

Loving Like Jesus 3 – Accessible Love

Luke 2:41-52

Some things in life are more complicated than they should be. Folding fitted sheets, for instance, or talking to an actual human being when you call customer service, and now, thanks to Starbucks, ordering coffee is now an Olympic event– I'll take a venti salted caramel mocha Frappuccino with five pumps of frap roast, four pumps of caramel, three pumps of mocha, three pumps of toffee nut syrup, double blended with extra whipped cream, please.

In football, determining a legal catch in the NFL now requires 3 officials, 5 lawyers and call to the front office. The teens could tell us horror stories about how hard it is to actually get the class schedule you want. How about this one– have you ever tried to use the TV at someone else's house? It's enough to make you long for the days of 13 channels on a dial. If you have young children, you are familiar with some overly complicated things like car seat installation, assembling toys with poor instructions, or keeping both shoes on their feet. If you have older children, then you know the living hell that is filling out the FAFSA every year.

At the top of the list has to be taxes. No joke. True story. Last week I get a letter from the IRS stating that they had received my tax payment, but did not have my 1040 for last year. I wanted to scream. It was in the same envelope with the check that I mailed 9 months ago. How do you lose my taxes?

Relationships are complicated. Decisions are complicated. School is complicated. Work is complicated. All of life can be like one giant Rube Goldberg machine. But should finding Jesus have to be complicated? Should you have to jump through a bunch of hoops to hear about the good news of Jesus and the grace of God?

Sometimes, we make it more complicated than it really is. In my years of ministry I've seen churches make people jump through hoops like unwritten dress codes. You don't really belong here unless you look a certain way. Thankfully, that's changed. I know some of us long for the good ole days when everyone dressed up in their Sunday best as act of reverence and honor to God. And if you want to dress up as an act of worship, then go right ahead. But I don't want someone who's just getting to know Jesus to come in here in shorts and a tee shirt and be made to feel like a pimple on a 17-year-old girl on her way to prom.

Sometimes it's just the language we use. If you don't speak Christianese, church can be pretty confusing. We have all these phrases and clichés— Traveling mercies, spirit-filled, bearing fruit, having a cross to bear, a spirit of heaviness, blessed beyond measure, quiet time, hedge of protection, I could go on. Or how about when you use a Bible translation that's more than 400 years old. I know some of us grew up with the King James, but what will make Jesus most accessible to others when you read a Scripture publicly? Do you ever stop to think how impenetrable these might sound to guests? I remember years ago, it created a minor controversy in my church when I changed the words “invocation” and “benediction” to “opening prayer” and “closing prayer” in bulletin.

We've made music a barrier. For years we fought the worship wars, and even though now there is relative peace in the church over music styles, do we still have an expectation that non-Christians need to like our worship style.

We've made hoops out of political affiliations insinuating that if you're a true Christian would support this party or this person. Don't get me wrong I believe Jesus is Lord of the voting booth on Tuesday just as He is Lord on Sunday, and I will not shy away from talking about moral or spiritual issues when they happen to also be political issues, but I don't think Jesus has a lapel pin is a donkey or an elephant.

As we continue our series *Loving Like Jesus*, I want to talk about loving with an accessible love, a love that makes Jesus as accessible as possible. Yes, *the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it* (Mt. 7:14). We can't make the narrow way wide, but we can remove as many of our own hoops and barriers as possible, so that people can come to Jesus on his own terms.

As we planned this sermon as a group of pastors, we landed on a surprising Scripture and looked at it with fresh eyes. This passage is found at the end of Luke 2 and it's the only story we have from Jesus' childhood. A month ago we celebrated Jesus' birth, now we get to peek in on Jesus as kid. Luke 2:40-52:

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

41 Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. 42 And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. 43 And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, 44 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, 45 and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. 46 After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. 47 And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. 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." 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?" 50 And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. 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.

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

Let's begin by looking at the end. Vs. 52 says, "*Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.*" The word used here for "favor" is the Greek word *charis*. This is word that is often translated in your Bible as "grace." However, it's not used in its theological sense here. *charis* was a very common word in the first century. Many times it was used in an aesthetic sense to describe something that was beautiful, tactful, or artful. A fine wine or a clever turn of phrase were examples of *charis*. *Charis* had other meanings too. It also meant to bestow a favor or a blessing. So the way a person would win the favor or *charis* of others was by being a person of *charis*. This how the word is used here. At its root, *charis* meant to reach out, or extend oneself to someone.

In this passage, we see Jesus reaching toward God. God was reaching toward Jesus. Jesus was reaching toward others, and people were reaching toward Jesus. Let me apply this to our lives. The way we win favor with God and others is by reaching toward God, allowing God to reach toward us, and then reaching toward people with the love of Jesus, and allowing people to reach toward Jesus through us. We grow in the favor of God and people when we make ourselves more accessible to God and make him more accessible to others through our love for others.

I. We Must Come

In this passage, there are three keys to making Jesus more accessible to others. The first step is to come. We must come. We must first seek God's favor. In Luke 2:40 we see that Jesus was already growing in the favor of God throughout his childhood. "*And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was*

upon him.” Perhaps your version says the grace of God was upon him, but it that same word *charis* used here. I don’t think this means grace in the theological sense, because Jesus was sinless and never needed God’s grace in that sense. This is the favor of God.

Then we see Jesus come to the temple. Here’s the scene. Jesus comes for the Passover. It is the holiest of holy days for the Jews when they celebrate God delivering them from captivity and slavery in Egypt. This feast is commanded in the Law of Moses. Every year they go to the temple and worship. It’s what God wanted. It pleased God, and so Jesus and his family come to the temple to please God, and in so doing, Jesus was in the perfect position to be impacted by God, and then have an impact on others.

Jesus came to seek God’s favor first. He sought to please God first. We cannot seek people’s favor over God. When we seek to win people’s favor, but ignore God, that’s when we water down his word, we try change his truth, and we end up earning God’s disfavor. We must seek first the favor of God and then the favor of people. That’s what Jesus did, and in so doing, he made it a lot less complicated for people to access his truth, his grace, and his love.

If Jesus didn’t seek God first, he would have been of no use to other people. This is why Jesus calls us in Mt. 6:33 to, “*seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.*” We must seek God’s favor first. Step number 1 is come.

For Jesus this meant going to the temple to pray, to learn, to worship. For you, it means coming to church, it means coming to spend time with God’s people, it means spending time in God’s Word, reading, meditating and memorizing his truth. It means spending time in prayer and putting yourself in a position to experience God’s favor.

II. Stay

The second step after we come, is we have to stay. Growth takes time. Growing in favor with God and people is a slow cooker process even though we live in on-demand world. We like quick results– instant breakfast, Minute Rice, and microwave popcorn. We can watch our favorite shows “on demand” and we can go online anywhere and have instant access. We have the attention spans of dung beetles. And we spend most of our time chasing after the latest ball of, well the same thing that dung beetles spend most of their time rolling around.

We’re always rushing on to the next thing. Jesus is in no rush. Vs. 43 tells us that when the feast ended, “*the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem.*” Everyone else is

packing up. They're going home. They've got things to do. They've got to get back to work. But Jesus is content to simply stay. And where does he stay? Look at verses 45-46, *"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 questions."*

Later, in vs. 49, he tells Mary and Joseph, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"

Sometimes we just need to slow down. We need to do as Psalm 46:10 says and be still and know that He is God. When we're always in such a rush, we can rush right past what God is trying to do in our lives. Don't always be moving on to the next thing. If we want to have an accessible love, we first need to make ourselves accessible to God. I'll give you two reasons why:

1. When we stay it's easier for God to impact our lives. In verse 52 where it says, *"Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man,"* the word for "increased" originally meant to lengthen by hammering, or move forward by means of blows. Think of a smith pounding a sword out of a hot piece of metal, or a charioteer driving his horses forward with lashes. We must stay where God can shape us and mold us into what He wants us to be.

Don't just come to church, or join the church, but stay and be a part of it. Be a part of our life and vitality. Don't just open your Bible, but remain in the word. If we want to have an impact on others, we have to allow God to have an impact on us.

2. Secondly, when we stay it's easier to impact others. Jesus was able to impact others, because God first impacted him. If Jesus had rushed on to the next thing, he wouldn't have had that impact. Jesus goes to the temple to worship and learn. He's listening to the teachers and asking them questions, but then something amazing happens. All the sudden Jesus becomes the teacher, and he's only 12 years old. In verse 46 Jesus is asking them questions, but look at verse 47, "And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his...answers." Now, they are asking him questions.

Jesus wasn't just a recipient of God's favor; he was conduit. God's favor flowed through him into the lives of others. Son-Rise we need to be a church that stays. No, not here in our four walls, but we need to stay in the presence of God, and we need to stay as a strong presence in our community. We need to be the kind of church that, if we

disappeared tomorrow, Marshfield would miss us. We would leave a gaping hole where God's people had once showed up and stayed to make a difference in people's lives.

Let me give you a picture of what this looks like. Derek Levins, pastor of First Christian Church of Herrin, Illinois, tells this story.

Derek and his family moved into a new neighborhood and— almost immediately raised the ire their neighbor. They put up a basketball goal in their driveway, and the commotion of kids playing outside drove the neighbor lady nuts. She even went to a public meeting of the city council to complain about the basketball goal. Was she being petty? Certainly. Was she being cantankerous? No doubt. It would have been perfectly understandable if the Levins responded in kind.

The Levins decided to only respond with the love of Jesus. They went out of their way to love her. Took her cookies and were kind every chance they had and she started to have a change of heart. She brought them cookies at Christmas time. Another time, they were gone and forgot to take out their garbage to the curb. She did it for them. Now she simply refers to the Levins as “The Christians.”

Wouldn't it be awesome if we had such a presence in this community that people simply referred to us as “the Christians” with the same respect and favor as that?

III. Go

First, we must come. Then, we must stay. Finally, we must go. Jesus stayed in the temple so he could be impacted by God, and then impact others. Jesus stayed for a time, but the time came for him to go. Vs. 51 says, “*And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them.*”

Let tell you about Nazareth. Nazareth was a Podunk little one stop-sign town of 400 people. Nobody went to Nazareth unless they had to. Our president has a term for places like Nazareth. If you think I'm stretching things, in John 1 Philip wants Nathanael to come see Jesus. Nathanael wants nothing to do with it, because Jesus came from Nazareth. In vs. 46 he says, “*Nazareth! Can anything good come there?*”

Jesus stayed at the temple long enough to do what he needed to do there, but he didn't stay where he was comfortable. The temple would have been much easier than a dump like Nazareth. Hanging out with the teachers would have been so much easier than going to Nazareth and submitting to his parents.

We can't stay in our Christian bubble forever. God has a mission for you out there somewhere. You have your own Nazareth. Too often we want something more exciting. We want something better than where we are and what we have. If only I could go here and do that. This mentality infects us spiritually. If only I could do this, then God really use me. If only this would happen, then I could really make a difference. We have to quit thinking that we have to be someplace else or someone else before God can use us.

God wants to use you now, even in your own Nazareth. Jesus' earthly ministry didn't begin until he was 30 years old. That meant he spent the next 18 years of his life in Nazareth, submitting to his parents, supporting the family business, learning and growing in wisdom and in stature. God will move you on when He's ready and you're ready, but don't wait until then.

It is in Nazareth where we take God's favor on our lives and spread it to others. It's not enough to just grow in favor with God. You must grow in favor with others. You can claim to love God. You can go to church every week. You can go to every Bible study. You can pray an hour every day. You can know your Bible backwards and forward. You can know every lyric to every Chris Tomlin song, but if you are nothing but an obnoxious jerk to people, something's wrong.

Go to your own Nazareth and let God use you there. Maybe your Nazareth is a job you don't really like. But you don't need that dream job for God to use you. Maybe your Nazareth is high school, and you're just itching to get on with the rest of your life, but how can God use you now. How can you grow in wisdom and in the favor of God and people now? Your Nazareth might be a marriage that isn't what you hoped for, but how might God want you to grow in his favor and the favor of your less-than-perfect spouse now? Perhaps your Nazareth is simply being stuck here Marshfield. Some of us love the small town life, but for some it is mind-numbing experience with nothing to do. Do you ever stop to wonder how God wants to grow you here?

So, come, grow in wisdom. Stay, and experience the favor of God, and then go into your Nazareth, and earn the favor of people and love them like Jesus. Love them with an accessible love that reaches right where they are, just as they are, to take them where only Jesus can.

What is it that God is calling you to do today? Do you need to come? Stay? Go?