

"When God Gives You An 'A' And You Know You Deserve An 'F'"

Luke 2:39-52

4 December 2022

We're continuing our Advent series "3-D Jesus" where we are looking at the Incarnation of Jesus, what John means when he says that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." What was it like for Jesus to be a human being just like us? What was it like for Jesus to be a *teenager*? Have you ever thought about that? Jesus was a teenager. His body was changing. His voice squeaked. He went through puberty. Have you ever considered that Jesus went through that awkward phrase of life that we call puberty?

What was Jesus like during puberty? Well, as we saw last week, He didn't sin. Imagine that! A teenager who doesn't sin!? It's hard to wrap our minds around that idea, isn't it? I was a moody teenager! But, Jesus wasn't a moody teenager. Wow.

What we do know about Jesus as an awkward pre-teen/teenager is that the favor of God was upon His life. And, that's why He came: to share God's favor, God's welcome, God's hug, if you will, with people like us. People who are moody, whether we are a teenager or not. God welcomes moody sinners. Why? Precisely because His Son was not a moody sinner.

So, what does Jesus do with the favor of God that was on His life? He shares that favor with us. Because God's favor rested on Jesus, then-

GOD'S FAVOR, WELCOME, DELIGHT, ACCEPTANCE, SMILE, AND AFFECTION RESTS ON YOU. ENJOY IT, Y'ALL.

That's why Jesus came, as He Himself says in Luke 4, as he quotes the prophet Isaiah:

Luke 4:18-19

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Jesus came and lived a perfect life, and the favor of God was upon Him. He came to proclaim that God's favor was free to anyone who would believe in Him. So, the good news is that if you are trusting in Christ alone, then you live forever in the perpetual favor and unabated delight because of Jesus. Because Jesus wore diapers. Because Jesus went through puberty.

But, what was it like for Jesus to become a human being? What did that look like? Well, when you picture Jesus, don't picture Him as a toddler, sucking on a pacifier, and beating you at Bible trivia. And, don't picture Jesus completing all of the AWANA books by age 6. Instead, picture Jesus *growing in wisdom*. Picture Jesus learning truths from the Old Testament as He grew up. Don't picture Him earning a Ph.D in the Old Testament when he was 8. Picture the human nature of Jesus learning and growing, but picture also that same human nature united to His divine nature, which knows all things.

As Athanasius (296-373), one of the early church fathers in the 4th century, said, *"...on the one hand, with men and as man he does not know, but, on the other hand, divinely being in the Father as Word and wisdom he knows, and there is nothing which he does not know."* (Oratio III, 46, 8-10)

That's Biblical Christology. In the Incarnation, Jesus was limited in knowledge *in His human nature*, while being omniscient- knowing all things- *in His divine nature*. He knew everything, but didn't know everything! Let that picture hurt your brain and then cause you to worship! Jesus knew everything as God, but had to learn many, many things as a human!

So, as we look at God's word today, and as you think about that- *and perhaps get a migraine!*- I want you to also marvel at the humility of Jesus. Turn in your Bibles to Luke chapter 2. Let's marvel at the humility expressed by a teenage boy, whose body was going through puberty, and whose face was most likely covered with a few pimples.

You probably think that an awkward teenager going through puberty with acne couldn't cause you to worship. But, "youth group Jesus" as an awkward teen can cause you fall down in worship and adoration. So, let's look at God's Word so that you will be humbled anew, in order to worship the Son of God anew.

Luke tells us in his Gospel what happened after that first Christmas morning. What do you do after you give birth to the eternal Son of God? You go back home!

LOOK AT VERSE 39...

And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.

We're picking up Luke's narrative after the birth of Jesus and after his parents took Him to the temple to dedicate Him to the Lord. Joseph and Mary return to their hometown of Nazareth and then Luke tells us about the first 12 years of Jesus' life with these words:

And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.

That's all that Luke gives us concerning the first 12 years of Jesus' life. That's it! We don't know anything about Jesus getting fussy and wanting to nurse His mommy. We don't know anything about Jesus running around shirtless and in diapers with a pacifier hanging out the side of His mouth. We don't know if Jesus had a favorite book that He loved to have His parents read to Him, or a favorite toy that He played with, or if he had a "binky,"- His favorite little blanket that He liked to snuggle with. We simply don't know what He was like from birth to age 12. All that Luke tells us is that he grew, got stronger, was filled with wisdom, and God's favor was upon Him.

In fact, this section in Luke 2 is the only incident that we have of Jesus' childhood. But it's far from boring! The only story we have of Jesus from His childhood involves a giant church celebration that involved lots of food and music and it almost ended with His parents filing a missing person's report! The only incident we have of Jesus' childhood was the time He went missing and almost ended up having His picture put on a milk carton... all because He was playing Bible Trivia with some seminary professors!

Back to Luke chapter 2.

LOOK AT VERSE 41...

Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances, and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress." And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.

So, when Jesus is 12 years old, He travels with His family to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Passover. We don't have any details about where they stayed, what they did, etc. The only info that we get is what happened *after* the celebration. Jesus' family apparently traveled with many friends and family in one great horde. And after the celebration, Mary and Joseph just assume that Jesus is somewhere in the group, probably with his cousins- maybe even John the Baptist.

It's kind of like what happens when we have some function here at Grace. We're all in the gym and we're eating and talking, and those of us who have kids will just assume that our kids are safe because they are out on the playground with all the other kids.

That's what it was like with Joseph and Mary. They just assume that Jesus is with His cousins. But, they don't discover that Jesus is missing until they travel one day's journey away from Jerusalem. So, they head back to Jerusalem, and it takes them three more days to find Him. So, at this point Jesus has been missing for 5 days! One day's journey out. One day's journey back. And, then 3 days searching the streets, malls, and skate parks of Jerusalem.

This is a parent's worst nightmare, right?! Maybe Joseph and Mary went to the temple *to pray* and to ask the Lord to help them find their boy? Or, maybe they thought Jesus might be there? We don't know. But we do know that they found Him. And when they found Him, He was just having some theological Q & A with some of the leading seminary professors of the day. No big deal.

Okay.

LOOK AT VERSE 46 AGAIN...

After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.

If your kid goes missing, isn't this how you want to find him? Wouldn't you want to find them at church talking

theology with the pastors? Wouldn't you be proud to hear the pastors say, "I was just talking with your son. He knows a lot about the impassibility of God. And, he knows the difference between supralapsarianism and infralapsarianism!" (Go look those up. I dare you!)

But is that how Jesus' parents react? No.

LOOK AT VERSE 48...

And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress."

The reality is that Mary and Joseph reacted the way parents should act in this situation. They weren't impressed with Jesus' Bible knowledge at this point. Later, in verse 51, Mary treasured this moment in her heart. Later, Mary would recollect that Jesus, as a 12-year-old, was engaging in theological discussions with some of the top seminary professors of the day.

But at this point, Mary and Joseph just wanted to know that their little boy was okay! Luke tells us in verse 48 that they were astonished. But, I don't think Joseph and Mary were astonished at His knowledge and interaction with the teachers of the law. I think they were astonished that He was alive after 5 days! The teachers were amazed at His understanding and the kinds of questions Jesus asked. But, His parents were astonished that after going missing for 5 days, He was alive! In fact, they had been in "great distress" as Mary says in verse 48.

And how does the pimple-faced Son of God respond?

LOOK AT VERSE 49...

And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them.

Think about this: this is the very first recorded sentence we have of Jesus in the Bible! And, what Jesus says gives us a clue as to what dominated His heart at age 12: "I'm here to learn more from the Scriptures, so that I can be prepared to fulfill my Father's mission." Amazing. Remarkable.

Joseph and Mary did not grasp how remarkable Jesus' response was. But, Jesus did. It is clear then that the pre-teen, pimple-faced Jesus knew that His true Father was not Joseph, but His Heavenly Father. At this point in His life, Jesus knew that He was on a mission to do what His Father had sent Him to do. Here in the temple, what seems like a simple Bible trivia game, is actually a part of what is preparing Jesus to go to the cross to suffer and die. These conversations with the teachers of the law were a part of Jesus growing in wisdom and understanding. These conversations in the temple should astonish us, just like it did the teachers of the law.

Jesus was listening to them. He was absorbing their Bible knowledge. And, He was asking questions. He was learning. He was growing. He was understanding the Hebrew Scriptures and making connections as he sat and listened and took sermon notes.

And, the teachers of the law were amazed that this 12-year-old boy knew all that He knew. So, in order to be able to picture Jesus increasing in wisdom, we need to ask ourselves a question: What accounted for the remarkable questions and answers that Jesus came up with in the temple? How did He have so much wisdom and insight at age 12?

The typical evangelical response would probably be that it was because Jesus was God that He knew all the answers. We may be tempted to say that the "God part" of Jesus, His divine nature, supplied His human nature with the answers. We may be tempted to think that His divine nature enabled His human nature to dominate Bible trivia. But, is that what Luke wants us to believe? I don't think so.

Scripture often puts the emphasis on the humanity of Jesus in His day-to-day activities. I think Luke wants us to see that Jesus grew *as a human being*. I think Luke wants us to see that Jesus, like all human beings, grows and increases in knowledge and wisdom as time goes by. That's why Luke gives us the 2 bookends of this temple story-

VERSE 40: *And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.*

VERSE 52: *And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.*

Verses 40 and 52 speak of Jesus becoming strong and increasing in stature. Luke is not saying that the divine nature of Jesus grew. Luke is saying that Jesus was growing up in His body and His mind. Luke is saying that Jesus was a growing boy! That means Jesus ate like a normal teenager! That means that Jesus would eat pizza for dinner and then 2 hours later He would be hungry again and eat a whole bag of chips and then 2 hours later he would eat a bowl of cereal before bed! (I have no experience in this area!)

This means that perhaps Jesus started growing armpit hair, and maybe His voice was starting to change, and maybe He had a peach-fuzz mustache coming in. And, maybe He had a pimple sticking out between some of that peach-fuzz mustache.

Luke's point is that Jesus was growing and maturing and increasing in knowledge as He was growing stronger physically, as a young boy. Luke is not saying that Jesus was increasing and growing in His divine nature. Jesus was fully God. His knowledge as God was complete and He lacked nothing. He was the omniscient God-man, who knew all things, and yet was growing in knowledge as a young boy, as a human.

Understand this: Jesus' divine nature as God did not enable Him to know everything in His human nature. It wasn't like you could shake Jesus and His divine nature would spill over into His human nature. No. Both of His natures are *united*. As a 12-year-old boy, Jesus was omniscient and knew all things, and yet, at the same time, He was growing and increasing in wisdom.

Jesus had to learn biblical truths as He grew up. His divine nature as God did not supply Him with knowledge or make up for His lack of wisdom. He had to learn and grow. And, I think, in the temple that day, Jesus wasn't debating or trying to "school" the teachers. He wasn't trying to beat them at Bible Trivia. He was learning and growing. And the teachers were impressed with his questions and answers.

And one reason Jesus did grow was because He had God's favor. Luke tells us in verses 40 and 52 that *"the favor of God was upon him"* and He *"increased... in favor with God and man."* God was pleased with His pre-teen Son! Therefore, the picture we have of 12-year-old Jesus in the temple, talking with the teachers of the law, is one of a boy filled with the wisdom provided by the Holy Spirit, wisdom that came through years of catechism, reading, Scripture memory, and meditation upon the Word of God.

It was as His parents catechized Him, and talked about God's Word, and as He read and studied and memorized and mediated upon God's word that Jesus grew in wisdom. And because the Spirit was at work in Jesus' heart and mind, illumining the Scriptures, then it stands to reason that at some point in time it dawned on Jesus that the Old Testament spoke of Him.

Let this blow your mind: There must have been a day, a specific time when the Holy Spirit illumined Jesus' mind and He understood that He was the Messiah. Think about that.

At some point as Jesus is reading Isaiah 53, which speaks of the suffering servant, it dawns on Jesus, in His human nature, as the Spirit illumines His mind, that He is the one Isaiah is talking about. As He reads Psalm 22, at some point, Jesus understands that the person in Psalm 22 is speaking about His suffering on the cross.

Maybe the real question is not *"Mary did you know?"* but *"Jesus did you know...that you would walk on water?"* And, to that Jesus would reply, *"As God I knew, but as a human being, I had to learn that truth."* If 12-year-old Jesus knew He could walk on water, you know He would have done that at Hume Lake! Jesus had to learn things. Jesus grew in His understanding of His mission, and at least by age 12, He appears to know much of it. Or, at least He knew that He should be in the temple learning from those seminary professors.

So, as Jesus grew up, the Spirit illumined His mind and He began to understand from the Old Testament Scriptures that He would be rejected, and suffer unimaginable pain and agony through crucifixion as He bore the weight of the sins of the world. Imagine Jesus coming to grips with this!

How amazing! Jesus was just like us! In His humanity, He had to learn and grow. He had to rely on the Spirit to illumine His mind. As He heard the Old Testament preached in the synagogue, the Holy Spirit gave Jesus insight and understanding into the meaning of those texts. Perhaps this is why Jesus didn't start His public ministry until He was 30 years old? He spends 30 years studying the Scriptures and coming to grips with what He must do. As Bruce Ware says-

"For three decades the Spirit worked within Jesus, instructing him and bringing him yet greater and greater insight, until finally the day came when he was ready to face the Devil, the Pharisees, the demons, and his disciples, all with the Word of God deeply enmeshed in his soul." (The Man Christ Jesus, p. 54)

And, because Jesus had the Word of God deeply enmeshed in His soul, He knew that His mission was to come and proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. That means that Jesus came to proclaim to you that-

GOD'S FAVOR, WELCOME, DELIGHT, ACCEPTANCE, SMILE, AND AFFECTION RESTS ON YOU. ENJOY IT, Y'ALL.

If you trust in Jesus, this can be true of you. You will live forever in the perpetual favor and unabated delight of God! Scotty Smith says, *"The gospel puts an end to the spiritual equivalent of the daisy game: 'He loves me, He loves me not.' We live in the perpetual favor of God."* God doesn't love you to the degree that you are *like Christ*,

but to the degree that you are *in Christ*. Jesus came because we *are not like* Him! He came to give us God's favor.

And, that means that God's feelings and affections for you, Christian, are unchanging! If you are in Christ, God's favor rests upon you fully and permanently, and there's absolutely nothing you can do about it! All because Jesus obeyed. All because Jesus obeyed His parents when they found Him at the temple. So, what happened after Mary and Joseph find Jesus in the temple?

LOOK AT VERSE 51...

And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart.

Mary and Joseph understood their role as parents in leading Jesus, raising Him, teaching Him, disciplining Him. There was no, "*Well what do you want to do, Jesus? You're the Messiah, do you want to stay here and live in the temple?*" No. They said, "*Get in the car, son. We're going home to Nazareth. You have chores to do.*"

And, Jesus did! He obeyed His parents without any grief! Marvel at the humility of Jesus as He submits to His parents! At this point in His life, Jesus knows who His real Father is! He knew His identity as the Son of God and yet He would choose to put Himself under their authority! Technically speaking, He created His mom and dad! He made them! He was their creator! And yet He humbles Himself and submits to their authority.

Why? Because He loved God's Word, the Old Testament. He knew that God's Word called for children to obey their parents and honor their mothers and fathers.

A quick word to the kids/teens: Look to Jesus! See what humility He shows when He submits to and honors His mom and dad. Kids, you need to underline and highlight and put Luke 2:51 on your bathroom mirror or as the wallpaper and lock screen on your iPhones! See Jesus honoring His mom and dad! Oh, that I would have done this as a kid!

The humility that Jesus shows us is remarkable. The eternal Son of God submits to His mom and dad. And, that's why the favor of God was upon Him. And, in the Gospel, God's favor rests on us. In the Incarnation, Jesus comes to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor to people like us. Jerry Bridges said,

Living by grace instead of by works means you are free from the performance treadmill. It means God has already given you an "A" when you deserved an "F". He has already given you a full day's pay even though you may have worked only one hour. It means you don't have to perform certain spiritual disciplines to earn God's approval. Jesus Christ has already done that for you. You are loved and accepted by God through the merit of Jesus, and you are blessed by God through the merit of Jesus. Nothing you ever do will cause Him to love you any more or any less. He loves you strictly by His grace given to you through Jesus. (Transforming Grace: Living Confidently In God's Unfailing Love, p. 73)

So, here's the Gospel: For those of us who are trusting in Christ, God has already given all of us an "A" when we all clearly deserve an "F." On that Day, when we stand before Jesus, we'll get our report cards and we will all see that we all got straight "A's." And we'll know why. Not because of us. It's all due to grace. It's all because Jesus 1) always obeyed and 2) never sinned and He credits that to us. We will know that we failed. We will be fully aware for all eternity that we only got straight "A's" because of grace. And we'll just be amazed and awestruck. It will seem too good to be true, but it will be true!

Christmas is about grace. It's about getting the best gift that we don't deserve, namely, God's favor. Christmas is all about Jesus proclaiming this to you in the Incarnation-

GOD'S FAVOR, WELCOME, DELIGHT, ACCEPTANCE, SMILE, AND AFFECTION RESTS ON YOU. ENJOY IT, Y'ALL.

And that's what the Lord's Supper is all about.

"When God Gives You An 'A' And You Know You Deserve An 'F'"
Luke 2:39-52
Sermon Study Questions

1. READ Luke 4:18-19. Why did Jesus come? Do you picture Jesus coming to declare and give God's favor to sinners, or, do you picture Him angry all the time?

2. READ Luke 2:40 and discuss what Athanasius (296-373), one of the early church fathers in the 4th century, said,

"...on the one hand, with men and as man he does not know, but, on the other hand, divinely being in the Father as Word and wisdom he knows, and there is nothing which he does not know." (Oratio III, 46, 8-10)

Do you picture Jesus having to learn things in His humanity? What did He need to learn?

3. Discuss what Bruce Ware said:

"For three decades the Spirit worked within Jesus, instructing him and bringing him yet greater and greater insight, until finally the day came when he was ready to face the Devil, the Pharisees, the demons, and his disciples, all with the Word of God deeply enmeshed in his soul." (The Man Christ Jesus, p. 54)

4. Discuss this thought from the sermon:

Let this blow your mind: There must have been a day, a specific time when the Holy Spirit illumined Jesus' mind and He understood that He was the Messiah. Think about that. At some point as Jesus is reading Isaiah 53, which speaks of the suffering servant, it dawns on Jesus, in His human nature, as the Spirit illumines His mind, that He is the one Isaiah is talking about. As He reads Psalm 22, at some point, Jesus understands that the person in Psalm 22 is speaking about His suffering on the cross. So, as Jesus grew up, the Spirit illumined His mind and He began to understand from the Old Testament Scriptures that He would be rejected, and suffer unimaginable pain and agony through crucifixion as He bore the weight of the sins of the world. Imagine Jesus coming to grips with this!

5. Discuss what Scotty Smith said: *"The gospel puts an end to the spiritual equivalent of the daisy game: 'He loves me, He loves me not.' We live in the perpetual favor of God."*

6. Discuss what Jerry Bridges said:

Living by grace instead of by works means you are free from the performance treadmill. It means God has already given you an "A" when you deserved an "F". He has already given you a full day's pay even though you may have worked only one hour. It means you don't have to perform certain spiritual disciplines to earn God's approval. Jesus Christ has already done that for you. You are loved and accepted by God through the merit of Jesus, and you are blessed by God through the merit of Jesus. Nothing you ever do will cause Him to love you any more or any less. He loves you strictly by His grace given to you through Jesus. (Transforming Grace: Living Confidently In God's Unfailing Love, p. 73)