

Jesus the Son of God

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[0 : 00] Matthew chapter 3. In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the desert of Judea, and saying, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.

This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah, a voice of one calling in the desert, Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist.

His food was locusts and wild honey. People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea, and the whole region of the Jordan. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. But when they saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come into where he was baptizing, he said to them, You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the coming wrath, produce fruit in keeping with repentance.

And do not think that you can say to yourselves, We have Abraham as our father. I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The axe is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

[1 : 14] I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning the chaff of unquenchable fire. Then Jesus came into Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John.

But John tried to deter him, saying, I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me? Jesus replied, Let it be so now.

It is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness. Then John consented. As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water.

At that moment, heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, This is my Son, whom I love.

[2 : 19] With him I am well pleased. May God bless his word. I was recently feeling very ambitious in my reading, and I decided that I would read a Russian novel by Dostoevsky, the Brothers Karamazov.

It's a massive brick of a book. The reason I decided I would read it, there's a very famous statement that comes from it, that if there is no God, everything is permissible. Maybe some of you have heard that.

It comes up, Christians often quote it. If you've done the Christianity Explorer course, I think, for example, it comes up there. The point, obviously, is that we know that everything is not permissible, and that's evidence that we recognize on one level that actually there is a God.

I decided I would read this book. I said I finished it recently. I won't tell you when I started reading it, because that would be embarrassing. It was very long and complex. One of the things that made it difficult was that being a Russian novelist, obviously, Dostoevsky would frequently make allusion to other Russian works, which we wouldn't know anything about.

The editors would put footnotes at the back to explain that, so that wasn't so bad. Dostoevsky had obviously also read Shakespeare, and at points he would make reference to that, and my knowledge of Shakespeare, embarrassingly, isn't that good either.

[3 : 42] But there were no references for that, because the editors obviously felt that we ought to already know that. It was a very complex book to read, and part of the reason is because he assumed so much.

He was assuming an awareness of other literature to understand what he was saying. And sometimes, as we read the New Testament, it's a little bit like that. The New Testament is written in

light of the Old Testament, and very often the authors, to a greater or lesser extent, will assume a knowledge of the Old Testament.

Well, this morning I would like us to look at Matthew 3, verse 17. This is my son. That was the father's statement about Jesus when he was being baptized by John the Baptist.

I would suggest that in order, many people suggest it, in order to understand that, there are several passages in the Old Testament that are being referred to. So I'd like us to look at those passages. There are three of them. Now, don't worry. You may feel like you're going to be getting three sermons for the price of one. Don't worry. We won't look in great detail at those passages. But just briefly looking at them, seeking to understand what they tell us about what it means for Jesus to be the Son of God.

[5 : 02] Now, hopefully, if I've done this right, yes, there they are. So the passages will appear in the screens there behind me. So the first one is in Isaiah 42.

It's actually the passage that we read earlier. Now, Matthew 3, verse 17, we have the voice from heaven saying, this is my Son whom I love. With him I am well pleased.

And in Isaiah 42, we read God saying about Israel, this is my, well, God saying about his servant, sorry. Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight.

I will put my spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations. Now, the parts that are particularly similar, I've put in bold in both of those places.

Now, you will have noticed, very obviously, that the one thing that's missing in Isaiah 42 is the word Son, isn't it? And nevertheless, we read this language of being well pleased.

[6 : 08] God said about the servant that he was going to send that he was well pleased in him. When Jesus was baptized, he said that he was his Son in whom he was well pleased. This does seem to be the passage that the Father is alluding to in what he says.

Also, notice what happened in verse 16 of Matthew's Gospel. What happened to Jesus as this was going on?

At that moment, heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. Notice what God says in Isaiah 42.

Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight. I will put my Spirit on him. The language and the events that are being recorded in Matthew chapter 3 call to mind Isaiah 42.

This passage is one of those passages that enables us to understand what it is that Jesus is the Son of God in whom the Father is well pleased. Something that's helpful for us to fully appreciate this passage is that many Jews in Jesus' day thought that when this figure came, when this promised king came, he would come just for Israel, just for people who are physically descended from Abraham.

[7 : 34] And that was true in Isaiah's day. As they looked forward to what God was going to do, they thought that God was going to do it just for them and not for other nations.

Now, we can sympathize with that kind of attitude, excluding people, that is, because we often do that, don't we, if we're honest. It's easy for us to compartmentalize people, to think that there are some people who might be interested in Christianity and other people who just wouldn't be interested.

And perhaps we write them all. We may make these decisions based on interest. We may think that Christianity is just for people from a certain class.

There was a story that illustrates this. When I was at the Free Church College, one of our professors told us a story, a true story. He can tell you afterwards if I've gotten the details wrong. I think I've gotten most of the details correct. In the 19th century, there was a minister named John Eady. He was a very well-known minister and theologian. He was minister of a church in Glasgow, and the church was on Cambridge Street.

[8 : 48] If it's the same Cambridge Street that's still there, I think it's been redeveloped. But in his day, it was a very poor part of the town. He was minister of a church there. He was a very well-known preacher, and things were going well.

The church was growing and thriving, so much so that it was decided to build a new church building. I'm not sure. I suspect they were given a gift of money to build the church. But this building wasn't in the poor part of town.

It was in the rich part of town, here, Calvin Bridge. And when the church was dedicated, when it was opened, there was a poem.

It was an unofficial poem that was written. I think it may have been fixed on the door, but I'm not sure. But the poem says, about the new church building, that this church is not built for the poor and needy, but for the rich and Dr. Eady.

The rich may come in and take their seat, but the poor must go to Cambridge Street. So there was a perception, at least, that poor people were being excluded.

[9 : 55] They didn't really count. Now, we can laugh at that, but as God's people, we have often done that. We have often excluded people.

But notice the language that we read in Isaiah 42. Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight.

I will put my spirit on him, and he will bring justice to whom? To the nations. To everyone.

In verse four, he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his law, the islands will put their hope. Now, in the free church, for many people, because of where many folk are from, the islands can seem like the center of the universe.

But we appreciate that, obviously, for them, it was the other way around, wasn't it? The islands were the furthest corner of the world. Okay? This figure who is coming, whom we know to be Jesus, he would come for the nations.

[11 : 01] He would come for the islands, for the furthest flung parts of the world. In verses six and seven, I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness. I will take hold of your hand.

I will keep you, and will make you to be a covenant for the people, and a light for the Gentiles, to open the eyes of the blind, to free captives from prison, and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.

It's a very simple point here, that if Jesus is the son, if he is this figure who is spoken about, then Jesus is for everyone.

Now, in some ways, that's challenging. It's challenging for you if you're maybe not yet a Christian. Maybe you've made it this far, you're here in church, but you can't really imagine things going any further than that.

You can't really imagine yourself professing to be a Christian, professing to follow Jesus. Maybe you think that Christianity is just not for you. Jesus would challenge that, because he is telling us that he is for everyone.

[12 : 15] That's challenging as well if we are Christians, because often we can behave in ways that exclude other people, whether it's as a congregation, or whether it's as individuals.

We can behave in such a way that place obstacles in front of other people, that make it unnecessarily difficult for them to come to faith in Jesus.

Well, again, Jesus is challenging us, because he's telling us that he is for everyone, and he wants everyone to hear about him and to come to him.

That means that we need to think about everything that we do as Christians, whether as individuals or as a congregation. Are we making it possible for people to hear the good news about Jesus?

So this is challenging, but it's also tremendously encouraging. Again, if you're not yet a Christian, or maybe you feel that you're a Christian, but you struggle in your faith, read through the Gospels and try to find any occasion on which Jesus excluded people.

[13 : 29] Whenever Jesus encountered people, actually, interestingly, the people that he often seemed to have the most affinity for were those who would have seemed to be the least religious.

Jesus never said to anyone, I'm sorry, I can't afford to be seen with you. Jesus never said to anybody, no, I'm sorry, I've given you so many chances and you've messed up and I don't really want to have anything to do with you now.

Jesus never did that. He accepted everybody who comes to him. I think we could say that all human beings naturally have a desire for acceptance.

We want to find acceptance with one another and I think that's because whether we acknowledge it or not, we seek acceptance with the God who created us. The tremendously good news of the Gospel is that that acceptance is offered to you through Jesus because he is for everyone.

There should be no one who is sitting here this morning thinking to themselves, Jesus just isn't for me. So first of all, if Jesus is the Son, we see that he is for everyone.

[14 : 41] A second point that we see, and this comes from Psalm 2, is that if Jesus is the Son, Jesus is in charge.

We sang earlier in the service from Psalm 2, and there we notice particularly in verse 7, again, this is up on the screens for you.

I will proclaim the decree of the Lord. He said to me, you are my son. Today, I have become your father. Again, this is one of the passages that the father is alluding to at Jesus' baptism.

He says, you are my son. This is my son. And again, in Psalm 2, what does it mean for Jesus to be the Son? Well, at the very least, it means that Jesus is in charge.

If we continue reading through this Psalm, we see that he tells him, ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the end of the earth your possession.

[15:49] Again, we see this universal reign of Jesus. Then we read, you will rule them with an iron scepter. You will dash them to pieces like pottery. Therefore, you kings, be wise.

Be warned, you rulers of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son lest ye be angry and ye be destroyed in your way. For his wrath can flare up in a moment.

Blessed are all those who take refuge in him. Notice particularly verse nine. You will rule them with an iron scepter.

You will dash them to pieces like pottery. Now, we could easily misunderstand that. We could think this language is smashing them like pottery, that Jesus is someone who's given to wanton destruction, a bit like the children's talk, that Jesus is presented here as someone who's simply dangerous and violent.

We need to bear in mind that those people who are at risk from him are his enemies. Those who reject them. They're the ones who are smashed.

[17:03] Now, we shouldn't think that this means that Jesus is somehow given to wanton destruction, but it does mean that Jesus is not to be trifled with.

It's another book that I read recently about a journalist who had covered the war, the civil war in Yugoslavia in the 1990s.

And on the anniversary of that, it was 2014, I think, tied in as well with anniversaries relating to the First World War, he went back to that part of the country and he decided that he would follow the route that Gavrilo Princip took in 1914.

Now, because of the conflict that had happened in the last century in the 1990s, there are still landmines all over that country. And so he got a local guide, someone that he'd known actually when he had been there before.

And the guide had the maps and the guide could read the language and he knew where the minefields were and he could guide him. Now, the journalist had a choice.

[18:12] He could either say, who do you think you are? Who do you think you are to tell me where I should go? Well, that would have been suicidal, wouldn't it?

Because if he wandered off the wrong way, it would have led to his destruction. Alternatively, he could listen to him and he would guide him on the safe path. Maybe that's a little bit of an illustration of who Jesus is.

Jesus claims that he is in charge. He is the son of God. He has the authority to direct us how we should live. And we have a choice to make. Either we could say, who do you think you are to tell me how to live?

Or, we could follow him. Now, I suspect this is one of the things that puts many people off of Christianity because they don't want someone who's going to tell them how to live.

But as we think of that, we should notice, for example, in Psalm 2, in verse 11, serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling.

[19:20] As we follow Jesus, we're meant to rejoice in who he is and what he has done for us. We might also think of the language that Jesus himself uses later on in Matthew's gospel.

In Matthew chapter 11. Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. Now, see there that Jesus again claims that he is the one who is in control, he is in charge, he is the one who claims the authority to tell you how you should live.

But that's not an onerous, terrible thing. Jesus says that that is actually the path of true freedom in following him. So if Jesus is the son, it means that he is for everyone.

If Jesus is the son, it means also that he is in charge. Then finally, if Jesus is in charge, sorry, if Jesus is the son, it means that he is the one who brings salvation.

[20 : 36] And through him, we come to recognize, in fact, how precious and how costly our salvation is. The third passage that we would look at is in Genesis chapter 22.

God had called out to Abraham, Abraham, and then in verse 2 he says, take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love.

Now again, when Jesus, when the father says to Jesus, this is my son whom I love, he's clearly echoing the language of Genesis chapter 22.

But this passage in Genesis 22 is perhaps the most difficult passage of the ones we've looked at, partly because salvation is hard for us.

It can be difficult for us to acknowledge that we need to be saved, but also simply because this passage is difficult. Notice what we read here. Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah.

[21 : 47] We know, interestingly, interestingly enough that that is the temple. It's the area where the temple would be built in Jerusalem. That's where Moriah was. That's where Abraham was called to go.

But notice what God tells him to do. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I will tell you about. We read that and we tremble.

It is God commanding Abraham to offer his son as a sacrifice. Our society, understandably, has a profound fear of religious fanaticism.

And a religion that would lead you to sacrifice your own child would be the very worst possible kind of fanaticism. And so we find this passage very troubling and we wonder what on earth is going on here.

we should appreciate that we are not the first people to find this passage troubling. The people of Israel for whom this book was written, they would have been troubled by this, not least because their God himself had told them that they mustn't ever worship him in this way.

[23 : 01] He pointed out that that's the way the nations around them worshiped their gods, but he said that that was an abomination and that they must not do that, that it was a very great evil. And yet we come to this passage and it would appear that that is what God is telling Abraham to do.

Now as it happens, as we read through Genesis 22, it makes it clear that that is not ultimately what God intended. Some people commenting on this passage have pointed out that in Abraham's society, child sacrifice is as horrific as it is to us in their cultures wouldn't have been that surprising. So the thing for them that would have been surprising wasn't so much that a God might ask for that, but that in fact that a God would say no, stop that. That is what is surprising. And then consistently from this point onward in the Old Testament, God says, you must not ever do this.

And so what is the point? Why is it that God speaks to Abraham in this way? So we come to Matthew chapter 3, I would suggest that we see at least one profound lesson that is being taught here.

God in Matthew chapter 3, verse 17, is echoing the language of this passage and he is using it to describe his own son, his beloved son.

[24 : 26] As we think about what that means, I think it's helpful for us to call to mind two things that I mentioned previously. one thing, I suggested that everybody seeks acceptance.

We seek acceptance with other people. Ultimately, we seek acceptance with God. And when Christians speak about salvation, that's one of the ways you could understand salvation.

It means to be accepted by God, to know that he loves you, to know that he's forgiven your sins. acceptance. So, we all seek acceptance. The other thing that I mentioned was that quote from Dostoevsky, that if there is no God, anything is permissible.

But of course, the whole point of that is that not everything is permissible because there is a God. And that God who exists is judge.

He is the one to whom all people are accountable. and he is a just judge. If you think of human judges, you can get just judges, you can get corrupt judges.

[25 : 35] A just judge will not condemn the innocent. He will not justify the wicked. A crooked judge would simply let the guilty walk free.

That's not the kind of judge that God is. But then you begin to see perhaps that there is a tension between those two things that I've mentioned. Our desire for acceptance with God and the fact that

God is a just judge.

We tend to think that our salvation is easy for God. I think if we're honest, we tend to view salvation almost as something that God owes us.

to be a good God but what if we've sinned? What if we have done wicked things? It's easy for us to think of other people whom we reckon to be bad people but what if we're the problem?

What if we are the bad people? Then how is it that we can find acceptance with a God who is perfectly just? So you see, for God to save us is not in fact an easy thing.

[26 : 46] Had God simply said, well yes, you've sinned, yes, you've done horrible things but let's just forget about that. Had God done that, he wouldn't be just. In order for God to be just and the God who saves us, he himself needed to satisfy his justice and we get a glimpse of that here.

Remember where Abraham was as he was traveling along with his beloved son. He was traveling to Moriah. He was traveling to the place that would ultimately be Jerusalem and as he was traveling there, he was going to the place where he thought that he was going to have to sacrifice his beloved son and you can't read Genesis 22 without your heart being moved.

It's a fearful passage and yet ultimately at the last moment there was that voice that cried out staying Abraham's hand and stopping that. He didn't sacrifice his son.

But here in Matthew chapter 3 we find the reality. Here we have our heavenly father and his beloved son and in a few short years they will be traveling together to Jerusalem.

Except this time there will be no stain of the sacrifices to be made. The son will be sacrificed upon the cross. And why is it that that happened?

[28 : 22] Why would God do that to his beloved son? Well he did it for us. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him might not perish but have everlasting life.

And as you've begun to understand that as you see Matthew chapter 3 and the whole of Matthew's gospel in light of Genesis 22 we read about this relationship of a father and his beloved son and our hearts are torn as we think of what Abraham must have gone through.

God is revealing to us that that is how much he loved us. in spite of your sin he loved you so much that he was willing to give his son that Jesus would endure what we deserve that our sins might be forgiven.

God didn't simply say we'll just forget about your sin your sin doesn't matter. He paid the price himself so that he is just and also the one who accepts you and loves you and forgives you. and that's the thing that transforms everything else that we've looked at doesn't it? Why does it make any difference that Jesus is for everybody? Why should you care if Jesus is for you?

[29 : 43] Because Jesus is the one who loved you and gave his life for you that through him you might be forgiven. Why should we give our lives to him?

Why should we recognize that he is in charge of our lives? Why should we willingly accept his direction in our lives? Well again because he loved you so much that he gave himself for you. What does it mean for Jesus to be the son of God? As we think of that we see lastly that it means that Jesus is the one who brings salvation. Not only does he bring salvation but we come to understand through him how much that salvation caused.

Christ. So as we think about what it means for Jesus to be the son of God if Jesus is the son it means that he is for everyone. Because Jesus is the son of God it means that he is in charge. And because he is the son of God it means that he is the one who brings us salvation. to be the son of God to be the son of God is in charge. Of course of God we see Th ■■■■ are other who ■■■ are other people who Pelosi are trying to other who