

I'm With Them

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Preacher: Graeme Shanks

[0 : 00] Well, morning, folks. It is so lovely to see you. My name is Graeme. I'm the pastor here, and it's great to meet! Particularly some new people this morning for whom this is your first time. We just want you to know how welcome you are.

Now, friends, have you got Matthew 3 open in front of you? Yeah? Right. Do you remember what Shrek said about ogres? What did he say about ogres? What are they like?

Onions. Why are they like onions? Layers. Oh, my goodness, guys. Matthew 3, the layers in this. It's unbelievable.

I've had the week of my dreams this week in this text because of the depth and the God that we meet in this four verses of Scripture. So just in case you're thinking we're shortchanging you this morning by looking at four verses, layers, depths to this.

Can I get us into it this morning? Here is a T-shirt that you'll find that you can buy at the minute on Etsy. It's a T-shirt. Apparently, they market it as the perfect one for a parent to wear when they're out and about with their children.

[1 : 09] So picture the scene. You're in the 24-7 Asda. You're a parent. The kids are running mental around the place looking for the sweet cereal aisle. Promise you it's a hypothetical. I've never lived it. Okay?

They're running around causing chaos. Somebody from the other aisle, another customer, looks on at these kids disapprovingly and you can tell what they're thinking. Whose kids are these? Only for you to look at mom or dad wearing this T-shirt.

Yeah, I'm with them. You know the kind of novelty T-shirts that you get? I'm with her, arrow. I'm with him, arrow.

You got that phrase in your mind? Yeah, I'm with them. That's the phrase that you've got to keep in your mind if you're going to get the enormity of the truth at the heart of this passage.

So if you're a note taker today, and I love that so many of you are, if you're a note taker or if you're like me, you like to scribble things in your Bible, then that is what to write above verses 13 to 17 of Matthew chapter 3.

[2 : 17] Go ahead and do it. Yeah, I'm with them. And it's the answer to the million dollar question that's right at the heart of this passage.

Are you thinking it? If you were here last week, maybe it's already in your mind, the million dollar question. And I'm going to try and get us there.

We'll get to that question in about 10 minutes time, but see if you can work it out as we go. What we need to appreciate as we head there is that there is a rough 28 year time gap between the end of chapter 2, do you see it there, and the beginning of chapter 3.

Now blinking, you might miss that. You might not get that in the plain reading, but that's what's happening in the chronology of this. There's a 28 year time gap between the end of chapter 2 and the beginning of chapter 3.

So that means that Matthew has given us in his account of Jesus' life, he has given us two detailed chapters, 1 and 2, on the first two years of Jesus' life.

[3 : 24] And then he's proceeded to write another 26 chapters on the last three years of Jesus' life. And that's with a purpose.

It tells you that Matthew, according to Matthew, if you and I want to understand who Jesus is, his person, his significance, we need to get the beginning and the end of his life.

Now if you're like me, you've got a curious mind. You're thinking, what on earth happened in between those years, right? What happened in that gap? Well, we don't know a huge amount about what did happen in those in-between years.

But we do know one thing for certain that didn't happen. Jesus never sinned.

Yeah? Jesus never sinned. So imagine that. No cheat to his parents.

[4 : 29] No fallout with his siblings. No teenage pushing of boundaries. No expletives when he hits his thumb with the hammer on the carpentry work site.

And that's the reason I imagine that none of the other Nazarene mums wanted to go for a coffee catch-up with Mary. And they're telling her about their child but refusing to tidy their room.

How's it going for you, Mary? He's perfect. No sin. And just in case we think his life is about not doing things, what he is doing this whole time is he is giving his life totally over to pursuing obedience to God and with that knowing joy.

Sometimes you'll hear theologians call those two sides of the perfection coin Jesus' passive and his active obedience.

It's really important. One of the foundation things of the Christian faith. His active and his passive obedience. And I think instinctively we struggle to get our heads around that.

[5 : 45] I was thinking that this week. Because we don't know anything other than living our lives in this world that is broken. I struggle with this. I've got no framework for understanding what a perfect life would look like.

I mean, how easy is it at the minute to turn on the news and see what's happening to people in Iran? And to watch something like that.

And honestly, your heart is just completely unmoved. Or Ukraine or Gaza. Or you take your pick at the minute.

And you feel like because we're bombarded with it that we can become almost emotionally numb to it. I've listened to enough Jeremy Vine phone-ins on Radio 2 doing a long drive down south in my time to know that one of the bingo phrases from callers when he asked people to ring in and comment on the latest big political scandal, one of the bingo phrases you hear from people is this.

It doesn't surprise me anymore. We're just so used to living in this world. But what we need to see is that when Jesus comes on the scene, he is something both radically different and wonderfully attractive.

[7 : 04] And Matthew wants us to look at him and conclude, here is humanity as it was always meant to be.

He is perfect love, covered over in flesh. And so with that in mind, would you have a look at verse 13?

Now remember the context that we thought about last week. John the Baptist is at the River Jordan. So people are coming to him.

Do you remember we saw that last week? Verse 6. People are coming to him. And what are they doing? They are confessing their sins. They are publicly declaring that there is dirt on my hands, that I am guilty before a holy God.

And my greatest need in this moment is not to keep hiding, is to come and be clean. That's what they're coming to John and saying. And what are they doing? They are being baptized.

[8 : 10] Again, to see it in the text, they're being baptized. So they're going under the water. They're coming up again. And then one day, John is out in the middle of the river doing his thing.

You're in the text. Yeah? He's out in the middle of the river doing his thing. As usual, a queue of people is forming. Right? Again, we're British. It probably wasn't a queue. Probably just gathering around the river.

Right? But looking up, what does John see? Or rather, who does John see? He clocks Jesus. Do you remember Jesus as the one, verse 11, whose sandals John has just said that he is not worthy to untie?

And Jesus has come all the way from Galilee in the north down to the Jordan. Now, depending on where the starting and the ending point is that is somewhere between a 40 to 80 mile trip.

Think of it roughly Glasgow to Edinburgh or Edinburgh to Glasgow, depending on your preference. And he's not doing an Uber. He's doing it on foot.

[9 : 19] Now, just remember what we thought about last week with all these details. None of it is filler. All of this is with a purpose. What is the purpose? What does Matthew want us to see?

He wants us to see that this has a purpose. And now we're getting warmer to our million dollar question. Are you thinking it yet?

Are you thinking it yet? John, he clocks Jesus in line. And he effectively says, Jesus, what are you doing here?

What are you doing here? You're here wanting to be baptized by me? Surely it's me that needs to be baptized by you.

Do you see what he's saying? Surely this should be the other way around. I guess this is a bit like Magnus Carlsen enrolling in a beginner's chess class.

[10 : 23] Or maybe it's Adele auditioning in the early rounds of the X Factor. Do you get it? Surely it's the other way around.

And you've got to say that John's right, isn't he? And I was thinking about it this week, friends. I can get my head around why the people in this day are confessing their sins and getting baptized.

I get that. I can get and most definitely understand why I needed to repent of my sins and come to Christ to forgiveness.

And so we've arrived at the million dollar question. Are you thinking it? Why is Jesus getting baptized? Because he's not repenting of any sins that he committed.

Right? You guys, perfect. Friends, this is where we need to remember the T-shirt. He's not repenting of any sins.

[11 : 33] What is he doing in this moment? And this is glorious. He is identifying himself with the very people that he's come to save. And see, as we try and get our heads into this, to the answer to that question, I was reminded of a famous old quote about the Bible.

And it's been attributed to many people over the years. And to be honest, it's been repeated so often, I don't think anyone knows who said it anymore. But that's no problem because it's not about who has copyright to it.

It's about the insight that it contains and it's absolutely golden. You ready for this? The Bible is like a river shallow enough for a lamb to go wading, but deep enough for the elephant to go swimming.

And what Matthew is doing in verses 16 and 17 is inviting us out to the deep waters and to the deep waters and to get our elephant on.

Friends, this is, this is deep and it is profound and it is wonderful. And maybe you're here this morning, you think, all this Jesus stuff is still new to me.

[13:02] I don't really get it. Come wait in this. This is who our God is. What we get in these four verses, we get a profound glimpse into the heart and the mission of the God of the Bible.

You ready to be stretched a little bit by this text? You up for it? The God of the Bible is triune. We've already been singing about that, meaning that he is one God in three persons.

He is Father, he is Son, he is Spirit, and that puts him in a league of his own. There is nothing else like him out there on the market.

He is radically different from any so-called competitors in this world. He is so radically different from what our Muslim friends would understand Allah to be like.

or our Buddhist friends who worship many gods. The God of the Bible is radically different. He is the reality of all realities. He is the beauty of all beauties.

[14:13] Before anything was, he was. And with perfect wisdom and power, this God spoke creation into existence.

What do we do when we speak? Why does anyone speak? They speak to make themselves known. And this God has made himself known in creation. And why did he create the world?

Have you ever wondered that? Why did he create the world? Well, because he is Father, Son, and Spirit. Because he is a community of love. The answer cannot be that he was lonely or that he is needy.

He doesn't need anything. He's not sure of enjoyment and satisfaction. He created the world to showcase his glory and invite us into knowing him.

Friends, have you ever wondered why human beings long for relationships? The answer is that we are made in the image of God who has eternally existed as a fully satisfied community of love.

[15:17] We're made in his image. No longer there's longings for relationships. This God, he knows the end from the beginning. He's never reacting to anything.

When Adam and Eve rebelled against God in the Garden of Eden, it was tragic, but it did not take him by surprise. No, this God has eternally had a plan to redeem the world and showcase the glory of his love to the world.

You feeling stretched? And in Matthew, what do we get here? Who's in the photo, if you like?

Who's in the photo? The Father, the Son, and the Spirit. You feeling stretched? And I think we're meant to ask, if we know the Bible story, I think we're meant to ask ourselves, when was the last time that we saw all three mentioned together in the Bible story?

And the answer, I think, is Genesis 1. With the Spirit hovering over the waters, let us make man in our image.

[16:39] And what is Matthew doing but creating that sense of wonderful anticipation as to what God is about to do that's kicking off in this moment as he is acting to bring about the start of a new creation.

You see, as far as the earth is concerned, the baptism of Jesus, I don't imagine it looks anything special as far as earth looking on is concerned.

But it's almost as if heaven at the kickoff of Jesus' public ministry cannot contain its excitement. And so, friends, let's just think about three things that we can savor as we think about the Father, the Son, and the Spirit from these verses.

Here's the first thing we need to savor here. It's the willing Son to fulfill all righteousness. See verse 15, right? Jesus tells John why he's come to get baptized.

Do you see it? What does he say? To fulfill all righteousness. Now, we're thinking a bit more about that word fulfill and the law in a few chapters time.

[17 : 56] But for the purposes of this today, in the back of Jesus' mind is this thing that Isaiah had spoken about.

And this is where Isaiah 42 and 52 and 53 come in. So if you've got it there, you can flick there. And the book of Isaiah, you've got these two big things that are happening in Isaiah. These two big themes that you think, how is this puzzle going to be solved?

So on the one hand, you've got God promising that he's going to rightly punish his people for their blatant idolatry and sin against him and for dragging his name through the mud via their lives in front of the nations.

So God's going, on one hand, he's going to say, I'm going to punish sin. But on the other hand, God is promising that he's going to make a way for his people to be forgiven and set free and to be transformed.

God is going to create this city of righteousness and he's going to create a people who long to live for him. And you think, how is God going to do both of these things?

[19 : 03] We're standing at the center of that Venn diagram. How God is going to be faithful to both of those things? It's this figure that you get in Isaiah 42, get it in 49, 52, 53, called my servant.

This figure who will act wisely, who will have no deceit in his mouth, who will be despised and rejected by men, who will be a man of sorrows and he will carry all our infirmities on himself and he will be pierced for our transgressions.

And what else will he do? He will number himself with the transgressors. So he will say, I'm one of them.

Are you beginning to get this? He's going to say, I'm one of them. And Christians down the ages have rightly, absolutely cherished Isaiah 52 and 53 in particular because we read this and we think to ourselves, cannot wait to meet this guy.

Where is he coming? sin? We read it alongside Matthew chapter 3. And so here we have Jesus in this the most wonderful of moments who having read the scriptures since he was a boy, he declares in this moment as he gets baptized, as he stands in the place of sinners, as he identifies with them, with this my servant in the back of his mind.

[20 : 48] He is declaring, I am willing. He's uniting himself with the people that he's come to save, saying, Father, I will live for them.

For them, I'll do it. I will live for them the perfect life that they could never live. And I will die the death that they deserve to die because of their sin.

I'm up for it. I'm going to be the servant. And it's well worth seeing, folks, that Jesus saves us by both his doing and his dying.

Jesus is stepping right into the shoes of Isaiah 52 and 53 of this servant job description and he's declaring in this moment, I am willing.

oh, is this not great that he's come to do the very thing that I could never do for myself and that you could never do for yourself.

[21:55] He left the eternity with his father and you all go and he stepped into the water for you and I. See the willing son, but secondly, we need to go quicker here, I promise.

See the equipping spirit. Verse 16, he descends on Jesus in the form of a dove. Now don't get sidetracked by the dove there. I'm going to give you your theories afterwards.

The answer is we're not sure. I think it's just another symbol for the Holy Spirit. You get fire, you get lots of symbols throughout scripture. It's just another one of these indicating the presence of the Spirit.

But what's important to see is that the falling of the Spirit connects Jesus with the servant of Isaiah 42. The one on whom God will put his Spirit.

And what will that Spirit do? What will he do? He will empower Jesus to accomplish his mission. And he will bring home the truth that the Father is just about to declare of him.

[22:58] I take it he will bring it home in a really personal way. But the big thing to see is the Spirit is given to the Son and sends him out to accomplish this mission.

And this is Ian's verses next week and I don't want to verse creep but I'll do it for five seconds. Okay. Look at verse one of chapter four. It is the Spirit that leads Jesus into the wilderness.

Friends, the equipping Spirit, we're going quicker here. Thirdly, see the adoring Father. Verse 17. Look at this.

With him I am well pleased. Oh, the Father, his heart is positively bursting with pride and brimming with love as he looks on the faithful obedience of his Son.

And there are overtones in that word Son there. We don't have time to do this but you can check out your own time of Psalm chapter 2 and 2 Samuel 7 there. We thought about Psalm 2 a few weeks ago in the first sermon of this year.

[24:19] But when God talks about his Son there, he's also talking about his King. And the way that Matthew's written this is he emphasizes verse 16 in Matthew.

Do you see how Jesus seeing and presumably hearing is to show us that although this declaration is for the world, these words are aimed personally at Jesus.

Now why does that matter? here's what we're going to see next week. It matters next week because in the very next few verses, the devil is going to be in Jesus' ear saying, are you sure?

You sure you're the Son? You sure you heard that right? I mean, the distance between heaven and earth is big and phone reception is not great these days. You've just switched to O2.

You sure it didn't fall out? You sure it didn't drop? Or is it a contract? You didn't read the terms and conditions? There's an asterisk there that you missed.

[25:36] You sure? I mean, would you really be out here starving in the wilderness if that was true? I mean, it's as if here God the Father is saying to his son at the outset of his public ministry, no matter what happens, he sees you step into being that servant.

Don't you believe anything else? And is that not a wonderful lesson for the Christian life? When the devil so often whispers in our ears, you sure?

Again, think back to the beginning of the Bible story, Genesis 3, the devil's only got one play. You sure? Did God really say? Did he really say that you can be forgiven of all your sins?

Did he really say his love is unconditional? Nothing's going to separate you from it. Are you sure? Have you seen your week last week? If he did love you, do you not think your life would be a little bit easier?

A cancer free life? Do you not think that you would sail through your exams? Do you not think you would have no mental health worries? Do you not think there would be no relational difficulties in your life?

[26 : 58] Are you sure that you picked that up right? That's when we need to remember that united to Christ, the Father feels the exact same way about us as he does his son.

Nothing's going to separate us from his love. Why? Because he's willing to be this servant. What did he do? He steps into the water for us.

And in this minute he identifies with all those who would come after him and put their faith in him and say I'm with them.

And of course what is the baptism thing that we do other than us declaring that we are with him? Yeah?

My, his life is my life, his death is my death, the old me has gone, the new me has risen, the son has united himself to me, the father loves me, the spirit is in me, and my plea to you this morning if you've never done that, that you're missing out in such a wonderful blessing and also it's an obedience thing that we do because it reminds us of a moment when this is true, when it first became true, he has totally united himself to us.

[28 : 34] And friends, we need to know how heaven feels in this moment. Do you know why? We're beginning to close it here. Do you know why? Because this gospel from here on out will look anything other than victory for Jesus.

is it? Let me put it like this. In 2007 there was an experiment that the Washington Post did with highly acclaimed violin player called Joshua Bell.

And this experiment, it went something like this, they got Joshua Bell to dress up as a busker. And they asked him to go and busk at Washington, D.C. Subway.

And he busked for 45 minutes. He played some of the finest classical pieces ever composed on a Stradivarius violin worth, get this, 3.5 million dollars.

And only a handful of people stopped to listen in that 45 minutes. A couple clapped and in the end he raised just over 30 dollars.

[29 : 48] true brilliance, utter magnificence but hidden in plain sight. Why does God want us to know in chapter 3?

Why does Matthew want us to know in chapter 3 about who the son really is? Because this gospel from here on in is not going to look like victory. And of course the shape of his baptism, if you get this, is a prediction of the shape of his life.

From this point on his earthly life will be downward shaped. His family won't understand him.

The religious leaders will reject him. Everyday people won't get him. Roman soldiers will mock him. The Roman authorities will sentence him.

Roman soldiers will kill him. But as if God is saying, or Matthew is saying, as you read the rest of this, don't be fooled. What's kicking off here in chapter 3 is the most magnificence of rescue missions from the most willing of saviors.

[31 : 03] What is this that Jesus is declaring? Yeah, I'm with them. man of sorrows, what a name. For the son of God who came ruined sinners to reclaim.

Hallelujah. What a saviour. Let me pray. Father, we just praise you for who you are here today. Lord, our finite minds cannot get our heads around your true glory and splendor.

God, I just because we can't fully, fully comprehend does not mean there's any reason not to bow in reverence and worship. Father, we thank you.

We praise you, Father. We praise you, Son. We praise you, Spirit. We thank you, Lord, that you are a wonderful God. And Lord, I just pray that this message would come home with the exact application salvation that it needs to have in each of our lives.

Lord, maybe for some of us here today, it's just to wake up to the wonder of who you are. There's nothing else worth pursuing with our lives than knowing you. Maybe for others, it's to know that Jesus is the saviour who got down into the dirt.

[32:20] He is God with us, and this just means he's God with us in such a perfect and wonderful way, that he truly is one who knows what it is. And Father, maybe even for some of us here today, this would be the morning where we grasp your outrageous love for us, and that we would turn in repentance, leave that old life behind, say sorry for the ways that we've offended you and lived our own way, and turn to you, the giver of life.

And may today be the day of salvation. So Father, we thank you so much for your goodness. Thank you for your word that we have it in our language, that we can pick it up and read.

Lord, be with us as we finish our time together, we pray. In Jesus' wonderful name we ask. Amen.