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“Favor With God or Men?”

Text: Luke 2:40-52; 1 Kings 3:4-15

And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.

We don't know a lot about Jesus' childhood. There are some non-biblical writings that claim to give us some stories of when Jesus was young - how He created birds out of mud and how He misused His divine power until He learned how to control it and use it rightly - but such stories do not agree with what the Bible says and come from those who want Jesus to be something He is not.

From Scripture, all we have is the story we heard tonight - of twelve-year-old Jesus in the Temple. Our curiosity would like to know more, what the child Jesus was like, but more we are not told. More important is what Jesus did for us and for our salvation. And so the Scriptures concentrate on that, beginning from His baptism and to His death and resurrection.

But what we have here does tell us something of Jesus. He is eager to learn. A mind untainted and unhindered by sin learns quickly and well. He knows that the Temple is His Father's house, and He wants to be there. And after His parents find Him and tell Him its time to go home, He does not resist them or protest, but is submissive to them. He obeys them, perfectly fulfilling the Fourth Commandment, just as He perfectly keeps all the Law for us, in our place.

But there's one more thing - that last line, which should not be overlooked. *And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.* Jesus continued to grow, He continued to learn, and He found favor not just with God but with men. For He was wise but not proud, obedient but not condescending, good but not arrogant.

We get a picture of this kind of man with King Solomon. He was a young man when he rose to the throne of Israel, and God gave him great wisdom, such that Solomon became known far and wide as the wisest man in the world. People came from all over the world to see and hear such a king, and he found favor with both God and men. Just like Jesus.

But for both Solomon and Jesus, this favor would not last. **Solomon lost favor with God**, for he allowed the people and things of this world to lure him into idolatry. Though wise, he became foolish, and while still admired by men he fell away from God. **Jesus lost favor with men**, for he would not allow the things of this world to lure Him away from His mission - to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And because He proclaimed this fact, who He was and what He had come to do, though some believed in Him, many opposed Him and finally, put Him on the cross for it.

How about you? How is it with you? Are you more like Solomon, or more like Jesus? What is more important to you - the favor and admiration of men, or the favor of God? Truth is, we are not always wise, are we? We too foolishly seek the favor of the world instead of the favor of God. And so maybe we remain silent when we should speak up; we hide our religion under the excuse of not wanting to offend others; we go along with the crowd instead of standing up for the truth; we love the things of this world too much and God too little. It's true. And if it happened to someone as wise as Solomon, we should not be surprised that it happens to us, too.

But do not despair. Recognize this fact and repent of it, and then rely not on your wisdom, your faithfulness, and your steadfastness, but on the fact that Jesus is what you could never be. That though He found favor with God, He took our place under the wrath of God against our sinfulness and foolishness on the cross, and gave us His place of favor. He became the sinner and made us the perfect sons. And after three days - not in the Temple, but in the grave - He rose and went to His Father's house, to His Father's right hand, where He will never leave, but rules all things for you. To provide for you the forgiveness, life, and wisdom you need. To keep you in the narrow way.

So for us who so often act foolishly, here is true wisdom: to repent of your sins and receive your Lord's forgiveness. And to pray, as Solomon did, for wisdom. The wisdom of God and His Word, and to live according to it. For the favor of men comes and goes, but the favor of God lasts forever. The favor of God in His Son Jesus Christ, who was born for you, grew for you, learned for you, lived for you, and then died and rose for you. So that you could be children of God. Dearly beloved. And that is what you are.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.