

Easter Worship Service

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, April 9, 2023
PASSAGES	Deuteronomy 6; Hebrews 2; Romans 6; 1 Corinthians 15; Colossians 2
MESSAGE	Begins at 0:58:52 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

If you do not know what story you are in, you can see the same evidence as everyone else and still not know what to do with it. The empty tomb is not a wiped slate that puts you back at zero on probation — it is Christ breaking the power of sin and the fear of death, disarming his own spiritual enemies, and gladly claiming a people who belong to him.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ The same passage can be read as a lesson in principles, a rally to succeed where Israel failed, or bare history. All of those miss the point unless Christ is at the center of the story.
- ◆ Freedom from sin's *power* is not the same as forgiveness of sin's *debt*. Christ accomplished both, and our feelings do not get a vote on either.
- ◆ A faith that expects to be truly free only at death is hoping in your death rather than his — as though Jesus forgot something on the cross.
- ◆ The world outside Christ is held in a lifelong slavery to the fear of death. His taking on real flesh was not a preamble to the battle; it was part of it.
- ◆ The cross and the tomb are not only about us. They are the king disarming rulers and authorities and putting them to open shame.
- ◆ What we now have of glory and power is the seed, not the plant. What is sown perishable is raised imperishable.

- ◆ The Father is more committed to your salvation than you are, and he is happy about it. The joy of the kingdom is his own joy, not a neutral atmosphere it happens to sit in.

► 0:58:52

Matt opened Easter morning with a story he still finds embarrassing. Back when he taught math, around 2008, he had a student named Jaquarius who had never once finished a school year with the teacher he started it with, and wanted to, just to see if he could. Months later, at a school assembly, the principal pulled Jaquarius out of the crowd for a demonstration: hold a twelve-pound weight up with your strong arm in total silence, then with your weak arm while everyone cheers. The point was how much a community's encouragement can do.

► 1:01:22

Matt had zoned out for the instructions. Watching the silence, he decided this kid needed someone in his corner — and, as he put it, he did not just break the silence, he pierced it: “Jaquarius, come on.” A colleague grabbed him. Every one of his students was in those bleachers.

Knowing what story you are in

► 1:02:44

“If you don’t know what story you’re in,” Matt said, “you see the same data everyone else does but you don’t respond properly.” Everyone in the gym saw the same boy holding the same weight. Only one person did not know what he was looking at. Scripture works the same way: you can read a passage accurately and still not know what to do with it, because you have lost the larger story it sits inside.

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children...”

DEUTERONOMY 6:4–9 ↗

One reader takes that as principles of spiritual education — teach your kids, pick a good school. Another takes it as a rally: the Israelites dropped this, let us pick it up and finally pull it off. A third takes it as history, interesting and inert. None of those is false, exactly. But the generation being addressed had watched the plagues, the sea part, the pillar of fire, and had breakfast handed to them every morning by God himself — and still rebelled. “Do you have to convince yourself there’s a higher power when he feeds you breakfast every morning?” The honest conclusion is not that we would have done better. It is that Christ has to be our hope.

► 1:06:25

Matt ran the same test on two more stories. Saul offers the sacrifice himself when Samuel is late and his army is melting away (1 Samuel 13:8–14) — a lesson in patience, or one more entry in a long ledger of human frailty that leaves us longing for a king who is faithful and steady. David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11) — a lesson in marital faithfulness, or the same pattern again: God’s faithfulness paired with human faithlessness, and a longing for a king who rules justly and shows himself blameless. We find that king in Christ.

What we think the empty tomb means

► 1:08:41

Then Easter. Romans 6:4 says we walk in newness of life. Newness of life — meaning what? Renewed vigor and enthusiasm, a Christian New Year’s? Matt remembered a Nutri-Grain commercial where a man bites in and becomes enthusiastic about everything. Or a metaphysical principle about investing yourself and getting returns.

The most common reading is more modest and more damaging. Christ brought us out of the negatives up to zero, and from there we have to force our way into the Father’s affection. “Basically a fresh start, a do-over,” Matt said — “but you’re on probation.” A lot of Christians live there.

What the passages actually say he did

► 1:11:06

“Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.”

HEBREWS 2:14–15 ↗

The world outside Christ is held under a slavery to the fear of death, and it takes many forms. Notice what breaks it: his taking on human flesh was not a hug, and not merely a preamble to the sacrifice. The incarnation was itself part of the battle he fought for his bride.

► 1:12:16

“For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.”

ROMANS 6:5–7 ↗

“Our feelings do not determine our reality,” Matt said. Plenty of Christians do not feel free from the power of sin. They are anyway — because it was not their feelings that accomplished it. Reading on in [Romans 6:8–11](#): Christ was raised and will never die again, so we are to consider ourselves right now dead to sin and alive to God. Our identity is wrapped up in his reality, not in our perspective on it.

Hoping in your own death

► 1:14:27

“And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins... If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.”

1 CORINTHIANS 15:17–19 ↗

Many of the Father’s own children believe they are still in their sin — that there is some hidden corner of the heart, some self-help book, one more or maybe two, that will finally destroy sin’s power. Jesus got them most of the way. The rest, they assume, arrives when they die. Matt named that for what it is: a faith rooted in your own death rather than his. “But we are not saved by our death. We are saved by his.”

► 1:17:05

“What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power.”

1 CORINTHIANS 15:42–43 ↗

An agricultural metaphor, and worth taking literally at the point where it bites: the glory and power we experience now are the seed, not the plant. And the calling is not ours to generate — Christ “saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace” (2 Timothy 1:9–10), the savior who abolished death and brought immortality to light. We do not possess that immortality outright. It is given.

He had other fish to fry

► 1:19:40

“...by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.”

COLOSSIANS 2:13-15 ↗

Here the frame widens past us. In the same event Christ is disarming his own spiritual enemies and shaming them publicly. [1 Corinthians 15:22-26](#) puts a timeline on it: Christ the firstfruits, then those who belong to him at his coming, then the end, when he hands the kingdom to the Father after destroying every rule and authority and power. He must reign until every enemy is under his feet.

We feel the destructive edge of those powers and usually blame a person — the atheist on television, someone’s religious cruelty. Matt’s point is that God has enemies beyond any of that, and the empty tomb is his victory over them, won for himself.

Not moralism, and not a Pokémon

► 1:23:28

The shrunken versions come easily. Christianity as doing better. Christianity as being a good person. Christianity as one attribute of Jesus extracted and imitated — he was kind, so be kind. “It’s not enough for us to just want to be like Jesus or embrace an aspect of him,” Matt said. We want to live not merely Christlike lives but lives inside Christ’s life.

“Christ is not like a Pokémon that we just conjure up when life gets weird or difficult, or some genie who’s here to fix our major problems and maybe minor if he has time.”

He is the high priest who lives forever, the prophet who revealed the Father perfectly because he and the Father are one, the king who reigns in victory. And if the Christian life is not actually the Holy Spirit living in us and working through us, Matt said plainly, then it is just not happening. “We’re way past fresh starts as a species.”

The part we forget: his joy

► 1:26:27

Then the turn the whole message had been building toward. He did this because he wanted to, and he is happy about it. That barely computes for us, Matt admitted, because we tend to define the Father's love as pitiful charity — he does not much like anything about you, but he is decent, and he made you, so he supposes he is stuck with you. That is nonsense.

► 1:29:45

His analogy was parenting, and he made no apology for how obvious it is. A child is, in pure scheduling terms, a net negative. What do they give back except that they belong to you? And it is wonderful. When they grow up and move out, he is not going to ask for checks or a maid-service payback program; when they have their own kids, he will want to help again, and he will love it. One reason God reveals himself to us as Father is that he lives for that.

“*You’re never going to be as good to him as he is to you. Will we just let him?*”

Praying for Hope Chapel that week, Matt saw God pursuing him like a tidal wave or a rainstorm so thick the difference did not matter — and he was running from it. That was grace. “He chases us down with his goodness and mercy.”

► 1:33:40

He closed with the parable of the talents ([Matthew 25:14–30](#)). Two servants double what they were given and hear “enter into the joy of your master.” The third buries his, because he knows what a hard man the master really is — and that, Matt said, is how most of us approach the Lord: *I know how awful you really are, and I have brought you some more chores I did this week*. That servant is called wicked and lazy. The alternative is confidence in the master's goodness.

The joy of the kingdom is not an atmospheric condition that happens to be present wherever the kingdom lands, as if there were a well of it under the soil, or the angels had assembled some for him. It is his joy. Jesus is pleased to give the kingdom ([Luke 12:32](#)); he wants his joy in his disciples and their joy full ([John 15:11](#)); it was for the joy set before him that he endured the cross ([Hebrews 12:2](#)). He is the heartbeat of the kingdom.

Matt ended by praying what Paul prays — that the Spirit would give power to grasp a love standing directly in front of us ([Ephesians 3:16–19](#)). That the love needs praying for at all tells you how far it is outside our ordinary reach.

“*He’s more eager for that to happen than you are to let it happen.*”

FOR FURTHER STUDY**SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- Deuteronomy 6:4–9
- 1 Samuel 13:8–14
- 2 Samuel 11
- Romans 6:4
- Hebrews 2:14–15
- Romans 6:5–7
- Romans 6:8–11
- 1 Corinthians 15:17–19
- 1 Corinthians 15:42–43
- 2 Timothy 1:9–10
- Colossians 2:13–15
- 1 Corinthians 15:22–26
- Matthew 25:14–30
- Luke 12:32
- John 15:11
- Hebrews 12:2
- Ephesians 3:16–19

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. When you read a passage like Deuteronomy 6, which of Matt's readings do you default to — principles, a rally to do better, or bare history? What does that default reveal about the story you think you are in?
2. Where have you been living as though the empty tomb got you to zero and the rest is probation?
3. Romans 6 says we are already free from sin's power whether or not we feel it. Where is the gap widest between what you feel and what Matt says is true?
4. The wicked servant buried his talent because he was certain the master was harsh. What have you buried because you assumed that about God?
5. If the Father is more eager for this relationship than you are, what would you stop doing this week — and what would you let him do instead?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Matt Ryniker is Hope Chapel's senior pastor — his own description of the job — and reports to the church's governing board, who he cheerfully calls his boss. He and his wife Mandy have been held up from Hope's own pulpit as an example to the congregation. He spent a stretch of his working life as a public school teacher, and he still teaches the parent dedication classes where families commit to raising their children to follow Jesus — a theme that runs straight into this message.

Watch the full message:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iN74cwlxW5U&t=3532s>

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.