June 16/17, 2012

Simply Jesus: And His Father

Simply Jesus Series

Luke 2:39-52; 3:21-23; 9:28-32

Pastor Mark Kremer

We are on a journey together this summer to take a fresh look at Jesus. The series we are going through is called *Simply Jesus* and we have created a reading plan for all of us to be reading through all four of the Gospels over the next nine weeks. It started last Monday. How many of you have been reading this week? Beautiful—a lot of hands! If you don't have one of these reading plans, they are at the information centers this morning, but we want to learn and journey together through the Gospels.

Now I have to make a little confession this morning: that I would say that, for a number of years in my adulthood, I got kind of bored with the Gospels. I just didn't find it all that interesting and I think what I would attribute it to is the fact that I had heard all those stories about Jesus and all these miracles and doing these various things since I was a little kid over and over and over again. I could tell those stories; I could almost put them in order, and I had heard them so much that the familiarity just kind of became sort of boredom. I think I just got the Gospels—and I don't think I'm alone in that. In fact N.T. Wright, who is a great biblical scholar and writer, who has written a book called *Simply Jesus* that we are offering at the Publications Center as something to read this summer to go along with this study, he made this comment; he said, "Most western churchgoers think of the Gospels as the chips and dip you snack on before you get to the real meat and potatoes of Paul's Epistles." And I think that's probably the way a lot of us feel. Interestingly enough, if you go back even to the great Creeds of the church: the Nicene Creed, the Apostles' Creed, you see the virgin birth, nativity of Jesus and His death, burial and resurrection but nothing is said, even in the Creeds, about what his life was all about. For many people, they think the life and work of Jesus recorded in the Gospels is nothing more than Him proving that He was God, that He was deity. And then we say, "Okay, we have seen enough miracles now; okay He's God." But there is so much more that's being given to us in the Gospels.

I think what I was missing could be compared to being invited to go into a tropical rain forest in Central or South America. But I went in with my head down, just going in to look at some trees. And I looked at the trunks of this tree and that tree and I noticed that this tree was a little different than that tree, and there were about one hundred of those trees and about fifty of those trees. And I say, "Okay, I've been to the forest; I've seen a lot of trees." Okay? But what I didn't do is really look up. I didn't look up to see the layers of the canopies, of the texture and depth and majesty of the forest. And really, until I'd climb one of those trees and get a higher perspective, where I could look down and look out and see the wonder and majesty of this incredible rain forest—or in this case the Gospels—I think I'd be missing really the very heart and essence of what's being communicated to us in them.

So that's what we want to do. This is going to require that you and I are on a journey together, that you have to do the reading and the exploring day in and day out. And when we come together on the weekends, we're going to climb a tree or two and we're going to try to get some perspective and then, hopefully, you will be able to take it from there and begin to see the wonder and majesty of what is presented to us in the Gospels.

Now we heard last week the prologue from the Gospel of John—that introduction to the Gospels—where John said that Jesus, who was God, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. And then the very last verse we looked at last weekend said that Jesus came to give us a full view of God. He came to be the exegeses of God; He came to fully expose to us who God is. And that's what is being unfolded for us in the Gospels. Jesus is showing us who God is and all the richness and all the majesty of God. He came in a way that we could see and understand who He is and one of the very first words out of Jesus' mouth gives us one of those very life-changing views of God. It's found in the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 2, and I invite you to turn there with me.

Luke, Chapter 2—we're going to begin in Verse 39. While you are turning there, we just need to note that Matthew and Luke start their stories about the life and work of Jesus at His birth or before His birth: the angel coming to announce to Mary and Joseph. They walk through the whole birth sequence and the angels coming; they walk through the earliest days of His life. Mark and John just sort of jump right in at the point where Jesus begins His adult ministry—His ministry at about age thirty. So we're here in Luke, Chapter 2, and up to this point Luke has described everything that's happened has either preceded Jesus' birth or up until the eighth day when He was circumcised and brought to the temple. And He's just concluded telling that story about what happened at the temple when Jesus was dedicated and the prophets that came and said, "Hey, this is the One," and they had just had that experience. Verse 39:

> **When they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city of Nazareth. The Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God,** (or the favor of God) **was upon Him."** (*NASB, Luke 2:39-40)

We learn from this again that Jesus was taken back with His family to the small town of Nazareth, where they were from—not by any means a significant place to be from. In fact that was going to be a stumbling block. As you read into the Gospels, you are going to see people really questioning who Jesus was, because, "He is just from Nazareth and really nothing much of any value really comes out of Nazareth." But Jesus would have grown up in a very devout Hebrew family. They worshiped God; they loved God; they did everything that the law required. He would have learned the Shema; he would have learned the Old Testament. He would have learned what it meant to love God and love your neighbor. That would have been part of His upbringing and teaching as He grew up in His family. No doubt His father used Deuteronomy 6 as sort of the pattern of what he was to do and instill in his Son—to teach Him the things of God. And Jesus grew up in that kind of family and by all accounts He had a very ordinary childhood. He continues to grow physically and He continues to grow, it says, "...and the favor of God was upon Him." Now there is nothing else said about Jesus' childhood from age eight all the way to age twelve. And aren't you just a little curious? What was He like at five, six and seven and eight? I mean how would Jesus interact with His family and how did He play? What did He do? What was He like? Did He spill; did He make messes? You know, what was Jesus like? None of that is recorded for us and only one incident between his eighth day of life here on this earth and His coming into His ministry at age thirty. And those are the words we are about to read. Verse 41:

> **Now His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when He became twelve, He went up there according to the custom of the Feast.** (Vs. 41-2)

Again, as a devout Hebrew family they would have gone three times a year no doubt to Jerusalem for various festivals, Passover being the most significant because it celebrated God's redemption of Israel out of bondage and out of slavery in Egypt through Moses. And that was the Passover, when the angel of death passed over the houses where blood was put on the door posts. And God then brought His people out. It symbolized the fact that one day a Messiah would come who would deliver His people out of bondage to sin and death. And so it's not insignificant that many of these critical events in Jesus' life would happen around Passover because we would find out, by the end of the story, that He is the fulfillment of Passover. And so now the very first recorded incident in Jesus' life—His first words—are going to happen during the festival of Passover in Jerusalem.

Now it says here that they went up according to the custom and, when He was twelve, He went up. At age thirteen a Jewish boy was considered to be *of age* or to be a man. You pass from boyhood into manhood and, in preparation for that, twelve-year-olds would go with their families to the Passover to begin to be ingrained into the worship and the life of the nation of Israel. So, as would be the custom, Jesus at age twelve, for the first time, would have gone up to Jerusalem for this Passover celebration. Verse 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, but supposed Him to be in the caravan, and they went a day's journey; and they *began* looking for Him among their relatives and acquaintances.** (Vs. 43-44)

Now, as you could imagine, this was a hundred mile, three day journey when you are walking on foot from Nazareth to Jerusalem. And, by the way, as you are reading through the Gospels this summer, you have to get into your mind the hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of miles that Jesus walked. We'll see Him in Nazareth; we'll see him in Capernaum; we'll see Him on the other side of the Sea of Galilee; we'll see Him down by the River Jordan; by Jerusalem; we'll see Him back in Nazareth. I mean literally, no doubt, thousands of miles that Jesus would have walked in the period of three years. So you have to realize this is a guy who is strong, who is always on the road. This is no wimpy Jesus that we have. He has to do a lot of hiking and a lot of climbing to get anywhere.

So now they are on this three-day journey back to Jerusalem and at the end of the day, somewhere along the way, I'm sure as has happened in your family, Mary says to Joseph, "Hey, you see Jesus anywhere?" And of course Joseph, being a highly tuned-in father says, "Huh? Jesus? No, haven't seen Him around. I'm sure He's around somewhere." You know how guys do: "I'm sure He's okay, around somewhere."

Well that wasn't good enough for Mary, and Mary begins to look urgently and diligently all around this caravan because they traveled together. And you get the sense that children were safe within the caravan as they traveled there with families. So He could have been playing with other families along the way. But the more they looked, and they come to the end of the first day and everybody is setting up camp, they go to every tent and there is no Jesus. And now there's some anxiety; now there's worry; now there's some fear of where Jesus is. Now this is not a situation of, "It's dark; Jesus is missing; let's retrace our steps; we'll get in the car; we'll drive back up to Jerusalem." There's no way you can travel at night. So can you imagine for this night, in fact for two more nights, Mary particularly, but Joseph also, worrying about, "Where is Jesus?" We don't know where He is; we can't find Him; He's missing. You can feel just the anxiety and the tension, knowing your child is missing and not knowing where He is or whether He is safe. Verse 45:

And when they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem, looking for Him.

So they made the trek all the way back. And then, after three days, they found Him right where you would expect to find a twelve-year-old boy: in the temple...Not! Can you imagine going into Jerusalem and you're thinking: Okay, where would twelve-year-old boys be in Jerusalem? Well, you know it looked pretty cool to throw rocks down off the wall of the city. I think that would be one place we could look for him. Maybe He's running around in the garden of Gethsemane across the way. There are a lot of cool rock formations and there are tombs and there are places to explore. You know there's a whole group of young ladies. Maybe some of them caught His eye. He's with a group of guys and they're kind of pursuing that and they're looking all over the city of Jerusalem. And then the last place they would ever think to look for a twelve-year-old is in the temple. But, then, they think: we probably ought to go in and at least look there. And, lo and behold, there He is!

After three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them, and asking them questions. (Vs. 46)

Now this is really quite extraordinary. He is sitting with the spiritual leaders of the nation. These are the scholars; these are the people who lead the people spiritually. And here's a twelve-year-old boy sitting in the midst of them and He's asking them questions and listening. And you can imagine that that was quite shocking to the people. In fact in Verse 47 it says:

All who had heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers.

They were amazed at what He comprehended. That is what that **understanding** means. In other words Jesus had an incredible grasp of all the truth that they were talking about—all the things. I'm sure they were talking all the way back through the history of the nation of Israel and all the great acts of God and what was the significance of Passover and what was the worship of God really like? And who was Yahweh and who was Elohim, this God of the nation of Israel? And they are having this deep discussion about spiritual things, and it says that they are **amazed** that He comprehended it.

But it also said that they were amazed at His **answers**. That's literally what the word says—the *way He was answering*. It wasn't so much the answers that He gave as it was the way He was answering. There was something different about Jesus: the way He answered the questions, the way that He engaged. It was almost like Jesus knew a whole lot more, like He had some kind of authority, like He spoke as One who had maybe even written the story, not just heard the story. Because, you see, Jesus was there from the very beginning. It was His story; He'd been writing it since before the days of creation. And I think one of the amazements—the word literally means *blown away*—they were blown away, not only by His ability to comprehend, but by the fact that he spoke as One who had authority. And you will see as we read through the Gospels, look for how many times it says, "People were amazed at His teachings." And they kept saying, "Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't this the guy from Nazareth? Isn't this Joseph's son who has these brothers and sisters? Isn't this just the ordinary-Joe guy?" because they just can't get their hands around the way Jesus grasps things of this world and the truth and the spiritual things. Verse 48:

And when His parents saw him, they were astonished...

I can imagine. This isn't exactly where you think your son would be. It literally means they were bowled over; they were knocked down in astonishment.

...and His mother said to Him, 'Son, why have You treated us this way? (Vs. 48b)

Now there's a very poor parenting question by the way—and I'm sure we've all said it. You know, "Why do you do this to me Johnny and Suzie? You know, after all that we do for you, this is what you do to me?" You know Mary's being pretty selfish at this point. Mary's thinking about, "I have been worried sick for three days. Why have you treated us like this?"

"...Your Father and I have been anxiously looking for you." (Vs. 48c)

The word *anxious* is really not a very good translation into English. It really is a word for, "We have been deeply in distress and sorrow. I mean, we were worried that something terrible had happened to you." That is how they have been going through these last three days; I mean they are sick with worry.

And Jesus said to them in Verse 49—He asked them two questions. Again this is something to pay very close attention to because you will find that it is extremely annoying, as you go through the Gospels, that Jesus just keeps asking questions. He asked probing questions; He asked questions that make us have to think and answer and engage with Him. People want simple answers, "Hey, just tell me how to do this," and Jesus always comes back with some questions. He wants us to think and engage with Him and so here—in His response to His mother—two questions:

"Why is that you were looking for Me?" (Vs. 49a)

Now on the surface that seems like a really stupid question, doesn't it? I mean that's sort of a: *Duh.* "Why would your Mom and I," Joseph might say, "be looking for you? Because You are missing; because we love You; because you are a part of our family; because we didn't know where You were. I mean c'mon, Jesus, of course we are going to be looking for you." But I think what Jesus is really asking with that question is this: "Don't you know who I am? Don't you remember what the angel said to you when they first announced that I would be coming? Don't you remember what the prophets and the prophetess said at the temple? Don't you know who I am? Why are you looking for me?" And then the second question that really launches this new vision of God and announces who Jesus sees Himself to be is wrapped up in this question:

"Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's *house*?" (Vs. 49b)

"I had to be in my Father's house." Where does a son belong? Well Mary and Joseph knew the answer to that question: it's why they were looking for Jesus. Sons and daughters belong in their parent's house. That's where they belong. They are a child; they belong in their parent's house. And Jesus is saying to Mary and Joseph, "Don't you know who I am? I had to be in My Father's house!" And Jesus makes a very clear statement that God is His Father and His Father's house is where a son needs to be. And Jesus defines this new relationship between Himself and God—as Father and Son!

These are the opening words out of Jesus' mouth. But it inaugurates this new expanded view of God—that God was not only the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son, who was not *made a son* when He entered into Mary's womb, that He *has been forever* the Son of God. He is the first born of God; He has forever been the Son of God. But now He is saying: "Not only am I the Son and God is the Father, but Jesus in the Gospels is going to make the case that His Father wants to be everyone's Father and that He came to make that possible."

One of the questions that we are often asked in life is, "Who's your dad?" I get that question all the time, "Hey, who's your dad?" People think they might know my dad. And so I say, "Well, you know I have two dads. My biological dad," … I don't always say this; it is kind of smart-alecky..."My dad is Bob; you know my biological dad is Bob," but what the Gospels are going to tell us is that we do have two dads. You have a biological father, whether you knew him or not, whether he was present in your life or not. Somehow there was a man who was involved in you being here—a father. But the Gospels are announcing this great good news: that God now wants to be and He has made it possible for everyone to have Him as Father. He wants to be your Father; Jesus came to announce that. Jesus came not only to tell us about His Dad, like you know boys do on the playground in the 3rd, 4th, 5th grade, when they are trying to distinguish themselves from each other. So one boy says, "Hey, my dad is stronger than your dad." "Oh yeah?" the next boy says, "but my dad is smarter than your dad." And then the third guy chimes in and says, "Yeah, but my dad is richer than your dad." And there's this sort of competition. And what are we doing? We are trying to find our identity, right? We're trying to figure out: Is my dad and my family and the place that is giving me my identity, is that cool; is that okay?

But Jesus comes to say that God wants to be our Father and that real identity for us will be found when God is our Father. Jesus in the Gospels will announce this and speak this again and again and again. You will find one hundred and fifty times in the Gospels that Jesus refers to God as *His* Father, as *our* Father, as *your* Father. This is one of the primary announcements that He comes to make. And the revelations about who God is, He makes Him known as Father.

There are just little hints here and there in the Old Testament about the fact that God maybe could be a Father. But here Jesus lays it out. This is the way. God wants you to know Him as Father and He didn't come to just *tell* us that message. This is the really important thing, as you read through the Gospels, you are really going to need to pay attention to. Jesus didn't just come to say in His teachings that God is your Father and this is how you get to heaven with your Father. Jesus showed us the Father—Jesus *showed us*—because Jesus will say over and over again that He and the Father are One. He said, "If you've seen Me, you've seen the Father. If you've heard me, you've heard the Father. If you know Me, you know the Father." In other words, Jesus in everything that He does is showing us the Father heart of God. And that's really good news for us, because I think for many, many Christians, and those who are on the road to Christianity, that we kind of like this Jesus character. You know He seems very compassionate; He's very real to us; He seems very caring. He seems like someone we would want to get close to but this God person—that's a little bit scary. We're not sure how we feel about God—God the Father, or Elohim God, the Creator God? And Jesus has come to say, "I and the Father are One. If You've seen Me and the works that I do, then you've seen the Father."

So if you want to know what God the Father is like, then you are really going to want to read the Gospels because this is the heart of what God the Father is and how He feels and how He wants to engage—not only with Jesus, His only begotten Son—but with everyone who has called him Father by believing in Jesus. It changes everything about our worship, about our spiritual life, about our connection to God. Suddenly this isn't duty; this isn't obligation; this isn't formality; this is relationship. This is a God who loves us as a Father. After this incident, Verse 50: (But Mary and Joseph...)

> **They did not understand the statement that He had made to them.**

Isn't that interesting? After all of the things that they had been told along the way, they still didn't know. And you will find this phrase again and again and again in the Gospels. Look for it because it's going to be amazing to you how many times Jesus will do miracles; Jesus will do all these amazing things and the disciples and His followers still won't get it. They still didn't understand...they still didn't understand! Watch for it; you are going to see it all throughout the Gospels. It just takes a while for us to latch on and get a hold of these things—that God is Father and Jesus is right where he should have been, with His Father. That was His true identity. Verse 51:

> **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. And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.** (Vs. 51-52)

Amazing! It would be another eighteen years before Jesus would emerge onto the scene, ready to launch His ministry, His work. And He continued to live in subjection and obedience—just being a son, learning a trade, doing those things for eighteen years! And the very next time, the very first time we see Jesus come onto the scene, ready to engage in His work, what's the very first thing that happens? Well, turn over to Chapter 3, verse 21, one page. The beginning of Chapter 3, he talks about John the Baptist coming ahead, announcing, calling people to repentance. We get to verse 21:

> **Now when all the people were baptized, Jesus also was baptized, and while He was praying heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove and a voice came out of heaven came saying, "You are My beloved Son, in Whom in You I am well pleased."** (Vs. 21-22)

If we didn't get it in Luke, Chapter 2, we need to get it in Luke, Chapter 3—that Jesus is the Son of God and that God, as the Father, takes absolute delight and pleasure in Jesus. He hasn't done anything up to this point, He hasn't done any miracles; He hasn't gone to the cross; He hasn't done all these things, but God just delights in Him and you will read, as you go through the Gospels again and again, that God the Father delights in all of His children as He delights in Jesus Christ.

Again in Luke, Chapter 9, just before Jesus heads straight toward Jerusalem to accomplish the great work of redemption on the cross, again the Father speaks. Only this time in the hearing of Peter, James and John and, again the voice out of heaven comes out and says,

> **"This is my beloved Son of whom I am well pleased. Listen to Him. Listen to Him. (**He's got a message from Me.)" (Luke 9:35)

And part of that message from God the Father is that God wants to be your Father and my Father. That's the kind of relationship He wants to have with us. In the Old Testament, God was Yahweh, Elohim, the Lord God, the covenant-keeping God, the God of cloud and pillar of fire, the God of justice, the God of the prophets, the creator God, the powerful God, the One who called out a people. But here Jesus adds to that definition of God. He is Yahweh, Elohim, *Abba, Father*—my Father. And that forever is the fullest description of who God is to His people—He is Father.

Now I would ask you this question this morning: "When do you and I no longer need a father?" Is it when you're sixteen and you get your driver's license and you kind of cruise the world on your own? No, I think we all know you still really need a father at that point. Is it when you're nineteen; is it when you're twenty-one? When are you done being parented? When do you no longer need a father? I remember being twenty-two or twenty-three years old. I'd just gotten out of college. I'd just run into an old girlfriend who was about to get married. She was one month away from getting married and I just ran into her somewhere and she just floored me. She said, "If there's a chance for you and me, I'm going to call off my wedding." You know I had not called or asked my Dad for advice in five years. I mean I could only think of one person to call. And I think I started the conversation with, "Dad, I think you better sit down because I'm asking you for advice. What in the world do I do with this?" And he gave me great advice which I followed and married a different woman—which is right on. (laughter) At thirty, do we now need a dad at thirty, at fifty? Is there not a wound in the hearts of all of us, men and women, when we no longer have a father...when we never had a father? Is there not something in all of us that longs to be loved by a father? Is that not one of the deepest needs we have? No matter how grown up we are, no matter how skillful we are, no matter how mature we are— physically or mentally or emotionally—is there not still within each of us a child that needs a dad? And this is the great introduction that Jesus makes to God. He tells us that He is a father. He will father us. And I challenge you as you read through the Gospels and you read Jesus, realize everything Jesus does is descriptive and illustrative of the Father's heart, and take note of everything we learn about God as Father by looking at the life of Jesus, through family, all of the provision we need. He feels our pain and enters into it; He forgives us.

For many people Father's Day is very difficult and painful because you do not have a dad. Some of you have never had a father that you have known. There are more and more people in our culture who've never had a father and there's something that seems missing in our life and we can't quite figure out what to do with it. There's a pain; there's an ache and this is the good news which was what the Gospels mean. God is Father through Jesus Christ. You can have a heavenly Dad who will be yours forever.

Some of you have had a father who wasn't the father you really needed or wanted. And as dads, we feel that too. We know we haven't always been what you needed or wanted. But instead of anger, instead of frustration, instead of bitterness, God says to us, "Hey, I'm your Father. If you will find your identity in Me, if you will be a part of My family, and let me father you, I will be there for you. I will be everything your dad never was, both now and forever." Perhaps this morning you're sitting here and you're thinking, "You know what? Father's Day is my absolute favorite holiday of the year. I mean I had the greatest dad; I can write volumes about all of the things that he did in my life." Then here is what I would say to you. It's very similar to what I say to every couple who stands before me to get married. I've

said this at every single wedding that I've done. If you've asked me to marry you, then there's one thing I'm going to say to you. I look at the couple in the eye and say, "Never try to get from each other what you can only get from God." And I would say to all of you who have great dads here. "Don't settle and say, 'You know, good enough' —because your dad won't always be there. He isn't as good as your heavenly Daddy." In fact the goal of our parenting, dads, is not to raise independent and self-sufficient children who will be able to go out into the world and stand on their own two feet, independent and self-sufficient of anyone or anything. No, that's a disaster. That's a disaster we have in this culture—independent, self-sufficient, everyone doing what's right in their own eyes, doing their own way. That's not what works. No, the goal of a dad is to take the childlike trust that our children place in us and lead them to a place where they are introduced to their *Abba Father*. We will have succeeded in our parenting when our children have transferred their trust from us to their heavenly Father. And then we as dads will be brothers with our sons and our daughters together on the journey of walking with our heavenly daddy. And that's a beautiful thing.

And so, on this Father's Day, I ask you, "Do you know who your Father is?" Jesus, at age twelve, knew exactly who His Dad was. God is My Father; I belong in His house. Because Jesus came and not only announced that message and showed us the Father, but went to the cross to open up the door as the older brother to the family. You say, "Come on in to the family; there's room for everybody." Today you can find your identity, your true identity as a child of God—and that's not just something we say at church. That can be a daily reality in your life—walking intimately, close with God as your Father. Read the Gospels. Get to know your Father. Get to know Abba Father and you will, I believe, at the end of the day crave nothing more than a relationship with your heavenly Dad.

> *Our Father, I pray that whatever stands in the way of us either seeing You or embracing You as Father would be stripped away as we read the Gospels. Help us to see You as You really are, to see Your heart, Your compassion, Your love, Your discipline, everything that comes from You as the heart of a Father. And we praise You that you are not only our Father today, if we are in Christ, but forever. We celebrate and rejoice in that this Father's Day. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

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