

The Day the Student Stumped the Profs

Luke 2:41-52

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Have you ever known a genius? Someone who was so far ahead of their peers, that it's obvious that you are dealing with a special individual. Often their intellectual prowess is evident from an early age. Not long ago I watched a television documentary on child prodigies. One boy they profiled began speaking in sentences at six months! His parents bought him a computer at two. He finished college early and was hired by a consulting firm at age sixteen. His mommy had to drive him to work.

In this short study from Luke's gospel we are going to read about another child prodigy. His name is Jesus.

The gospel of Luke is the most comprehensive record available of Jesus' life, but as we will see, even Luke leaves gaps in the historical record. Just prior to the event we are about to study Jesus was dedicated to God in the temple. He was about forty days old. While there, a godly man named Simeon, proclaimed under the inspiration of God that this child Jesus was the long awaited Messiah. He was the one who would bring salvation to the nations.

But Simeon's words took on a more somber tone as he went on to prophesy that Jesus would be a divisive figure in Israel, causing the rising and falling of many. Then on a more personal note, Simeon turned and looked straight into Mary's eyes and said, "A sword will pierce even your own soul." In other words, "Mary, your wonder son will bring pain, sorrow and consternation into your life. It's not going to be easy being the mother of the Lord's Christ. You need to understand that." We are told that Mary heard Simeon's words, and pondered their meaning in her heart.

At this point there is a gap in the historical record. When Jesus reappears twelve years have passed. What happened in those intervening years? Luke does not tell us, except in summary fashion.

³⁹ When they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city of Nazareth.

⁴⁰ The Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.

All we know about Jesus' childhood between infancy and his twelfth birthday is that he continued to grow strong and wise, and that the grace of God was upon him. Apparently that is all God thinks we need to know!

Now there are some apocryphal writings dating back to the second and third centuries which seek to fill in the gaps for us. For example, the Infancy Gospel of Thomas, among others, record stories purportedly from Jesus' childhood. I must admit that these stories

are quite entertaining—I read some of them this week. In one story, when Jesus was five, he is said to have fashioned twelve sparrows out of clay on the Sabbath.

A Jewish man saw this and reported it to Joseph, Jesus father. Joseph confronts Jesus saying, “Why do you do on the Sabbath things which are unlawful to do?” In response Jesus claps his hands and cries out to the sparrows, ‘Be gone.’ And the sparrows took flight and went away chirping.

According to these apocryphal writings Jesus performed many other miracles in his childhood. What are we to think? First of all, we know that the early church rejected these stories as being unauthentic and non-historical. But we know that they are unauthentic based on a higher authority—the authority of the Scriptures.

We know that Jesus did not perform miracles as a boy because the Gospel of John tells us that the turning of water into wine at the wedding of Cana in Galilee was the first miracle Jesus performed. Jesus would have been about thirty years old at the time.

This morning we are going to be studying the only incident in Jesus’ boyhood recorded in the Bible. It is found in Luke 2:41-52. Let’s look at the text and make some observations.

Luke 2:41-52

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.

The Old Testament commanded Jewish men to come to Jerusalem for three religious festivals: Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles. The text tells us that every year both Joseph and Mary went to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover (v. 41).

In other words, they faithfully carried out their religious obligations. Furthermore, this speaks highly of Mary’s spiritual piety, as only males were required by law to make the trip. Mary went *every year* with Joseph. This wasn’t a family where the husband had to drag his wife to church or the wife her husband. They worshipped together. God was at the center of their marriage and their family.

By the way, if this isn't your experience, if your spouse or those you are closest to aren't where you are spiritually, don't nag them about it. That doesn't help. Pray for them. Live out your faith before them. If you have children, bring them to church. Seek to engage those who are spiritually resistant in spiritual dialog from time to time, as long as it is a dialog and not a monologue. Trust God to deal with them in his way and in his time.

Well this particular year Mary and Joseph are again traveling to Jerusalem for Passover and Jesus is traveling with them. He is twelve and according to Jewish tradition is on the verge of becoming a man, for you see, at age thirteen Jewish boys become responsible before God for their actions. At age twelve, Jesus would have been undergoing intensive instruction toward this goal. By the way the custom of Bar Mitzvah, common today for Jewish boys, began at a time after that of Jesus.

Luke tells us that Jesus and his parents stayed the full number of days. This would have been eight days. Actually there are two feasts involved here: the Feast of Passover which lasted one day, and the Feast of Unleavened Bread which lasted seven days. They ran consecutively.

Now, according to the historian Josephus, many families would blow in for Passover and then immediately head back home, not staying for the Feast of Unleavened bread since it was not strictly required. But not Jesus' family. They weren't interested in getting their ticket punched and then getting back home. They had come to worship, not to check off a religious obligation, like we are sometimes tempted to do. You know,

Went to church.

Wrote a check to Church.

Did my turn teaching Sunday School.

Well, the festival ended and everyone packed up to go home. They got about a day into their journey and Jesus turns up missing. It is kind of like the movie, Home Alone. Only Jesus is left alone, not at home, but in a strange city. How could this happen?

Well you need to realize that whole villages would often caravan together to these festivals. Not only did it make the trip more enjoyable, but it was also a deterrent to the robbers who were known to inhabit the major roadways in Palestine.

Mary probably thought Jesus was with Joseph; Joseph thought he was with Mary. Some of you have done it. Every once and a while a child gets left here at church. Parents you know who you are! Anyway, when Mary and Joseph stopped to camp for the evening, Jesus was nowhere to be found.

Like any parents, Mary and Joseph became anxious. I'm sure they didn't sleep a wink that night. Bright and early the next morning they arose to travel back to Jerusalem in search of their son. They probably arrived in Jerusalem late that day, too late to search. So Mary and Joseph spend another restless evening worrying about their son. The next day they finally locate Jesus. Guess where they found him? The temple. Let's read about it beginning in verse 46.

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.

Jesus is twelve years old. Here he is in the temple, sitting in the midst of the greatest Biblical scholars of his day, listening to them and asking them questions. The text says, "All who heard him were amazed at his *understanding* and his *answers*." Not impressed, amazed. He is a child prodigy. When I was 12 my teachers were neither amazed nor impressed. They were probably depressed.

The text says that Jesus' teachers were amazed *at his understanding and his answers*. The word "understanding" comes from the Greek word *συνεσι*. It speaks of "understanding that is able to penetrate to the very heart of an issue." *The word insight* might be a better translation here. It reminds me of a passage in Hebrews chapter 4.

¹² For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

¹³ And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. - Hebrews 4:12-13

The Apostle John, in the prologue to his gospel tells us that in Jesus, the word of God became flesh and dwelt among us.

These professors were amazed by the *insight and answers* of this twelve year old prodigy. I bet they were! I wish I could have been there to listen in to that conversation. Don't you?

Well, while all this is transpiring, Jesus' parents walk into the temple and witness what is going on. They probably stood there and watched for a few minutes, transfixed by what they see. Finally, they get Jesus' attention. Look at verse 48.

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."

Flash back...Remember Simeon's words to Mary? He said, "A sword will pierce even your own soul..." His words are proving prophetic. How do you think Mary felt upon finding Jesus? Have you ever lost one of your kids in a department store, or at the fair? You get this panicky feeling here in your stomach, and they have only been missing... maybe three minutes. Mary had not seen Jesus in three days! When you found your child, how did you feel? Relieved? What else? Maybe even angry...?

"Where have you been? I told you to stay put. I have been worried sick about you."

You don't know whether to hug them or spank them. Probably both. Hug, spank and then hug again. I think Mary and Joseph felt the same way.

"Son, why have You treated us this way? Behold, Your father and I have been anxiously looking for You."

Jesus response wasn't at all what they expected. Look at verses 49 and 50. By the way, these are the first recorded words of Jesus in the Bible.

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.

In essence, Jesus is saying, "I have been with my Father this whole time. I'm at home here, in the temple. The key term here is, *"I had to be"*... It is a translation of the Greek word $\delta\epsilon\iota$. It means, "It is necessary." Jesus used this term throughout his ministry whenever he wanted to set forth a key element in his mission. Let me give you some examples:

⁴³ But He said to them, "I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose." - Luke 4:43

²² saying, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and be raised up on the third day." - Luke 9:22

³³ Nevertheless I must journey on today and tomorrow and the next day; for it cannot be that a prophet would perish outside of Jerusalem. - Luke 13:33

³⁷ For I tell you that this which is written must be fulfilled in Me, 'AND HE WAS NUMBERED WITH TRANSGRESSORS'; for that which refers to Me has its fulfillment." - Luke 22:37

⁷ saying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again." - Luke 24:7

⁴⁴ Now He said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." - Luke 24:44

The point I'm trying to make is this. Jesus' staying behind in Jerusalem was not an act of childish irresponsibility, or rebellion, but was in keeping with his divine sonship and God-given mission. At age twelve, Jesus knew that God was his natural Father, not Joseph. He knew that he had a mission to fulfill. Mary and Joseph should have understood this too. But like Jesus' disciples, and most of us, they were slow to catch on to the profundity of who Jesus was, and to what he was up to in the world.

I want you to note that Jesus did return home with his parents. And the text says that he *continued* to subject himself to their authority. In other words, he never left it. Jesus kept the fifth commandment. He always honored his human parents. He was a model son, even though they couldn't quite figure him out.

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.

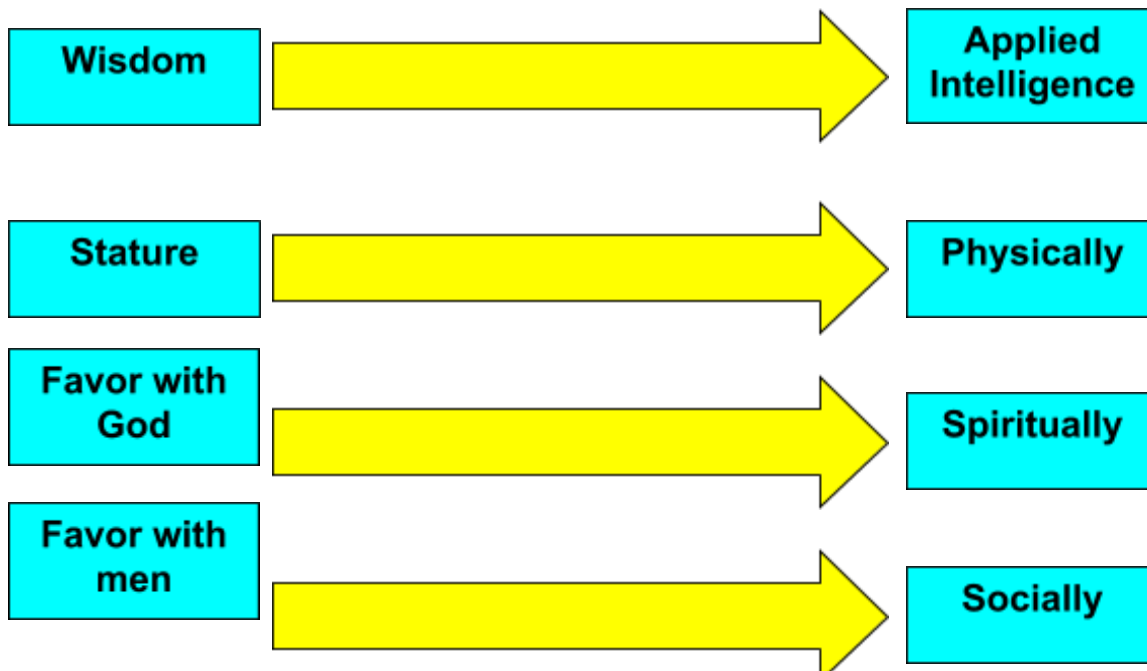
Mary was trying to process all that was happening around her. It was just too much.

We don't hear from Jesus again for some eighteen years. Another gap in the historical record. What did Jesus do between age twelve and the beginning of his public ministry at age thirty? We don't know very much. What we do know, Luke provides in summary fashion.

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

We could devote an entire sermon to this one verse. But I will avoid the temptation. Let me just say that this passage describes a balanced maturity. It sets forth four crucial areas in which each of us needs to grow.

And Jesus grew in...



All four of these areas must be cultivated if we are to achieve our God given mission and potential in this world. Question: Which of these areas are strengths for you? In which of these areas do you most need to grow? Progress in these areas does not happen by accident. Such growth will require at least five components.

1. Make a choice to grow.

There has to be a conscious determined choice to grow. It doesn't happen automatically. We breathe automatically, but we don't grow automatically.

2. Devise and execute a plan.

Growth involves some kind of plan. What is your plan? It's amazing—we'll have a plan for business, but not for our personal development and growth. Consider scheduling a [Spiritual Checkup](#). (Click on the link)

3. Discipline yourself.

Growth takes a lot of discipline. You've got to make your time count. And that requires discipline. It is the root of the word disciple.

4. Expose yourself to growth experiences.

The more we're exposed to growing experiences, the more we grow.

Our church offers many opportunities for you to grow in these areas. There is a men's ministry, a women's ministry. There are programs for our young people. We have home small group Bible studies called community groups. There are numerous opportunities to serve. Take advantage of these opportunities to grow.

5. Expose yourself to people who are strong in your area of weakness.

You can learn a lot just by hanging around such people.

Conclusion: In this section of Luke's gospel we have looked at an incident from Jesus' boyhood. We have seen that from an early age he was aware of his unique relationship with God. We catch a glimpse of the genius which would one day set him apart as Israel's greatest teacher. We have seen how Mary and Joseph struggled to understand their wonder son and how they should respond to him.

Perhaps you are struggling with how you should relate to Jesus as well. I suggest you follow Mary's example. As you read about Jesus' life in the gospels, ponder all that he did in your heart. If you will, you will never be the same!