Luke 2:41-51

“And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.”

So while I was preparing for this message I was reminded of a story from college. It was the first day of calculus 3, the third semester of calculus. The professor was about 30 minutes into the lecture when a girl raised her hand and asked if this was calculus 1. He told the girl, no this was the third semester and she had the wrong class. She got up and left. After she left, the professor said “Well I feel like she should have known faster than 30 minutes that she had no idea what she was doing.” That was the feeling I got when I started preparing this message. I quickly understood I had vastly overreached. In particular Ecclesiastes 7:23 really resonated “All this I rested by wisdom and I said ‘I am determined to be wise’- but this was beyond me.” Several books in the old testament are referred to as the *books of wisdom*. These include the Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, and Job. I say all this to say that I will not even be trying to give a full explanation of the topic of wisdom. In part, because it requires more time than I have, and in part because as a young man I feel wholly inadequate to do so. The plan here is in broad strokes, to define wisdom. (What is it?) Explain why it’s important, and finally to explain how to get it.

**Wisdom is insight**

In today’s passage we find that the boy Jesus actively sought out teachers and the passage concludes that he grew in wisdom and stature. But what is wisdom? Wisdom, is a very old fashion term. It’s rarely used anymore. Think about your teachers, did any of them tell you that the wisest boy would be successful? Did anyone ever tell you “One day I want a wise son (or daughter)?” I doubt it. Wisdom simply put, is insight. It is exemplified in Ecclesiastes 3. A wise man knows there is a proper time and place for everything under the sun. He knows there is a time to plant and a time to uproot, time to kill and a time to heal, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to embrace and a time to refrain a time to keep and a time to throw away, a time to search and a time to give up, a time to be silence and a time to speak, a time to love and a time to hate, and a time for war and a time for peace. As the proverbs tell us the way a wisdom leads you along straight paths, when you walk you will not be hampered, when you run you will not stumble (Proverbs 4:10). The opposite of wisdom is foolishness. The bible has many many passages about the fool. The fool is proud and self-confident. In his pride he goes through life wrecking everything around him. Simply put, a wise person does the right thing at the right time and the fool self confidently does the wrong thing at the wrong time. They go through life like a wrecking ball, smashing every good thing in their path. Has anyone met someone like this? The first part of the definition is this: Wisdom is insight. It is a tool that we are told is more powerful than “weapons of war” (Ecc 9:18), which is more precious than gold.

**Wisdom is Morality**

If you press most non believers on what wisdom is, I think after a while they come up with a similar definition. They might reference a movie character or something; but generally speaking they will formulate that wisdom is insight. What they will miss is something essential. Insight in and of itself is amoral. Insight is like a boat. It takes you from one place to another. But a boat needs a mast and a sailor to direct it. The direction we are going is defined by a standard, and we call that standard morality. What we find then is that wisdom carries with it a sense of morality. This is what we learn from Proverbs 1:7, which says that the “fear of the lord is the beginning of wisdom”. In other words, it’s not good enough to know what to do and when to do it; but why to do it and to what end we do it. That is why James tells us that the wisdom that comes from heaven is pure, peace loving, considerate submissive, full of mercy and good fruit. It is why he mentions another type of wisdom one that is girded in selfish ambition. James says it is “earthly, unspiritual, demonic, there you find disorder and every evil practice.” (James 3:15). The beginning of Proverbs 4 says “I give you sound learning do not forsake my teaching…Get wisdom, get understanding.” But then, note how it ends “keep your foot from evil.” This same message comes up again and again and again in the bible. The Apostle Paul says that “the wisdom of the world is foolishness to God” (1 Corinthians 3:19). Jesus himself says “everyone who hears his words and does not put them into practice is like a *foolish* man who builds his house on sand.” Mat 7:26 The world does not understand this idea that wisdom has a moral component. So wisdom is insight, which is guided by the moral standard of God.

**Jesus sought wisdom from elders**

So what does this have to do the passage. Well, in Proverbs 24 we learn that as one grows older they have more and more need for wisdom. Proverbs 24:3-4 says “By wisdom a house is built and through understanding it is established.” It’s talking about “house” not in our modern sense, but in the sense of a family. So wisdom becomes more and more critical as someone ages, which makes today’s passage so striking. Jesus, a mere boy of 12 shows an unheard wisdom. He understands that he does not have wisdom, and seeks it out where he knows he can find it. He goes to the temple, and questions the teachers. I just want to pause and point out, that in Jewish society children had no social standing. They were seen and not heard. They didn’t converse with adults outside of their family. The Jewish father at any point could legally have a disobedient child stoned according to Jewish Law. According to Roman law a disobedient child could be left in the wilderness to die. So the mere sight of a boy Jesus in the temple asking questions of the teachers as if he were a disciple must have been mortifying for his family. Jesus did not have any social standing to converse with the teachers in the temple. In Jewish society a boy became part of the community when we turned 13; girls when they turned 12. Jesus was a year to young to even be considered a person. Now knowing this, just try to imagine if your son or daughter (with no real rights legal or otherwise) went missing. You are searching all over, and it turns out they are at the court learning law from some bemused judges, not only that but everyone who heard him was “amazed at his understanding and his answers”. This explains why Mary and Joseph were “astonished” to see him in the temple. It says here in the passage, that they looked for 3 days for the boy Jesus. It doesn’t say for sure, but reading between the lines- its probable that this was one of the last places they had looked. I can just imagine Mary telling Joseph “Alright well we checked the inn, the vineyard, checked his friend’s house, and the fields. Only place left is the temple, no way a boy his age would be there.” But that is where he was. It’s an astonishing turn of events which I think has two lessons for us.

**Lessons for the youth**

First, for young people- it is never too early to seek out wisdom and we should be hungry for it. Remember Jesus was from Galilee, they came to Jerusalem every year for Passover. He ditched his parents in a foreign city to go to the place he knew he could find wisdom: the temple. Notice that Jesus finds people much older and much wiser. This is what we as young people should be doing. I try to call my grandmother every week for a chance to learn from her. She is over 80 years old and I know won’t be around forever. It might seem silly to you, but the elders of a church are resource in wisdom. It was only when I went out on my own that I really realized how woefully inadequate my wisdom was. As a young person entering adulthood you will often find yourself asking, “Is this the right thing to do?” “What should I do?” “How should I handle this.” Life becomes more than “When is my next exam.” Be like Jesus, go to extreme measure for wisdom. Look at verse 41-51 “Then he went down the Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.” After his birth the gospels only mention Jesus one time before he turns 30 and starts his ministry, and this is it. Imagine someone writing your biography or life testimony. They tell how you were born, they skip straight to your adolescent for a line or two, then jump to when you are 30. What do you want written in that one or two lines? I would hope that it would say “Michael grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.” And it is my sincere hope for all the young people here that they would want that written too. Luckily, we have some agency here. No matter what happened prior to today, you too can grow in wisdom and stature. You can find favor with God and man. James says that “If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God who gives generously to all without finding fault and it will be given to you.” So come to the church, ask and seek wise teachers within the church. I know for some of you it might feel as if you have no choice in the matter. But you do. I try to know as many wise people as possible, because I am not wise. I let other people be wise for me with the hope that I might become wise in learning from them and from God. I called Kit last week. I see Paul every week. It’s just a good practice in becoming wise. Be in the place with all the wise people is some solid advice.

**Lessons for the teachers**

Now there is a second lesson here. The lesson for all who are teachers and elders. Remember a moment ago when I mentioned that Jesus had no social status in Jewish society when he visited the teachers. The teachers in this passage are very atypical of the teachers mentioned in the New Testament. I cannot think off the top of my head, any positive story really about Jesus and teachers of the law. But here we find these teachers openly entertain Jesus’ questions. They actually are astonished by his understanding. This pretty amazing when you think about it. Not only did they entertain his questioning, for *3 days* (!) but the implication seems to be that Jesus taught them a thing or two. Look at verse 47 “Everyone was amazed at his answers.” I mean, there isn’t much amazing about an answer you already know. For those of us who are teachers, when dealing with those who are our students or even much younger or in some sort of subordinate position- we should always be open to learning new things. We should not think so highly of ourselves that we think we have nothing to learn from this person or that person, or that maybe I have limited time and I have studied this passage so many times there is nothing left to be gained. As a long-standing Christian, we can easily fall victim to the “I already know everything about this.” attitude. Has anyone ever met someone like this. They sit down for bible study and say “Oh yeah, I have read this 100 times. And I have read so and so’s commentary.” As teachers we must always keep a mind open to the possibility, no – the inevitability that we learn something new when we study with people we never met before. *Especially* when they bring to bear different experiences. I learned this the hard way a few years ago when I volunteered with a group of recovering drug addicts. I came in thinking I was going to be a teacher and helper, and found that I was the one being taught and helped. What was funny was word spread in the church, pretty soon half the church elders were showing up to learn from these people. The pastor even told us “it’s where I go to be fed spiritually”. The very last thing I want to mention here, is that Jesus sought out the temple, *because that’s where he knew the wisdom was.* Let me say that one more time because it’s critical *Jesus sought out the temple, because that’s where he knew the wisdom was.* The lesson is obvious, we must be wise as teachers and as the church. Why? Because God is revealed through the gospel message. And who has the message? We do. We have the message, and so we are called upon to be wise people who carry such a message. The apostle Paul in his letter to the Corinthians puts it this way “We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. No, we declare God’s wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.” We should all be challenged by this verse. As the church we should be the city on the hill, the salt of the earth, the light of the world. This means being wise, and cultivating wisdom among both the young and the old for the glory of God and his Kingdom. Amen.

**Conclusion**

So, this probably wasn’t the message that the students were expecting. I asked the students what topic they wanted, and I was told “something uplifting” before classes start. So I am sorry, but “there is a time and place for everything”. I suppose time will tell if this was a wise choice or not, but the topic of wisdom has really weighed heavily on my heart these last few years and I am certain that if you are “grow in wisdom and stature” like Jesus you will reap rewards that are inexpressible.