Matthew 3 - God is with us and it's time to repent!

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[0:00] We're in Matthew chapter 3. If you've got a Bible, just to read Matthew chapter 3 to us, we're in a series called Following the Way of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel.

And the first number of sermons pick up the theme of chapter 1, where Jesus is called Emmanuel, God with us. And so we're thinking of what it is to live with God, the with God life, as I think it was Richard Foster put it.
What does it mean to live with God and to experience God's presence in your everyday life? And so the title today is God is with us and it's time to repent.
Because we will see that repentance is the appropriate response to God's invitation for us to join him in the with God life.
God wants us to be in relationship with him and it begins with repentance. So chapter 3 of Matthew's Gospel. In those days, John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.
[1:14] This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah. A voice of one calling in the wilderness, 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 Jordan, confessing their sins. They were baptised by him in the Jordan River.
But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptising, 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 you can say to yourselves, We have Abraham as our father. I tell you, 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.
I baptise you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire.
[2:26] His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn, and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire. Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptised by John.

But John tried to deter him, saying, I need to be baptised by you, and do you come to me? Jesus replied, Let it be so now. It is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness.
Then John consented. As soon as Jesus was baptised, 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 alighting on him.
And a voice from heaven said, This is my Son whom I love. With him I am well pleased. Amen. And the Lord will bless to us the reading of his word.
God is with us, and it's time to repent. Next slide, please. Josh. You might recognise the lyric, Regrets, I've had a few, but then again, too few to mention.
[3:32] Well, congratulations, Frank Sinatra. He'd obviously lived an exemplary life. I wonder if you would be able to say, Regrets, I've had a few, but then again, too few to mention.

I think I would change that to, Regrets, I've had a lot, and too many to go into. And just think about life.
Life is tough, isn't it? And we, even if we honestly face life, we make mistakes, we mess up, we get it wrong, we hurt people, we upset people, we let people down, and that's just the nature of who we are as sinful, fragile human beings.
If we could live our life over again, what would you do, or what would I do differently? We all have regrets, words that we'd love to take back, or actions that are too painful to recount, and even to

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think about, but we would love to undo them if we could, wouldn't we?
Anybody who has a sensitive spirit, a sensitive heart, a sensitive conscience, would love to be able to take back those things that deeply hurt other people.
[4:55] There's haunting lines in Neil Gaiman's book, The Wake, in which he speaks of the lead lady in the story in this way, as she reflected over the loss of her husband.

She says, we were never lovers, and we never will be. Now I do not regret that, however, I regret the conversations we never had, the time we did not spend together.
I regret that I never told him that he made me happy when I was in his company. The world was the better for his being in it. These things alone do I now regret, things left unsaid, and he is gone, and I am old.
And it's very poignant, isn't it? The time you didn't spend together, the things you never said, the things you should have done, the things that should have been said, but now he's gone, and I am old.
Look in my face, next slide please, Josh, look in my face, says Dante Gabrielle Rossetti, look in my face, my name is, might have been, I am also called, no nature, too late, farewell.
[6:14] Regrets. Difficult to take away, impossible to put right. regret. But regrets, of course, hint at the idea of repentance.

Because we owe it at least to ourselves, if we can't reconcile with the person that we hurt, we owe it at least to ourselves to get to that point where we can live peacefully with our regrets.
where we know before God that if we could put it right, we would. And the fact that we haven't put it right because it is no longer possible to put right, we leave in the hands of almighty God.
Forgiveness requires repentance. If we do not forgive, Jesus says, we will not be forgiven. If we pretend forgiveness but we don't mean it in the heart, God knows that and we will not be forgiven.
But sometimes we can't put right the things that we've done wrong. We seek forgiveness from God because we cannot seek it from anyone else. And at least we need to do that in order that our regrets might be removed.
[7:38] So John came preaching repentance calling people who had regrets about their relationship with God and with others to put that right and to prepare themselves for the kingdom of God.

On Wednesday I went to a wedding, wedding of my niece. It was lovely and I dressed in my finest suit and I made myself look as presentable as I could and Lisa looked lovely and I looked respectable and off we went.
And the reason we did that and I didn't just wear what I'm wearing now and we could have a debate about this so I've got to be careful. The reason I dressed in that way was because there's an expected norm about how you dress at a wedding.
It's an important event and how you dress is obviously the bride and groom can dictate this but our family is very traditional and it was expected that the men would dress in suits and so I did.
It wasn't for me to determine the expectations it was the event itself. This was a special event and I was going to it I was fortunate enough to be invited and so I had to go to please them.
[8:57] It is the same as it were with God's kingdom. God's kingdom is coming and the appropriate response is repentance. repentance. And it was John that preached this.

Now John wasn't a well-dressed guy. He wore camel's hair. He wore rough clothing and his diet left a bit to be desired. Locusts and wild honey. He was a strange man.
A raw man. A big man. Perhaps metaphorically at least. An imposing gentleman very definitely. He lived in the wilderness and he was a fearless proclaimer of the gospel of salvation.
He was a very special man. Filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb we're told in Luke chapter 1 and prepared for this one task of declaring that God was coming and that people had to get ready to welcome him.
And the way to welcome him guess what was to repent. You can begin to count if you haven't already how many times will he use the word in the sermon. I'm not going to second guess that.
[10:06] I don't know. It was his one message. Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand. And this great man this obedient man this man filled with the Holy Spirit was not a perfect man.

Did you notice that at the end of chapter 3 when Jesus came to him to be baptised he didn't want to do it. He understood that here was the Holy One of God the One he'd come to prepare the way for God himself in human flesh.

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He said I'm not worthy to do this. I'm not worthy to untie the latches from your sandals. You need to baptise me. And Jesus says permit it to be so for so it fulfils all righteousness.
John understood himself as great as he was to be a sinner who needed to repent. And he was great. Jesus called him the greatest of the children of God.
There has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist he said. A great man yes a holy man yes a man filled with the Spirit yes but a man who needed to repent.
[11:18] And that reminds us that all men however great however big however powerful we might be however good we might appear to be all of us need to repent of something.

There is no one righteous nor not one the Bible says all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. So John's message is repent for the kingdom of heaven all of you.
And did you notice in chapter 3 that the people who were coming to be baptised were Pharisees and Sadducees the religious leaders the people of the religious establishment. Pharisees were really good people.
They were Puritans of their day. They kept themselves away from the ordinary tax collectors and sinners as they referred to them. That was people like me maybe not you.
The kind of people that others looked down upon. The people that others wouldn't associate with. So they'd associate with those who stay who turn up to synagogue and who do the right things and live an exemplary life.
[12:21] They wouldn't associate with those who went down the pub who spent their times on street corners and mixed with the wrong sort. They were Puritans. They kept themselves apart. And John called them a brood of vipers.

And he asked them to produce fruit that was worthy of repentance. You know what they needed to repent of? They needed to repent of how good they were. They needed to repent of how much they looked down upon others.
How quick they were to judge others and point the finger at others but forget that there was lots of things that they did wrong that they too needed to be sorry for. And that's the nature of goodness isn't it?
We're good people. We want to be good people. We want to do the right kind of things. We want to please God. All of those are good things and desirable and laudable. We should be concerned about that.
But that doesn't mean that we are perfect people without sin. Even good people need to repent. The Sadducees they were priests.
[13:23] They were of the aristocracy. They were the royal family. They were more educated, more liberal minded, more welcome and tolerant of others. They too needed to repent. They too needed to say sorry to God.

They too were part of the brood of vipers who John warned. if they did not repent, they would be like a tree that would be chopped down and its stump would be thrown into the fire.
Because God would not be mocked and God would not forgive those who refused to align themselves with God's word. So there's a reminder here to us all, whoever we are, tax collectors, sinners, Puritans, really good people, good reputation in the community, there's a reminder to us all that whoever we are, all of us, for some reason, need to be repenting.
Next slide please, Josh. So what does it mean to repent? What is repentance? You might be able to see the picture of the stages of transformation of the butterfly through its four stages.
That is repentance, the metamorphosis, the wonderful transformation that takes place repentance as the butterfly transforms from a caterpillar.
[14:45] And it's a good way of thinking about repentance. The Greek word is metanoia. Now, meta means after or above or before. It can mean a number of things depending on the context.

And noia gives us the word nous. And the nous, using your nous, is to think. and Ken's favourite word, the nous, is a product of the noggin.
The noggin is the house in which you think, at least most of us do. Actually, the noggin was also something people did when they went round, walking their dogs or whatever, to the local pub and had a quarter of a pint of ale.
So they could use their noggin and have a chat. and that tells us that all of the ideas here about repentance are found in the idea of a thought that you have after an action that makes you think again about your behaviour.

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So you think about what you did, you talk ideally about what you did, at least to God, although you can confess your sins to one another if you want, but then you change your behaviour.
[16:10] Repentance always involves thinking and action. It doesn't always involve feeling sad about your behaviour.

And that's a problem. A lot of people think that repentance is feeling really sorry and I'll never do it again. I've told you before, you know, I've been a school teacher for many, many years and I've had so many children in school who are really sorry about their bad behaviour because they don't want to get detention.
They're not really sorry because a lot of them do it exactly the same thing next time they're in the lesson. They say, oh, I thought you were going to change your behaviour. Oh, sorry, sir. Actually, what they were saying is I didn't really mean it, actually.
So it's not feeling sad about your behaviour. It's not enough to do that. I come from a family where alcoholism has been a problem.
I've sat and listened to people who are deeply, deeply sorry that they're drunk again and they've wept their tears. It doesn't stop them doing it again.
[17:22] I've pastored people, I remember pastoring a couple where the wife committed adultery. And she was deeply sorry about it. But it didn't stop her doing it again.

You see, it's not enough to feel sorry. It involves a change like the metamorphosis that is referred to here. And Paul says there is a worldly sorrow that leads to death and a godly sorrow that leads to repentance.
And so the measure of whether or not we truly repented is our willingness not just to think that the action is wrong, not just to resolve to put it right, but actually to say I will not do that again by the grace of God.
I will change my behavior by the grace of God. Next slide please. That's what repentance is. The second question is why should we repent?
Well John says you should repent because the kingdom of God is at hand. But I've already hinted at another reason why we should repent. all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. See if I was standing up here on my own authority and saying you are a sinful person you might think who's he?
[18:39] Just me. I am a sinful person too. And we are sinful people because God declares it to be the case. And sin is not just the bad things that we do.

It is also the good things that we should have done that we didn't do because we talked ourselves out of it. It's a failure to do the right thing as well as being culpable for doing the wrong thing.
So we should repent not just because we've done bad things but because we have not done the good we ought to have done. And we should repent because Isaiah makes it clear in chapter 59 verses 1 and 2.
behold the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save neither his ear heavy that it cannot hear but your iniquities have separated between you and your God and your sins have hid his face from you that he will not hear.
And for anyone who wants to know that their soul is right with God for anyone who cares about the love of God such a thought is terrifying that my sin should separate me from almighty God that he hides his face from me because of the bad things that I have done and the good that I have not done.
[20:03] And if that is the case we need to know don't we that our sin is going to be dealt with that when we repent there is going to be a cleansing. If you're into classic literature think of Shakespeare as Macbeth.

Lady Macbeth had calculated to rid the country of King Duncan in order that Lord Macbeth might ascend to the place of power and so she poisoned him but the problem was her conscience.
She'd go to bed and she would rue it over that is to repent. She would think about it the thoughts would plague her mind until eventually she started to have hallucinations and she started to recall her crimes.
And she wanted to wash herself clean of this terrible crime so she looked for soap that would wash her clean of this enormous guilt that she felt.
But she discovered there is no soap strong enough to remove the stain of her guilt and she cries out damn spot. Out damn spot.

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[21:13] have you felt like that? Something within you that you dearly want to be forgiven. Something that you're deeply ashamed of.

Something that you wouldn't want to tell another person about because if they knew it what would they think of you? And have you thought out damn spot? I wish that that could be removed.
I wish that could be cleansed. I wish that I could live as if that had never happened. That is what it means to repent and that is why we should repent.
Because we need that damn spot to be cleansed. We need to know that our sins can be made clean. And the gospel declares that the blood of Jesus God's Son can cleanse us from all sin.
And when Paul was baptized Ananias said to him what are you waiting for? Get up and be baptized washing away your sin and calling upon the name of the Lord. Because his baptism in the cleansing with water signified the cleansing of his soul from sin through the blood of Jesus Christ.
[22:24] So John says repent. Repentance is changing our mind about things that we've done wrong in order that we might change our behavior and no longer continue in sin and then we should repent in order that we might be right with God and in order that the damn spot of sin might be cleansed.

Next question. What does repentance look like? Three things happen here when people repent.
The first thing is they confess their sin.
They confess their sin. they cry out in public and acknowledge that they're sinful and they get baptized. And the two things happen because the baptism as I've already said signifies the cleansing that's gone on the inside.
You show that you've been cleansed on the inside by being baptized on the outside. The water does not cleanse your sin. It's not the water that does that.
It's the blood of Jesus. But the public confession of sin and the demonstration of that in baptism is an indication that you are a changed person and you're nailing your colors to the mask.
[23:41] You see baptism is like a college scarf. It's like telling everybody or a college uniform perhaps. It's telling everybody that you belong to Jesus. It's a public declaration.

that just as this water cleans your body so the blood of Jesus has cleansed the damp spots of your sin. Christians ought to be baptized because they are publicly declaring their faith in Jesus and I'm not going to miss this opportunity am I?
On Tuesday evening we will baptize Josh but I have been to a baptism when I was intended to baptize one person and I baptized two because somebody said I too want to be baptized on the day and bless her she was going to put it off again and she didn't put it off and she was so so happy wasn't she bless her heart and then just a little while after that she got an incurable cancer and shortly after that she died.
but she went to be with the Lord which is far better. Interesting how the Holy Spirit challenged and moved at just the right time and so I would say to you that if you have repented of your sin and if you have been cleansed in the blood of Jesus you make your confession of sin you're baptized and you're converted.
Conversion means you turn around. Repentance means you think about what you're doing. You declare that it's wrong. You are determined to change and conversion is you actually turn around and walk in the right direction.
[25:23] You begin to live a life that is honourable to Jesus Christ because of all that he's done for you. That's conversion. You're a different person.

You've been made for a different purpose. Like think about a conversion of a room or a conversion of a church. You make it better so that it is fit for purpose. And we repent because the kingdom of God is at hand because God is going to come by his son Jesus Christ and he's going to enter into your life and live in your heart and guess what?
He wants you to live in a way that is honourable to him, that is like the way he would live, that loves the things he loves and does the things he does. A person who is a Christian doesn't just turn up on Sunday.
A person who is a Christian lives with Jesus every day and honours Jesus every day and if we're not doing that we need to repent. And then the last question.
So what repentance results in? There are a few hints, there's a lot more you could say about this but the first thing is it brings you into the kingdom of heaven. That is to say you become a member, a citizen of God's kingdom here on earth.

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[26:42] So I'm a citizen of the United Kingdom. I still have a European Union passport. When I go for my next one it'll be a blue one or whatever it'll be a great British passport and that declares my citizenship.

I'm a member of this kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. However, I am also a member of the kingdom of God.
And the great thing about that kingdom is that that kingdom never ends. That kingdom never weighs out. That kingdom is eternal, everlasting. And you translate from this worldly kingdom into that kingdom when you die.
And you know we all fear death of course for various reasons at least the causes of death perhaps if it's suffering and everything else. But I often think you know dying will be a bit like going to bed at night.
You'll fall asleep and you'll wake up and you'll think I'm alive. Oh that was death. That was death. The last time I thought about anything I was alive and now I'm alive and I'm alive forever.
[27:49] That was death. Yeah. To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. Somebody will say oh John Wittler's just died. No he's not. He's alive. I just translated transferred metamorphosized I'm a beautiful butterfly if you can imagine that.

Because I'm a member of the kingdom of God and that kingdom never ends. A kingdom of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. An eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.
The second thing is it leads you into relationship with King Jesus. When Jesus came the first thing he preached was guess what? Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand. They had the same message.
Perhaps he borrowed it I don't know. Same message. Same message. The King has come. The right response is to repent. To join him in his journey.
And to live the life he wants us to live. And we live in relationship with Jesus every every day. He gives us a new heart and a new spirit.
[28:58] We are born again of the spirit of God. We are filled with the Holy Spirit and enabled by his power to live every day for him. That's a wonderful thing. We have a relationship with King Jesus.

It's not a religion. It's not just something that we think a set of morals or a code of behaviour that we want to show off to the world on because we're more disciplined and better people.
people. It is a relationship with Jesus that helps us to see that all that we are, all the goodness that is in us, all the things that other people find commendable about us is because of Jesus.
The Christ life lived out through us which shines in the world and attracts others to the kingdom.
And he will get the glory. People say, oh, you're a good person.
No, no, not a good person. A saved person. But a saved person becomes a good person by the grace of God. What shall we say?
[30:05] Shall we go on sinning that grace may abound? No, we should not. We die to sin. We don't live in it any longer because the grace of Jesus Christ is at work within us.

And lastly, repentance results in our bringing pleasure to God. bringing pleasure to God. Bring forth fruit worthy of repentance. Why? Because we want to please God.
Why do you, if you're in a loving family relationship, why do you want to please your parents? In order that they might get the respect that you want to show them because of the way in which they have raised you and loved you and taken care of you all your life.
if you're a husband, why do you want to please your wife? I'm assuming you do because you want to express your love for your wife and the same is true in reverse.
Why do you want to please your children? Because you want to be happy. You want to be content and fulfilled. It is exactly the same when we're in relationship with King Jesus.
[31:14] Jesus. We want to bring pleasure to God because Jesus says his food is to do the will of God who sent him and to finish his work. And our food, our meat and drink, our desire, our hunger, our aspiration should be to please the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So when we repent, this is what it results in. Members of the kingdom of heaven, nobody can take that from you. In a relationship with King Jesus and he will never leave you or forsake you.
And to live a life that brings pleasure to God because that's the kind of life he deserves you to live. repentance.

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It is time to repent because the King has come. And I'm bound to ask as I close this morning, have you repented of that damn spot, of that behaviour that torments you and keeps you from living the life that God intended.
Are you walking in relationship with King Jesus? Is your life pleasing and honouring to him? The music group we're going to come back and we're going to just pray in a moment.
[32:53] As we do so, let us bow our heads in prayer and let us take a moment to appropriately respond to King Jesus.

All of us have been given one life. We don't want to waste our life. Don't you want your life to count for something great?
don't you long for your life to have eternal significance? Don't you want to know peace with God through faith in the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ?
Don't you want to have that damn spot of sin to be cleansed and removed? And so we pray and I invite you to pray with me.
Lord Jesus, I thank you that you have come to bring God to us so that God would be with us.
[34:14] I thank you Lord Jesus that you died upon the cross, took the fall for my sin in order that I may be cleansed from its damn spot and forgiven.

I come now to repent of my sin. I ask for forgiveness for all the things that I have done wrong and all of the things that I have not done that I should have done.
And I thank you that the blood of Jesus, God's Son, cleanses me from every sin. And now I thank you for the new life that comes into me as I confess my sin to Jesus, for the new life that is available to all who have faith in him.
Holy Spirit breathe in me now. Holy Spirit come to me now. Holy Spirit comfort me now in the knowledge that I am a child of God through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.
Thank you Lord.

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