

Son Shared

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[0 : 00] We're going to look this evening for a little while at the theme of a better vision and looking at the title, A Son Shared.

Looking at the Gospel, looking at the story of salvation through Jesus Christ. We looked at the Father last week and we're looking at Jesus Christ today.

Now over the last number of weeks, and I've maybe alluded to this a little bit in church, I've been wrestling with preaching and wrestling with my preaching.

When you've been preaching for 27 or so years, you get to that stage, you know, if anyone are in your job, in a job that long, you ask questions about your job, you ask questions about what you're doing and how you're doing it and if you're doing it effectively and why we preach and why I preach and what it's preaching about.

I did kind of mention this before. And I think one of the important things other than obviously it's a spiritual command that is given to us by God, not merely preaching from a pulpit but presenting and sharing the Gospel, however we choose to do that.

[1 : 06] But I recognize and see the importance because I hope and pray that for example the group who are in the church that are around Identity's Age group, you know, left school or just at that stage of starting work or starting university, they will be listening to preaching for 40, 50, maybe even 60 years.

I hope so. Some of them might not, but I hope they will. And the rest of us are also, I mean it's something we come and listen to, we can and we can't.

And I don't want them, and I don't want anyone, but I don't want them particularly because of the age of that, I don't want them to become anesthetized to preaching, to getting to the place where they can quite casually and quite happily switch off because of what they're used to.

And so I think there's sometimes extremes of preaching. One extreme is that people think it's just about sharing facts from the Bible. As long as I get up here and just share facts from the Bible, I'll leave God to do the rest, okay?

But I think generally speaking that's really boring preaching. And I don't think that's what the Bible means by preaching. I think it's a denial of our responsibility to bring the gospel and to bring the message in an exciting and challenging way.

[2 : 30] The other extreme of course is to be novel, to be funny, is to be really different and share all my own ideas that might be really interesting and keep people wrapped in their attention, but will do absolutely no spiritual good because it's just all about the person who's preaching.

So, somewhere in the middle, there's this reality where I need to be digging deep into God's truth to bring freshness.

Because there's nothing new under the sun, but there ought to be freshness when we come. I don't want to be telling you things you've known for years, again and again and again. So you say, I heard it, I know it.

I want to be sharing truth that you may know, but in a fresh and in a meaningful way because it's infinitely resourced, isn't it, the Bible? We will always find you as we dig deep and as I dig deep in preparation, there ought to be like we saw a harvest.

Remember we saw that this morning and that's, you know, if we put in a little, we only get a little out. If we put in a lot, we get a lot out. So in terms of the preaching preparation, that is relevant and there needs to be that digging deep.

[3 : 39] So if that is, if I'm doing that, if I have enough time to do that, things need to change. But also we need the Holy Spirit, don't we? Because it's a miraculous, it's a unique sort of thing is preaching and ordinarily it would be kind of dull and boring and in normal reality.

But we need the Holy Spirit who will give us a hunger and who will enable us to learn and we need to depend on Him because we're learning God's truth. And He says He provides the Spirit to be the one who points us to Jesus Christ.

So there's a spiritual work going on that must go on and that we all must participate in as we are relying on the Holy Spirit and as we're being taught by the Spirit. And I must be learning to dig deep and rely on God to reveal new things from Scripture.

That's by way of introduction to the importance of our own, all our ongoing participation in preaching and what it means. I don't want people to be anesthetized and the questions also are part of that process.

But I want this evening in that process to take a verse from Matthew chapter 1 and it's a very famous verse, a verse that's often used at Christmas services, verse 23, the virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son and they will call him Emmanuel which means God with us.

[4 : 59] So I want to look at this Christmas text this evening which is God with us and look at the theme of the Son who is shared with us in the gospel and what that means for us and there will be therefore for the young people questions that follow on I hope from that.

Because remember really what we're trying to do is to remind ourselves that it's not that we make the gospel too good, it's that we make the gospel not good enough. That's why we don't follow, that's why we don't serve, that's why we're not committed if that's the case in our lives because the gospel isn't worth it for us, it's not good enough so the aim is really prayerfully and with God's help to reveal the gospel in such a way that it shows who God is.

So God with us, very famous description or name that has this meaning, Emmanuel God with us. What is this God with us? Well it means more than what maybe we sometimes think it means if I use a big theological word, it means more than omnipresence, it means more than that God is always with us.

That's the meaning of the word omnipresence, just like omnipotent means he's all powerful, omnipresent means he's all present, he's always there.

[6 : 21] But it means more than that, you know, there's many texts in the Bible that tells us God is everywhere and we believe that and we do know that, we know that don't we? He is always everywhere, he is there, God is with us in that sense, he is above time, so he's at the beginning of time and he's at the end of time and he's in the middle of time as he almost envelops it, he envelops history as it were because he is omnipresent.

He's a pure spirit, the Bible teaches that, doesn't it, that he's not in one place. He's a spirit so he's in all places at all times in every generation, he's uncontained, there's not edges to God, there's not places beyond which he doesn't exist.

He's uncontained at that level and he's invisible so that people will say, oh yeah, God's with us, he's with us in everything, he's with us in the air, he's with us in creation, he's with, he's all around us and people will talk in that sense of the omnipresence of God with us in all things.

He's all knowing, he's all seeing. It's all, it's too great to comprehend this picture of God or to at least, it's almost too big to conceptualize, to get an idea of our tiny little brains are beginning to smoke when we think about a God who is with us, who's all, is present everywhere, there's nowhere where he isn't present.

Now where the Bible teaches that, that is not primarily the meaning of the name given to Jesus and nor the explanation of the name God with us.

[8 : 01] It's very different to that because what we have here is the name Emmanuel which means God with us in the context of the incarnation, in the context of Jesus, the baby being born.

So that's where the name is given, it's not given before that, it's prophesied before that but it's not given before that. So it's in the context of a baby being born, God the Son being born, it follows or it's a pre birth announcement really, isn't it?

It's a pre birth announcement of the name that you're going to give to this miraculous child. So you've got God who remains God and who becomes a baby, who becomes a human being.

So you've got God and you've got a human being who have distinct natures but they are one person together, a real body and a real soul.

So you've got God who becomes a baby, who becomes a person, becomes a human being with a real human body, with a real human mind but he's still divine, he is still God and that is the context in which the name God with us is given.

[9 : 27] So we find that there's something very important about that in terms of an understanding of the Gospel is that God, the Spirit, this infinite, eternal, unchangeable being becomes a human being and forever seals his commitment to this grubby little people called humanity.

He forever says, I am going to be linked with you, I'm always going to be with you because I will never lose this body. The uncreated one takes on a created body and becomes a human being. He can't fully express his love for us and his commitment to us unless he becomes a baby, unless he becomes flesh and blood because that flesh and blood will then be torn asunder on the cross but it's only a person that can go to the cross.

It's not a spirit that can go to the cross. It's not an ethereal being. It's not an angel. It's not anything but this divine incarnate God who comes in the person of Jesus.

He comes to show us. See, we find it very difficult to have the idea of God with us just as a spirit, uncontainable. That's beyond our, it just blows our mind but he comes to show us what it's like to be God in our language, as it were, in our DNA, in a way that we can understand him.

[11 : 08] He narrows himself down to this amazing concentrated description of God-ness in the person of Jesus and he's declaring the dignity forevermore of humanity by becoming one of us.

He is always going to be God with us, the incarnation. It speaks tonight into your flesh and blood as you sit here because it says, God becomes like me.

God becomes like me. He's with us at that level and that begins to unpack for us a little bit about the gospel. What does it mean? What does it mean in God with us?

Jesus here is Emmanuel. Well, it means that Jesus came, or God came, in the likeness of sinful humanity like you and me.

It means he came and was tempted in every way like you and me but without sin. It means that he who had no sin whatsoever became sin for us on the cross.

[12 : 19] These are some of the important verses in the Bible that speak about what it means for Jesus to be with us and Jesus to take flesh in our experience.

Therefore, for you this evening and for me this evening, there's absolutely nothing that Christ does not appreciate or understand about your human experience and mine.

I absolutely and entirely believe that, that there's nothing that you can say he doesn't know what I'm going through.

In his divine perfection, he soaks up and he interprets with his infinite capacity. He interprets all that his human experience that he had while he was here and also on the cross and in hell and he knows exactly tonight what it is like to be you.

And he knows exactly what it is like to be me, God with us. That is partly what it means, the incarnation.

[13 : 32] Young people at the stage of the lives that you are often finding your identity, aren't you? You're finding out about yourself, you're experiencing new things, you're questioning, maybe not just young people.

You're lonely sometimes. You're relentlessly misunderstood by all these old people that have no concept of what's going on. You don't understand. Mom and Dad are completely irrelevant because they don't understand what I'm going through.

How could they possibly know they may or may not know? But very often that is the isolation and the loneliness and the struggle we feel in life. And the last person you go to as a young person is Jesus Christ because you think, what does He know?

Because He's God. He has no concept of what it is to be me in my dysfunctional, discouraging, difficult life.

And He says, I absolutely do. I absolutely do know. I know absolutely, there's nothing I can't appreciate and don't understand about your human experience.

[14 : 42] And Philippians 2, in kind of ordinary language, is really saying that Jesus Christ puts on our shoes. He stands in our shoes and He says, I know exactly.

I know exactly what you're going through. He is the most committed. He is the most effective, He is the most loving, listening ear you will ever have in your life as a young person.

And I want you to know that as a foundation for your living. That Jesus isn't the one you go to as a last resort or who you think is completely irrelevant or who's just for church on a Sunday or who's your parents God but who's yours.

And with whom you can communicate and speak to and share your angst and share your struggles and share your difficulties and your doubts and your fears and your unbelief and your joys and your pleasures and your temptations because He knows and He understands.

Jesus is Emmanuel. But of course we know that He is more than Emmanuel, you know, God with us because there's a sense in which that can become kind of quite a Marshmallow-y kind of theology.

[15 : 49] Oh, it's kind of soft and sweet and it's nice to think God's with us. Whatever we do, whatever we go, God's with us and God's in the world and He loves me and everything sweet and nice.

And we have, it's kind of just comforting and it's very man-centered so that Jesus is coming to satisfy all that I need and all that I do and all that I want to be.

But He's also Jesus. He's Emmanuel, God with us, but He's also Jesus and Jesus means the Lord is my salvation.

So this Emmanuel comes for that very specific purpose, doesn't he, to deal with our needs as human beings, to rescue us from the power of death.

That's what He comes to do, the sting of death, to remove that sting from your experience and from mine. And the great thing is, this is, it is kind of right a little bit paradoxical, but that's the one time, the one place throughout the whole of eternity where He goes without us.

[16 : 59] You know Emmanuel's God with us, well the cross is the place that He doesn't take us, far too dangerous. Only He goes to the cross.

Only He stands in the accused box. Only He receives the guilty verdict. Only He receives the sentence. Only He dies. The death, the unimaginable forsakeness of being separated from His Father bearing our sins.

We're not there. He goes there alone. He's the only place where it's God, not with us really, maybe, if we can use that terminology.

But it's also the place where He says it's finished. It's defeated for you and for me and for your young life and for your old life and for my life.

The sting, He says, as believers, He says, the sting of death is removed. So His work on our behalf where we're not with Him in that place of judgment and destruction, it affects your life and it affects my life at that most fundamental, absolutely deep level at the point of our character, at the point of our understanding of ourselves, of the future, of the universe in which we live, is absolutely fundamental that we recognize that on that cross, at that place, in that time, Jesus Christ did something significant without us because we simply would be burned alive there.

[18 : 40] It wouldn't have been something we could quote with. He did it in our place because of His great love for us. So it's not just the feel good factor of God with us and that's nice and it's lovely of Him, God, with us, but it's this reality, it's Jesus who is the Lord our salvation.

He has come for a specific choice, a specific reason, so that you and I, particularly, we have always a choice to make because there's a point where God has always said to us, maybe not in such tangible ways that we could understand this clearly, but He basically says, God, with us, are you with me?

That's what He says, are you on my side? What He's done on the cross is not just a kind of blank check for a universe that cares less, to blank check, it's the greatest gift of all but it needs to be accepted.

And so He says, are you with me? He says, you know, if you're not for me at that level, then you are against me. He says, in the kingdom of God, there are no fences to sit on.

We can't sit on the fence spiritually. If we're not for Him, if He's not Jesus our Lord our salvation and He's not with us, at that incarnational, close, significant relational level, yes, He's with us in terms of being part of the universe.

[20 : 10] There is no fence and He wants us to recognise that solemn truth and that challenging truth that we need to accept and recognise Him as our Redeemer.

And that pours out, therefore, into our understanding of discipleship. God with us, Emmanuel, in our discipleship. This is maybe for most of us where the rubber hits the road spiritually.

The great commission says, you know, go out and, you know, baptise Him in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, making disciples of them, discipleship. And He says, and lo, I am with you, even to the end of the age.

So He's with us in this task and in this life of discipleship in this remarkable way. And He is committed as the sovereign God, as the great God, as the Emmanuel God. He's committed to our discipleship. In other words, He's committed to make us like Himself. [21 : 12] He is not committed to give us what we want. He's committed to giving us what is good for us and what we need spiritually and to change us.

That is a fundamental and basic foundational truth because the minute you hit rocky water, the minute things are difficult for you as a young person, or maybe not such a, sometimes not such a young person, if you think God is only there to rub our backs and to give us marshmallows, then we will abandon Him.

God isn't with me anymore, but He's committed, as Lord, to our discipleship, to make us like Himself and to deal with the disease of sin which will break us and will take us away from Him and make us selfish and proud and ignorant and arrogant.

His power in discipleship is with us, molding us, transforming us. So He will be with you in your studies. He will be with you in your homes.

He will be with you in your relationships. He'll be with you in your choices. He'll be with you in your friendships, in your morality, in your sufferings, in your pain, in your rejections, in your loneliness.

[22 : 26] He's with you in all these things because He's committed to making you a disciple, to making you like Himself. And sometimes these things are what are needed to draw us to Himself.

I'll be with you even when you ignore me because I'm committed to draw you back. And He's with us even when we turn our back on Him and choose sin.

He will discipline us back into His kingdom, not into that relationship within the kingdom that He wants for us. He loves us.

Sometimes that will be sore. Sometimes that will be painful because discipline never is pleasant, is it, in the moment. But He loves us and He's committed to our discipleship and to dealing with the selfishness and the pride and the sin that makes us ugly and unhealthy and far from Him.

It's never a moment God with us when He is out with, and you're out with His work and His perseverance in your life as a Christian.

[23 : 33] However good or bad it may be. And that just brings me to the very last point, which is that with us, God with us, is exactly that, is Emmanuel.

Emmanuel is God. It is God who is with us. Can we please remember that? It's God who is with us. And that inevitably means that in our experience as Christians, there will be things that will be things we don't understand and things we can't comprehend because it's not a Christian friend who's with us.

It's not a Christian leader who's with us. It's not someone that we can comprehend fully. It is God who is with us.

And we need to remember that because He then knows the whole picture of our lives. We only see what we see around about us.

We only see the few minutes behind us in the, well, maybe a few years behind us in a few minutes, potentially what we want to do ahead of us. He sees the whole picture. He sees our lives beginning to end.

[24 : 41] He knows and He understands. He sees it all. He sees and has that purpose to transform us in a way that we possibly have no concept of. And He will sanctify us.

And it's good we don't know that. It's good we don't know everything that lies ahead and it's good that we battle sometimes to understand because it helps us to put our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ who says, I am with you.

I am God who I'm with you. And He's infinitely wiser than us. And when we question Him, when we think He's not there, it's because we can't see.

He sees the enemy. He sees what needs to happen in our lives. He will protect us. He will also allow things to happen that maybe we simply don't understand.

Because there will be times in your lives and maybe that is something that you're going through tonight where you think that He is absent. God not with us. God not with me. I don't feel God.

[25 : 51] I can't sense God. What does it mean God with me? He's nowhere to be seen. I wish He's not answering my prayers. You see you throw up your cry to heaven and say, God, what earth are you doing?

Where are you? It's these times. It's these times that we need to fall on our knees and worship Him.

We need to be weeping but recognizing and remembering it's God who is with us. And His promise is that I am with you right to the very end.

And you need that point to remember His forsakenness on the cross for you and I. He's the only one who can say, God, why have you forsaken me?

He's the only one. He's the only one who's ever experienced that relational God forsakenness so that we will never face that in our lives as Christians.

[26 : 57] That's the only genuine absence of God and He's experienced that so that we might know. You might not feel Him. You might not sense Him. You might feel far spiritually from Him.

But He's saying, I am with you. Hear that. Hear Him say, I am with you. God is with you tonight and is a foundation for your young Christian lives that is crucial to remember.

When you're plunged into failure, when you hit depression, when someone you love lets you down, you have a broken hearted relationship, you fail an exam, God forbid.

But when these things happen, do we walk away from God and say, well, He's nowhere to be seen? Where is He? Unless we know what Scripture says, unless we understand what He says, then we will go and leave Him to our own spiritual demise.

You know, in our lives, many people will say, I'll be with you. I'll not let you down. I'll always be there. People make these promises.

[28 : 11] I'll always be there. I'll not let you down. And very often, people will break these promises. They're not with us all the time. They love someone else.

They leave. They move away. They break the friendship. They break their promises. Or sometimes they die.

They always die. And then sometimes we're alone. And He says that is never the case with the Lord Jesus Christ.

And the foundation of your life is knowing that about the Son and then trusting yourself to Him. Not just for this life, but for eternity and that great Sam, the famous Sam we know, even though I go through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil for you are with me, the rod and staff that come from me.

That's a great foundation. And that's a great truth. And it will be with you into eternity. He will never leave us. The Son is on the throne of heaven with a flesh and blood body, with the marks of the nails in His hands and His feet.

[29 : 25] He will always be human. He will always bear humanity. He is always related to us at that fundamental, significant level and he's committed to us.

Please remember that in your lives. And I hope that the young people particularly can have a discussion along these lines. The questions are kind of fairly random in general.

They're not picking out the text, but they are looking at some of the themes and applying them. So please discuss that this evening if you're able to do so. First bow our heads in prayer.

Father of God, we ask and pray that you would bless your word to us and we thank you for it. And we ask that we would all know this foundation of God with us in the person of Jesus in a remarkable way as our Savior and Lord and that he would be given the praise and the honor and the glory for we ask it in His precious name.

Amen.