

Luke 2:39-52 - The Space Between

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Preacher: Peter

[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

If you have your Bibles, open up to Luke chapter 2. We're going to be at the end of Luke 2 today, starting in verse 39. It's been great being here over the last 60 days or so.

Maybe it hasn't been that long. My wife could correct me. The outpouring of love from the church to us. In one-time things and in continued interactions, we've been really blessed by that. And we're grateful and we're thankful for that.

It's also been great to get on with Ron and Will and sit under their teaching. And so we're going to follow up this morning with the past couple of sermons. Remember two weeks ago, Will talked about Christmas in September.

And our kids were all disappointed by the lack of good gifts that they were given. But they were happy that Jesus is a lifesaver. And last week, Ron talked about the disruption of Jesus and how he serves to disrupt in our lives and how uncomfortable that can be and how life-changing that should be for all of us.

[1 : 13] If you look on the back of your bulletin, I entitled this sermon, The Space Between. And I did that for a couple of reasons. Number one, because James Parker loves Dave Matthews so much.

Number two, the story we're going to talk about today is actually Jesus is a 12-year-old. And so 12-year-olds are popularly referred to as tweens. So I could have capitalized tween there. More accurately, the reason that we're doing it is because this is the one story in all of the Gospels of Jesus not as a baby and not as a grown man fulfilling his earthly ministry.

And so it raises a bunch of questions for us and should. Why did Luke choose to include this? What is the point of this passage? We'll try to answer that this morning as well as we can.

So it'll flash up on the screen as well. Read along with me as we start in verse 39. And when they had performed everything according to the law of the Lord, they being Mary and Joseph, they returned into Galilee to their town of Nazareth.

[2 : 26] And the child Jesus grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him. Now, we've skipped forward in time, now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of Passover.

And when he was 12 years old, they went up according to custom. When the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it. 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. And when they didn't 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 them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. 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.

[3 : 28] And he said to them, Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I'd be in my father's house? I must be in my father's house. And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them.

And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all of these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.

This is the word of God. Let's pray. God, a text like this is strange and difficult to understand. We've been called to study your word and to read your word.

We've been called to be on mission for you as your people. And we pray that you would make it clear today. I pray that the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts would be pleasing to you.

And that your son would be glorified. And that we would all know more of our salvation. Our salvation that's so humbling and so incredible that we've sung about this morning.

[4 : 32] And we've praised you for. All this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. What's your mission? What's your mission in life?

If you're anything like me, you answer that in one of two ways. It's either my best intentions, the things that I wish I was getting done and that I wish I could get done. Or it's the things that I think I'm supposed to do.

And so I classify mission being that. You know, I'm a youth guy, so I'm supposed to go out with youth. I'm a family guy, so I'm supposed to hang out with family. I'm going to be a pastor, so I should be studying for ordination.

You know, for me, it looks like a lot of should-of, should-of, should-ofs. I'm also 35 years old, so I'm young. I want to be Tim Keller. That's a mission that I'm on. I want to be Ron Clegg.

That would be an even closer mission. And then above both of those, I want to be Will Spink. Who is always the most godly man in the room. And, you know, by way of proclamation, this is not anything I'd even thought about saying.

[5 : 40] When I was talking to Will about this job, I had a few buddies that had gone to seminary with him. And we're so fortunate that God has called him to this church. And that he has been here and been steady for so long.

And I hope that you all appreciate that as much as I have in working for him. Back to mission and what we're supposed to be doing. I want to suggest something different to us about what mission is. So we talk about mission as things we ought to be doing or things that we want to be doing. That suggests to you that if you're a follower of Christ, mission is what you're going to do over the next 10 minutes.

What you're going to do over the next 2 hours. Over the next 6 hours. Over the next 24 hours. Think about this time tomorrow morning. You're in your place of work. It's 11.11 and 27 seconds or whatever the clock says right now.

What was your mission supposed to be during that time? And today we get a really neat picture in this passage of mission from 3 different perspectives.

[6 : 41] And I've outlined it in the bulletin there for you. And I said the parents, the teachers, and the student. There's a clear sense of mission for all of these people.

And then at the end we're going to come back around to this question of us. And what is this mission? For us. So Mary and Joseph are given this task of being Jesus' parents.

Can you imagine that? And at this point they don't know much about Jesus other than he is to be named Jesus. Which means God saves. Kind of like Joshua in the Old Testament. And we know that he's holy.

He's to be set apart. But they don't really know who Jesus is. So they're to raise him up. Proverbs 22.6. Raise him up in the way of the Lord. Right? And when he's old he won't depart from it.

How have they been doing on their job? This passage tells us something pretty good about that. We look at Luke 29. I'm sorry. 2.39 and 40. And when they had performed everything according to the law of the Lord.

[7 : 40] They returned into Galilee. To the town of Nazareth. His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of Passover. These are good pious people. They're doing exactly what they're supposed to do.

They're raising their Jewish child up in the way of the Lord. They're showing him the things that he's supposed to be shown. And probably keeping him from things he's not supposed to see. We see Luke 2.44. There.

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. I include that in this because they raised a trustworthy kid. How many of you would leave your 12-year-old not really sure about where he or she was?

I think that says something pretty good about Mary and Joseph. But you get to this passage. And I think it should freak all of us out who are parents. And if you're not a parent, it should still freak you out also.

Because they are a day away when they realize that Jesus is not with them. It's kind of funny. Kind of not. They're walking the way that these things would happen.

[8 : 40] So maybe a whole group from Galilee comes down. Maybe a whole group even from Nazareth comes down. They go to Jerusalem. They go up to Jerusalem, if we're using proper biblical parlance. They go up to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast.

This is the beginning of the seven days of feasting. And they're traveling in a pack. The pace is set by women and children in the front. Men, young men in the back. And then in the middle is kind of everybody else.

So there is, you know, we're in a good political season. It takes a village to raise a child. I'm sorry about that. And they're expecting some kind of help to be given by the village in keeping track of Jesus.

And so you can imagine, you've got a 12-year-old boy. He could be up in the front with Mary and the kids. He could be in the back with Jesus. I mean, with Joseph and the men. And so it can be easy to go, I thought he was with you. I thought he was with you. And so they're a day away. They're about 20 miles walk away when they realize, wow, he's not with either of us. Where is this kid? So that will make you feel pretty bad about your parenting if you've ever even misplaced your child in a grocery store cooler.

[9 : 42] Or if you've misplaced your child in a department store or something like that. So when they find him, what's Jesus doing? He's playing soccer in the streets with the other kids in Jerusalem.

Or he's found some movie theater and he's gone and he's watching the newest Captain America or whatever is out now. I'm sorry, I'm not very hip. Anyway, he's there doing what you'd expect a 12-year-old boy to be doing.

But that's not what he's doing. Where's Jesus? Jesus is in church. He's in a temple. He's hanging out with the teachers. Do you know how that worked? These men who'd studied the law their entire lives would sit up and they would play question and answers with people who would come in.

For the sake of refining young minds. For the sake of refining their teaching. And for the edification of the community as a whole. That's how that was supposed to work. And that's where Jesus is.

This 12-year-old boy is hanging out in the temple. And they get there and you can imagine this whole thing is a little bit confusing to Mary. You know, what is she thinking as she sees all of this?

[10 : 47] Because she goes up and says, what are you doing? Why are you here? And Jesus responds, well, didn't you know? I must be in my father's house. No, you're 12.

I didn't know that. I thought you were supposed to be on your way back to Galilee with us. You can imagine Mary's confusion. But this isn't dissimilar from other confusing things that have been said to Mary throughout the story thus far that Luke is trying to communicate.

So what does she say at the end of verse 51? What does she do? His mother, Mary, treasured up all of these things in her heart. Can you identify with that kind of confusion from the way that things are supposed to go?

Because we displace this as a narrative and we don't think about the reality of it. Jesus is real. Mary was real.

She was a little girl who was told that she was going to give birth to this holy child. Only she was still going to be a virgin when it happened. And by the way, when he's born, keep track of him.

[11 : 50] Raise him up. And you're on your way back to Galilee and he's not there. That's kind of heavy. And then you find him and he's hanging out in the temple.

And you weren't expecting that. And then you're standing there with your husband. Poor Joseph. Poor Joseph. Where is he in all of this? You can see that in Luke 2, 48 and 49.

This is our only mention of Joseph, really. 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.

And he said to them, Why are you looking for me? Didn't you know I'd be in my father's house? Poor Joseph. I mean, this guy, he found a great girl that he wanted to marry and he was betrothed to her.

And then you get this crazy story about how God is going to immaculately conceive a baby inside of her. And you're supposed to show your face around like this is normal and no big deal.

[12:49] And then you have the child and you're raising this child who's supposed to be set apart and you're not really sure why. I mean, can you imagine the daily momentary struggle of being Joseph and trying to be faithful to this call?

You're given this burden that you didn't necessarily ask for. You'd set up something completely other for yourself to do. You have this mission in mind in your heart.

You're going to marry this girl and you were going to, no pun intended there, you were going to be with Mary and you were going to have a family and you were going to do carpentry work, stone work, things like that.

And then God throws this curveball at you. And now in front of everybody at Jerusalem, the child basically disowns you. He said, didn't you know I must be in my father's house?

Poor Joseph. We can identify with this, I think. I want you to hear these questions about misplaced objective and misplaced mission and think about them as we go through this.

[13:52] Our next group of people are the teachers. So how do the teachers respond to a 12-year-old standing amongst them? First of all, I don't know why child services wasn't called when a 12-year-old was standing in the temple for three days with them asking questions.

After three days, they found him in the temple sitting amongst the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions, and all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. What is the mission of the teachers of Israel?

These people were the keepers of the law, the keepers of Scripture. Their whole mission and objective as the teachers of Israel was to know these things, to impart to the people, so that this people, this chosen race, this people of God, could be a taste of the kingdom, as Will spoke of a few minutes ago.

A taste of the kingdom to the world around them. They were supposed to show justice and mercy in all of the things that had been passed down from Old Testament times.

That's why the people, that's why the law was set up in the first place. Not so the people could earn their righteousness, but so the people who interacted with the people of God would see God and go, wow, what is this?

[15:12] We've never seen anything like this before. And now these are the same teachers. It doesn't say they liked Jesus. It doesn't say that, man, this kid's a prodigy. We've got to get him on board. It said that they were amazed at his understanding and at his answers.

And we can't lose in our minds the reality of the end of the story here, that these are the same people in just a few years, 18 years or so, are going to be tracking this guy down, wanting him dead.

And ultimately succeeding at that. And Jesus is just a little boy. We know from other scripture texts that he doesn't know everything.

He's growing in wisdom and he's growing in understanding. And he's asking these questions probably brought on from information that his pious parents have been exposing him to, that is probably exposing a lot in these teachers of how they've manipulated the law and how they're manipulating the people and how they're doing things that are contrary to what their mission and their calling as the teachers of God's law is supposed to be.

And they probably had that churning inside of them as this kid is picking apart so clearly, as kids so often can, truth from not truth. Raise your hand if you've had some ugly truth exposed to you by a child really simply when you had created a really great complicated cover-up story.

[16:34] And I mean, they're really good sometimes. And then a nine-year-old will come up to you and say something that just cuts you to the quick and you go, that was absolutely right, son. Thank you for bringing that to my attention.

So that's what these teachers were supposed to be on. They're supposed to be on this mission. We had parents who were thinking things were going to go a certain way and now they've lost their 12-year-old and their lives get shaken up.

Then you have teachers who've been given a very clear mission who are probably out off doing something else with that task. Then we get to Jesus. Luke does us a big favor here.

And this is a teaching moment, less than a sermonizing moment. Luke does us a big favor here by helping us and giving us a cue as to how to read this story because this is this one little tidbit that's

in the middle of Jesus' birth narrative and then Jesus' earthly ministry.

And he sets it off for us in a couple of ways here. He gives us a good bookend, Luke 2, 39 and 40, when they performed everything according to the law.

[17:41] And then he follows it up with 2, 51 through 52. He went down up to Nazareth, everything according to the law grew in wisdom and stature. So that should give us a clue as to what we're looking for here as to the answer of why did he include this passage.

Something about Jesus' growth in wisdom and in stature. So here's Jesus, somehow doesn't get on with his parents, and he goes home, or they go home and he's still sitting there in the temple.

And he's just a 12-year-old kid playing video games and didn't hear the instruction to get in the car. I don't know, I tried to envision what's going on because you read this in the Greek. And his response to his parents there in verse 49 or 50, 49 or 50, when he says, didn't you know that I must be in my father's house?

Go ahead and bring that next slide up. Didn't you know I was supposed to be in my father's house? This isn't, didn't you know? This is a 12-year-old boy talking to his mom and dad. Freaked out because they're freaked out.

And he's like, hey, this is where I'm supposed to be. I'm supposed to be in my father's house. And we see for the first time, Jesus being recognized as something other than this set apart one, this holy one, or God saves.

[18:57] He refers to himself as the son of God. He said, it must be in my father's house. And this is where I think Mary treasured up all of these things in her heart because Mary had to be going, wait a second, what is going on here?

This little human 12-year-old kid is just sitting here in the temple because he feels like he's supposed to be there. And I think that's the important thing for us to, we're done with the teaching part.

I think it's time to engage our hearts in what this passage is trying to show us now. Jesus, this little 12-year-old boy, this little human boy, is engaging the mission that God has given him.

And I think that that's the tough part for you and I to do because we are smart and we're older and we've engaged with a career and an education, people around us, Huntsville Society, American Society, and we have all of these expectations and these things that we think that we're supposed to be doing.

And we're given this model of humanity by a 12-year-old boy simply being there because that's what he was supposed to be doing. And this is the same boy who is on a mission that we read in Acts 2 has been set out that he's going to be murdered and he's going to be crucified.

[20:23] Can you imagine understanding prophecy and understanding Old Testament texts as he studied it and he's kind of beginning to relate that this is going to be true of him.

The story of the history of God's redemption began way back in Genesis 3 when God said he's going to crush the head of the serpent. God's coming after his people and he sets up his people and he rescues them out of Egypt and he said, you're my people.

I've rescued you. Now live like this so other people can be blessed. I want you to bless other people. And we screw that up and we say, well, we need kings.

So give us a king who is supposed to be the paradigm of virtue and represent all of God's people to be this blessing and this taste of the kingdom and the world. And how do the kings do?

What's our best kings? Solomon and David? These are guys that we revere well but I think we can all run down a litany of sins that we are pretty uncomfortable with that they ran through in their lives.

[21:28] And you come to a 12-year-old boy who's now going to be that head of God's people.

And the head of God's people that takes our misgivings and our blatant sins and our misappropriation of intelligence and of mission and of opportunity.

And he's going to reconcile it all for God. Because this is the mission that ultimately Jesus is on. We had it in our confession earlier.

We see it in Colossians 1, 19 and 20. Jesus is on a mission to reconcile all things to God. That's Jesus' mission.

And I hope this seems overly simplistic right now. Because I'm getting to you and me. Because it should seem pretty simple for this 12-year-old boy who's on a mission from God to save his people and to reconcile all things.

Because our mission has to be Jesus' mission. How is it not? Our mission day in and day out is so hard and terrible.

[22 : 43] And I think that that's why we look in other directions. Because for a lot of us we're going to go home from church this morning and we're going to have to live with a spouse that we don't even want to look at.

we're going to have to contemplate life with parents who can't take care of themselves. And the moment-by-moment reality of having to care for them is a burden and it's hard and it's unfair. we're going to go home thinking about a job that we have to go to tomorrow that we don't like with people that we don't appreciate and that don't appreciate us.

We're going to drive in a car that we can't afford or a car that we're not sure is going to get us to where we need to go. We're going to run into people whose hearts break our hearts.

We're going to run into people whose purpose is to break our hearts. And so our mission moment-by-moment is that. That's our mission.

[24 : 04] To be a taste of the kingdom in that. And we do it really, really badly a lot of the time. And I hope you feel the way that I'm feeling right now as I talk about it because this little 12-year-old boy enters into our humanity with us.

And that's what he's doing is growing and simply trying to do the will of his father that's ultimately going to culminate in his murder. And we think about, well, nobody knows what I'm going through. And in a lot of ways, that's true. And I want to affirm that in you. If you're going through real hardships in life, you might be the only person right now who can understand what you're going through.

But I think that's also where this humanity of Jesus, he was tempted in every way. Bring up that C.S. Lewis quote. This is great. I was reading Mere Christianity the other day and I thought, man, this is such a great quote.

C.S. Lewis quote. We never find out the strength of the evil impulse inside us until we try to fight it.

[25 : 28] And Christ, because he never yielded to temptation, is also the only man to know what the full, to the full, what temptation means. He's the only complete realist.

That's the guy who's on our side. That's the guy who entered into humanity fully God, yet saying that being like God is something that humans can't grasp.

And he emptied himself of that and he came down and lived with us. He lived in moments like this. Why did Luke put this passage in here? This is our God living as a human and growing and living perfectly in places that we think nobody else can identify with us in.

He's in the temple baffling, baffling people who've been doing this for years. As Will said a few weeks ago, God is breaking through the silence with this perfect representation of us.

and when we're in those holes, we're equipped and covered and you have to do nothing. You have to do nothing to earn it.

[26 : 44] I was sitting up here earlier and I don't remember what hit me. It just baffled me though as we were talking about it. We do nothing to earn this salvation. This is something freely given. It's grace. Grace is unmerited favor.

Why? Why are we given this grace? Why are we given this opportunity? Romans 10 says that if you claim Jesus for who he says he is and believe that God rose him from the dead, what?

You're in him and that's not something that you can bring about in yourself. And we're at the bottom of this pit, the slew of despond, the pit of despair and Jesus is standing there picking us up going, I've been there.

I died for that and you know what? You're found in me and your purpose and your mission is found in me and your hope and your salvation are found in me and your ability to walk through the next 10 hours or the next 10 minutes is found in me and my spirit lives in you and dwells amongst the people of God and you all are found in me and through you the world will taste the kingdom.

This is your mission. This is my mission and we don't want to embrace it and God says I give you Jesus for that too.

[28 : 17] how big is the cross to you? I'm closing my eyes thinking of personal ways for me right now of how Jesus has entered in and my lack of faith I think of salvation as this thing that's out there I don't think of it as this thing that's been given and that's active and that God is on a mission to do to reconcile all things to himself through the little act of momentary faithfulness that God puts in front of me in five minutes that he puts in front of me in a couple of hours.

That's how much God loves the world that he saves a people to himself to do his mission to be working with Christ as agents in the world to redeem all things to the Father. so I hope you see your little moments of opportunity that don't coincide with the big mission that you've set off in your mind or the things that you think other people think you're supposed to be doing for yourself.

I hope you see the importance of that. Life is that thing that happens when you're not paying attention right? I deal with senior high and junior high kids all the time their life has already started. John Mayer had that song that's for James as well. There's no such thing as the real world. It's already started. The decisions you make right now impact the people around you and the rest of your life.

[29 : 50] That's already started. This momentary faithfulness whether you're nine or whether you're 99 it's a part of God's plan for his world.

The mission we're all called to be on. The mission that Luke gives us a little picture here of Jesus' acknowledgement of that at 12 years old he doesn't know.

He doesn't necessarily know what's coming next but he knows that he is a child of the Father and he is the one who's going to save his people as we know moving forward.

And thank God for his momentary faithfulness and I pray that that's something we will all be empowered to experience and to give Huntsville and the world a taste of as we move throughout the rest of today and throughout the rest of this week.

It's supposed to have a pithy and funny ending but I don't. I'm disappointing some people with that. So let's just pray. Let's pray. God why do you choose us?

[31 : 01] We don't deserve it. When we search our hearts we know of ways that we have done wrong directly to you to your face.

We've despised those around us who are made in your image. We've thought of ourselves as better than we actually are. We take lightly the mission that you've given us in this world to be people of light.

but you gave us Jesus. Thank God you gave us you. You gave us your son. He lived like us. He lived perfectly. He lived righteously. Why do we deserve that? We don't and we're so grateful. As we go throughout the rest of our time on this earth whether it be five minutes or whether it be five years or whether it be 55 years keep in front of us the reality of our salvation the humility and how humble we should be when we embrace that and the calling that you've given us to love the world for your sake.

I pray that we would be conscious of the souls around us and that we would be a community on mission for you. We pray all this for the sake of and in the name of King Jesus.

[32 : 28] Amen. For more information visit us online at southwood.org For more information visit us online at southwood.org For more information visit us online um you