions and spend time alone with his Father, the Father filled Him with His grace and power and fully fulfilled his request for godly wisdom. And our Father will do the same for each of us as we learn to walk through life with that same focus and regularly take time to sit with, listen to, and ask questions of our God and his Word!