

IN FAVOR WITH GOD AND MAN

Luke 2:41-52

Key verse 2:52, “And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.”

Today, my message title is “In favor with God and man.” What does “favor” mean? According to Webster’s dictionary, “favor” means “friendly regard shown toward another, especially by a superior, or the state of being approved of.” The meaning of “favor” is somewhat different in the angel’s message to Mary, “Greetings, you who are highly favored!” (Lk 1:28).

How do you think we get approval from God in our lives? How about approval from man? Today’s key verse 52 says, “And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.” The writer of Luke’s gospel tells us that Jesus grew in favor with God and man at the same time.

Many parents wonder how to raise their children in this confused generation. It is because they love their children dearly and want to raise them as godly people. Let’s learn the principle of being in favor with God and man through the preteen boy Jesus.

I. Godly parents, godly family (41-42)

Look at verse 41. “Every year Jesus’ parents went to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover.” God commanded the Israelites that every male must appear before the Lord for three major festivals: the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the Festival of Weeks, and the Festival of Tabernacles (Dt 16:16). The Passover had historical significance for the people of Israel, and it continued for seven days. The people of Israel remembered God’s great grace of deliverance from Pharaoh after 430 years of slavery in Egypt.

Look at verse 42. “When he was twelve years old, they went up to the festival, according to the custom.” In Jewish society, a 12 year old girl and a 13 year old boy were considered to be adults. At thirteen years old a boy was obligated to do adult duties such as fasting and attending public worship. In this passage, Jesus was 12 years old, close to the age to participate in the festivals and ceremonies.

As we have seen, Jesus’ parents were faithful in observing God’s commands in keeping Jewish customs. They were too poor to offer a lamb for Mary’s purification rite. However, it was not a matter of money but a matter of heart. Jesus observed how his parents

obeyed God's commands and he learned God's commands from them. Jesus grew under the influence of godly parent.

As you know, children learn many things by imitating their parents at home, particularly spiritual things. So, the responsibility of parents is to let their children grow under their godly influence by their practical lives of faith. Then, how did Jesus' parents learn about God's commands?

In Genesis 18:19, the Lord said to Abraham: "For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him." Abraham's practical mission was to direct his children to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just. In this way, he could receive God's blessings promised to him (Gen 12:1-3).

How did Abraham teach his children? There was no school. Abraham taught them at home by himself. This was the origin of family worship in the Bible. The devout and godly Jewish parents had been keeping this command of God for more than 42 generations continuously, not by just teaching by their words, but by teaching as role models. Jesus' parents were such good role models.

Nowadays many parents, grandparents, and even future parents are worrying about parenting their children. Of course, the situation of the world will get worse, not better. However, God is Almighty! He is more powerful than the bad influences of the world. As long as we keep God's command to teach our children through family worship in our home like Abraham, God's blessing will be fulfilled in our homes as he promised.

Missionary Caleb and Grace Choi are members of Lincoln Park UBF about 1 hour round trip from our Chicago UBF Center. Because their chapter has no children's ministry, they gave rides to their two sons, Jonathan and Andrew, for the last 14 years to our church twice every Saturday for their spiritual education.

We visited one family chapter at Glendale, California where Missionary Abraham and Hannah Kim live with their son Paul, who is a high school freshman. When Paul entered high school, he asked his parents for a smartphone, like all his classmates have. They promised that when he goes to college, they will buy the best smartphone for him. But he kept demanding a smartphone, since his parents each had one. So they decided to replace their smartphones with flip phones for the sake of their only son. Since then, he didn't ask for a phone any more.

This passage inspires and challenges us that our children must grow up under godly parents and through a godly family.

II. The burning desire of boy Jesus (43-50)

Look at verse 43, “After the festival was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it.”

In our own neighborhood, on Saturday afternoon, when you pass through the Jewish area near Pratt and California in west Rogers Park, you can see many orthodox Jewish women walking with their smaller children to the synagogues, and Jewish men following with the bigger boys. Probably, on their way home from Jerusalem, Mary thought that Jesus was with Joseph, and Joseph thought that Jesus was with Mary.

At the end of a day’s journey, Joseph and Mary noticed he was missing from their company. So they began looking for Jesus among their relatives and friends. They realized that Jesus was lost. Oh my, they lost Jesus, the Son of God! They began to worry greatly as if their hearts were failing.

If you are a parent, has your child ever gone missing in your life? I had the same kind feeling of Jesus’ parents. Around 15 years ago, we had an International Summer Bible Conference in Indiana. We accommodated 185 middle school children. They were 11 to 13 year old boys and girls from all over the world.

On the second night of the conference, we found that two boys were missing, one from Canada and one from Mexico. It was a dark night, and an unfamiliar campus with many big buildings. Due to my sense of responsibility, my heart was broken with deep sighs, and I had only one wish, to find them safely. After 6 hours of searching, at 3 am the police found them in one empty dorm room sleeping. Although I was relieved, I never forgot that incident.

Early the next morning, Joseph and Mary had to go back to Jerusalem, a day’s journey on foot, to look for Jesus. When they arrived, it was already night. The next morning they went around Jerusalem to look for him. Probably they didn’t go to the temple first, but to fun places where children liked to go—such as the market places, theaters, sporting places, and so on.

Look at verses 46-47, “After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers.”

When Joseph and Mary found the boy Jesus, they were overjoyed. Their three days of worry and anxiety was instantly relieved. But, look at what boy Jesus was doing in the temple! Jesus was sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them

questions. He was not just a student but was also discussing with the teachers, with amazing answers and understanding.

We can learn two things here:

Firstly, the boy Jesus had a burning desire to know the truth. He had to sit more than three days without even asking his parents for permission to leave or do something else.

Our children's messengers notice that children can easily lose attention and make noise after listening to a message for 5 minutes. So, the messenger must adjust their message to their level. Otherwise, the children couldn't concentrate on God's word. Here we see that the boy Jesus had exceptional desire to know God's word.

Actually Jesus didn't even seem to know when his parents left, because he was so immersed in listening to the teachers with great desire to learn, asking questions endlessly. Maybe he had accumulated many questions from family worship and Bible study with his parents before coming to the temple. Maybe he asked his parents so many questions that they said, "Son, some day you can ask the teachers of the law. Just be patient." When the time came, he didn't want to lose the chance to get all his questions answered.

Like the boy Jesus, children have an inborn desire to know God in their hearts. They are most energetic and capable of doing many things. For example, whenever we saw their world mission presentations at CBF Summer Bible Conference every year, we were amazed at their creativeness and their energy to contact front line missionaries by email to find out God's work, and information in their mission fields. Most of all, children are humble; they have tremendous learning minds.

Once John Kevin Lee in Springfield was in CBF as a child. He told his parents that even if his parents left UBF, he would remain in CBF for Bible study and grow in faith. Now we can see how God blessed his desire to grow as a good shepherd and he now serves many young college students in Springfield. He has 3 full time jobs as a father of six children, a medical doctor, and a fruitful campus Bible teacher.

It is good to see young children have a sense of mission and desire to serve God's will from a young age. Therefore, we parents should help our children to develop a holy desire to study God's word and live up to their calling with our sincere prayers.

Secondly, we learn the importance of the interaction between the younger and older generation. The scene of 12 year old Jesus sitting with the prestigious teachers of the law studying the Bible with them was marvelous. It was marvelous in that male dominant society that usually kept seniority. Also we know the teachers of the law would not be so

humble to learn anything from Jesus in just 20 more years. How did this interaction between them happen?

We see that it came from Jesus' burning desire to know the truth and the teachers' encouragement to engage Jesus' questions and answers humbly. The teachers did not ignore the boy Jesus. Rather, they accepted him as he was, and even applauded when they heard Jesus' excellent questions and answers. In short, this interaction was possible because the next generation's burning desire for truth and the older generation's acceptance of his questions.

We can learn something valuable for our own church here. Many churches including ours are struggling to connect with the next generation. We are dealing with the immense technological, spiritual, and social changes that define our time. How can we prepare the next generation to live meaningfully and to follow Jesus wholeheartedly in these changing times?

Today's passage shows a clear picture that the intergenerational relationship must be restored between the young and old as before. The older generation can listen to and mentor the younger generation, encouraging their questions and even their answers. Such an intergenerational interaction begins from family worship at home between parents and their children.

Let's return to the story. When Joseph and Mary Jesus saw at the temple, they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you."

What did Jesus say? Verse 49 says, "'Why were you searching for me?' he asked. 'Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?'"

Probably Mary expected some kind of apology from her son for being missing for three days. Rather his question implies that Jesus expected they should know where he was, and what he was doing. It was because he had been engaged intensively for 3 days in Bible study. He forgot all about leaving. I wonder who gave him a place to stay and food to eat. Luke doesn't tell us about that. Jesus said, "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" Boy Jesus at age 12 was finding out who he was, that is, his clear identity, as the Son of God. Jesus was finding out what he must do for his life mission: teach the word of God.

One's clear identity in God and one's holy mission are closely related. If you have been called to be a missionary, or a shepherd, your mission is very clear as a Bible teacher, disciple-maker and prayer servant in this generation. Likewise, the Son of God, Jesus had two fathers; one was his earthly father, Joseph, a carpenter. The other was his

heavenly Father God. As the Son of God, Jesus had to be in God's house, and engaged in God's business. Although Jesus was only 12 years old, already he knew about his holy mission as the Son of God.

When Dr. Albert Schweitzer was just 8 years old, he prayed, "Lord, bless me to study well so that I may serve you for the rest of my life after study." He prayed like this, because his inner person compelled him to do so. After studying humanity, theology, music and medicine, he went to Africa for God's work until he died.

III. Jesus grew in wisdom and stature (51-52)

Now look at verse 51. "Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart."

It was remarkable that the boy Jesus was obedient after his unusual experience in the Jerusalem temple. The boy Jesus came back to Nazareth and he was obedient to his parents. Jesus was a good example to show how a child's attitude should be toward his parents. Those who are obedient to their parents can obey God too. Mary treasured all these things in her heart, even though she couldn't fully understand believing these things until later.

Look at verse 52, our key verse. "And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man." Here, the author Luke tells us that the boy Jesus was fully human, just like us. In reality, Jesus had to have a vertical relationship with his Father God, and also a horizontal relationship with man.

In this sense, in order to have favor with God and man, the boy Jesus needed to grow. The key word is "grow." There are many subjects to grow in such as language, literature, philosophy, history, politics, and so on. But the Bible highlights that Jesus grew in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.

What is wisdom? Wisdom is the spiritual, mental, and emotional ability to relate rightly to God, and to others. We become wise as we seek God in the Scriptures. Proverbs 9:10 says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."

Then, what is stature? Simply speaking, it is human height. In other words, it is our physical body. Of course, little children must grow in stature to become adults. People have a mind, heart, strength, and soul (Dt 6:5). These make up a person's whole being. Needless to say, man's body is a kind of container of these. So this container must be grow to full capacity.

As we all know, true humanity comes from our mind and heart. In order to understand people, everyone needs true humanity and knowledge. The boy Jesus as fully man, had to grow in his humanity to be the Savior of the world. He had to understand sinful, helpless, hopeless mankind fully, so that he may have compassion toward them, share their agony of life together, teaching them the hope of God, the gospel. That's why the boy Jesus needed to grow in wisdom and stature.

Steve Stasinos really wanted to go to Russia as a missionary right after graduating from UIC. But Dr. Samuel Lee advised him to get a job first. I remember in his testimony, that Steve wrote why he needed to work to learn true humanity before being a servant of God.

When Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan, a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (Mt 3:17). Thus, God approved Jesus' inauguration as the Savior of the world.

As a one and only son, my stature was big by Korean standards. But my mind and heart were so small that I couldn't understand those who were in agonies of life, and I didn't know how to help them.

On the other hand, several of our CBF teachers embraced little children who had problems. I was so proud of their deep ocean-like big hearts, as mother-like shepherds. It is because true humanity was imbedded in their deep heart and mind.

In conclusion, the boy Jesus in the temple is the Son of God Almighty. Also he was fully human like us. However he went through all the learning process so that he might grow as the Savior of the world whom God anointed. We are praying for raising 120 disciples of Jesus among college students, as well as all of our children. For this, we must be disciples of Jesus first and grow in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man. In this way, we may raise our Bible students and our children as disciples of Jesus in this generation. Amen.