

God Speaks, Part 1 (Because of the Gospel)

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, May 14, 2023
PASSAGES	1 Corinthians 12; Psalm 115; Deuteronomy 4; Ezekiel 12; 1 Samuel 15; Matthew 13; Isaiah 55; Hebrews 3
MESSAGE	Begins at 0:57:00 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

God speaks — to everyone, all the time, and he is very good at it. The problem has never been that he is hard to hear; it is that we hand ourselves over to gods we invented, and we become like them: eyes that do not see, ears that do not hear. What he asks for is not a technique but tilled soil.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ Before any teaching on the gifts, a church needs a shared commitment to telling the truth. Say what you think God said, and say it as what it actually was — a dream, an impression, a thought — not dressed up as “thus saith the Lord.”
- ◆ A spectacular experience does not soften a heart. Judas cast out demons. Solomon was given wisdom directly by God and still collected the horses, the gold and the wives Deuteronomy had warned a king against.
- ◆ The contrast running through 1 Corinthians 12 and Psalm 115 is between idols that cannot speak and a God so alive he enables speech in other people.
- ◆ Idolatry is not only Baal and Molech. Worshiping the true God in a shape we invented — a genie, a vending machine, a distant taskmaster with no love in him — is the version most of us are actually susceptible to.
- ◆ “Those who make them become like them.” Whatever you trust, you start to resemble. Trust something deaf and you go deaf.

- ◆ Rebellion produces the same result as outright idolatry: a heart that has closed its own eyes. Jesus' diagnosis in Matthew 13 ends not in a curse but in a wish — if they would turn, I would heal them.
- ◆ God does not need us to guard his word or make it land. Isaiah 55 says it does not come back empty. Our job is the soil, not the harvest.
- ◆ If you are anxious that you are not hearing him, that hunger is itself the evidence. Dead people do not get hungry.

► 1:00:53

This was the second Sunday of a run through 1 Corinthians 12–14, and Matt had deliberately not started with prophecy. Before getting to how God speaks through people, he wanted the room settled on something prior: that God speaks at all, that he is good at it, and that the static is ours.

1. First, a house rule about telling the truth

► 1:02:05

Matt named the pastoral problem plainly. “It will be very hard for me as a senior pastor to navigate and shepherd an environment in which I’m not confident that we’re being real with each other.” Hence his standing discouragement of the phrase *thus saith the Lord*. Say what you think God said to you. If it was a dream, say it was a dream, and say you don’t know the interpretation. It will sound less authoritative and less spiritual. It will also be true.

“I like the authenticity,” he said. “As we discern with each other what God is saying to us, a core principle has to be truth-telling.”

2. The voice on the curving street

► 1:03:14

Then a story from high school, back when he was first sensing a call to ministry. He was dating a girl who kept getting locked out of her house, so he carried three or four copies of her key in his wallet and handed one over whenever it happened. One evening they argued in the car, she got out, slammed the door, and he peeled off without waiting to see whether she could get in.

► 1:05:43

Fifteen seconds later, around a bend on a quiet suburban street, a car came fast alongside him and the driver shouted four words: *She can't get in*. He looked back. There was no car. He kept driving anyway. She was, of course, locked out.

He does not claim to know what that was. An angel, maybe. A drunk driver yelling something uncanny in the suburbs of San Antonio, possibly. The point he drew from it is the one that matters: “Many people assume that if they hear the voice of God, the spectacle of it will cause their heart to be soft automatically. I just don’t think that’s true.”

3. Power experiences do not fix hearts

► 1:07:40

Judas was in the group that came back from the mission reporting that demons had submitted and the sick had been healed (Luke 10:17–20). Nobody in the account is exempted. The miracles were real and they did not save him. “A power experience is not the cure-all that our charismatic brothers often present it as being,” Matt said. “The inner working of the heart is still so important.”

► 1:08:46

Solomon makes the same case with more irony. Deuteronomy had told Israel in advance what their future king must not do: not amass horses, not go back to Egypt for more of them, not multiply wives, not pile up silver and gold (Deuteronomy 17:16–17). Solomon heard from God directly, asked well, and was answered generously — and then 1 Kings 10 reads like a checklist of the warnings, Egyptian horses included. “Out of all these guys from the line of Judah, there was only ever one son of David that was trustworthy with riches and power and authority.” Which is where the whole subject is pointed: the Spirit of truth comes to bear witness about Jesus. Gifts that do not do that have lost the plot.

4. Mute idols, and a God who makes people talk

► 1:11:35

Back to the text. Paul does not want the Corinthians uninformed about spiritual gifts, and the first thing he puts in front of them is a contrast: they were once led astray to mute idols, and now no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit. Matt’s reading: the idols cannot even speak for themselves, while the Spirit of God is so alive that he puts speech in the mouths of other people.

► 1:13:28

That same contrast is the whole argument of Psalm 115, which opens by refusing the glory and then answers the nations' taunt — *where is your God?* A carved statue is easy to point at. An empty temple looks like an absence.

“Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell. They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; and they do not make a sound in their throat. Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them.”

PSALM 115:4–8 ↗

5. You become like what you trust

► 1:16:14

Verse 8 is the hinge, and Matt slowed down on it. What is it like to become like an idol? It looks impressive and it perceives nothing. So idolatry produces spiritual blindness and deafness — which is very likely where Jesus got the language of eyes to see and ears to hear that he uses again and again.

► 1:18:06

The obvious objection is that none of us pass a statue of Baal on the way to work. Matt went to Deuteronomy 4:15–16 for the answer: the warning there is not about a fertility goddess, it is about making an image of Yahweh himself. They had heard his voice out of the fire and had seen no form. “We can worship God in name only,” Matt said, “by worshiping a God that we ourselves have constructed” — a false father, a genie version of Jesus, a vending machine with levers and buttons, a harsh overlord with no love in his heart for you. His phrase for it was a tiki Jesus. And the danger is not abstract: worship something deaf long enough and you go deaf. “I don’t want to trust in a false father or a tiki Jesus and become blind myself to the true and living God.”

6. Rebellion does the same work as idolatry

► 1:19:55

Ezekiel is given a congregation described exactly this way — a rebellious house with eyes to see that see not, and ears to hear that hear not. Not a God who has stopped speaking. A people who have stopped receiving. “The problem is on our end,” Matt said — “not that he’s not good at talking. The problem is that we shut him out. And how do we shut him out? With our spiritual blindness and our deafness that we have put on ourselves through our rebellion.”

► 1:20:29

Then Saul, Israel's first king, who did not quite do what the Lord asked — and got Samuel's answer to a question nobody had dared ask out loud.

“Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry.”

1 SAMUEL 15:22-23 ↗

Matt admitted he had to look up *presumption*. The first two glosses he found behind the Hebrew were insubordination and stubbornness. Which puts rebellion and idolatry in the same category with the same outcome: “turning from God, either by just outright embracing this idolatry or by walking in rebellion against the true God — basically the same result, which leads us to being spiritually blind and deaf, just like the fake gods that we worship.” He conceded the material was running dark. “But it’ll get brighter.”

7. “And I would heal them”

► 1:22:07

Jesus picks the theme up in Matthew 13, this time quoting [Isaiah 6:9-10](#).

“You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive. For this people’s heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.”

MATTHEW 13:14-15 ↗

Read it slowly and the tone changes. “This isn’t like a *you displeased the Lord on Monday, so he cursed you on Tuesday and you can’t hear, and he doesn’t want you to hear*,” Matt said. “He’s saying they would turn — if they would open their eyes and turn to me, I would heal them. I want to heal them. He doesn’t want us in this state.” *Their eyes they have closed*. It is a heart condition, self-administered, and the sentence ends with God wanting to heal it.

► 1:23:10

Which means the silence is never on his side of it. “The voice of the Lord is present. God’s Spirit is with us, and he speaks all the time — to believers, unbelievers, people who believe in the gifts of the Spirit and people who don’t. He’s speaking.” Then the turn: [blessed are your eyes, for they see](#). What the

disciples saw that prophets and righteous people had longed to see was the Lord of glory standing right in front of them — the long-expected Messiah, God come to visit his people. The crowd was looking at the same man. “It wasn’t because Jesus wasn’t revealing himself.” Same revelation, different reception.

8. None of this is an argument against prophecy

► 1:24:30

Matt stopped to make sure the drift of an hour on blindness had not been misheard. “I want us to experience prophetic words. I really do. I don’t want to sound like I’m poo-pooing it — I don’t know if that’s an appropriate terminology.” Paul, after all, tells the church to earnestly desire to prophesy. The caution is about what the gift is for: “the most important thing is that the Spirit is revealing Jesus” — and what we block is that, usually not with Baal or Molech but with presumption, vanity, or the pursuit of a God who is not real.

► 1:25:52

So he went back to where he started. Psalm 115 refuses the glory, takes the nations’ taunt, and answers it flatly: our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases. “He’s real. He’s not a puppet. He’s been real this whole time, and he’s fully capable of revealing himself — and he is revealed fully and truly in Jesus Christ. Who knows what God is like? God does.” Which is why self-revelation is his job and not our achievement: “We should rely on God to reveal himself. That’s one of our main joys.”

9. He is very good at talking

► 1:28:04

We are, Matt said, the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth — not a mute idol. “He doesn’t need our food offerings to eat. He doesn’t need our prayers like a battery pack — like he gets low, and then we pray, and then he gets back up.” He is a shepherd pursuing a bride, and “he’s going to get his bride no matter what,” however incompetent we are. Hearing him is not an athletic event: “It’s not a strain, like, how much can I focus my breathing so that I hear the voice of God.”

“So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”

ISAIAH 55:10–11 ↗

Which relieves us of a job we were never given. “I don’t think we need to strain to make sure that God’s prophetic words come and happen and are fulfilled. He’s so competent. He knows how to talk. When

he sends his word, he knows how to accomplish it.” That leaves exactly one assignment. “As far as prophetic stuff goes, our top priority would be the soil of our heart, to receive that word when it does come” — because the obstruction is domestic: “our biggest shield against hearing it is our own stubbornness, our own spiritual pride, our own blindness.” And it is all one piece — the works Jesus did bear witness to him, and his sheep hear his voice. Prophetic ministry, he added, is not a spiritual news cycle — not Twitter, not getting ahead of the curve, not accumulating facts or spiritual-person points. “The target is knowing him, making him known, so that he can be loved for who he really is.”

10. Dead people don’t get hungry

► 1:31:56

“Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today,’ that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”

HEBREWS 3:12–13 ↗

An encouragement, he called it — keep the heart soft, because he is speaking, and if you belong to him you have already heard the voice.

The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. “It was that voice that led you to Jesus the very first time.”

► 1:32:29

Two classroom stories, told back to back for the contrast. Around 2010, newly a youth pastor here, he got his first request from someone who wanted to meet with a pastor. He was thrilled — Bible ready, praying beforehand. The young man arrived with a backpack, which Matt assumed held a Bible, unzipped it, asked “you used to be a math teacher, right?” and pulled out a trigonometry textbook.

► 1:33:32

Back when he was actually teaching, a student did the exact opposite. Matt assumed the question would be about the unit circle. It was: *How do I know I’m a Christian?* The boy pushed on it — the Spirit testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children, fine, but how do I know that happened to me, and not that I’m deceiving myself? Matt asked him to say more. “Well, I want to be — I’m hungry for God. I just don’t know if I’m doing it right.”

His answer was to hand the question back as evidence. “Dude, you’re hungry for God and you want to belong to him. Dead people don’t thirst. Dead people don’t have hunger. Dead people don’t have this longing. Where do you think you even got this longing?”

► 1:34:33

He then said out loud what he guessed half the room was thinking: *this all sounds pretty bad, I'm going to be spiritually blind and it's my fault*. "If you're sitting there thinking I'm stressed out now — I'm sweating, because I don't know, am I hearing the voice of the Lord, am I blocking him out — do you long for that? Do you want to hear his voice?" And if the thought is *I wouldn't speak to me if I were him, given everything I've just done*, the answer is the same one Jesus gave in Matthew 13. "The silence was on our end, not his. He's always speaking. He wants that more than you."

Where it landed

► 1:37:26

Four sentences, in his own numbering. Pursue the voice of the Spirit. The reason we can listen is that he is good at speaking. The obstacle is not his silence but our rebellion. And we do not have to stay there — we can humbly open ourselves to him and his ministry, "because when he ministers, he knows what he's doing." Then the ask, stated as an ask: "It's a call for us all to humbly repent and lay down our vanities and presumptions, and let him do the thing that he's best at in our lives — to, alongside of us, till the soil of our hearts." The receiving is the point, and the substance of what gets received is Jesus.

He had closed on the parable of the sower, where the diverging outcomes turn on the soil — the rocks, the weeds, the shallow depth. And on the bridegroom, a metaphor he lost hold of mid-sentence and cheerfully abandoned: God is dressed and ready for his bride; we are the ones who forgot, got distracted, puttering around the house. "Don't get the impression that you're the one with all the longing and he's aloof. That is totally backwards. He's the one with all the longing, and we're the ones that are slow on the uptake."

► 1:38:45

The Heart Ministry teams came forward, and he prayed the message back as a request: "God, thank you for today. We ask that your Holy Spirit would till the soil of our hearts — help us to walk humbly and openly before you, with receptive hearts to hear, and eyes that are sensitive to see what you're doing." Part two, on prophetic words, comes next week.

FOR FURTHER STUDY**SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- [Luke 10:17–20](#)
- [Deuteronomy 17:16–17](#)
- [1 Kings 10](#)
- [John 15:26](#)
- [1 Corinthians 12:1–3](#)
- [Psalm 115:1](#)
- [Psalm 115:4–8](#)
- [Deuteronomy 4:15–16](#)
- [Ezekiel 12:1–2](#)
- [1 Samuel 15:22–23](#)
- [Isaiah 6:9–10](#)
- [Matthew 13:14–15](#)
- [Matthew 13:16–17](#)
- [1 Corinthians 14:39](#)
- [Psalm 115:2–3](#)
- [1 Timothy 3:15](#)
- [Isaiah 55:10–11](#)
- [John 10:25–27](#)
- [Hebrews 3:12–13](#)
- [Romans 8:16](#)
- [Matthew 13:3–9](#)

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Matt asks people to say plainly what they think God said rather than dressing it up. What makes that harder than it sounds, and what would change in this group if we all did it?
2. He argued that a dramatic experience does not soften a heart. Have you ever seen or received something remarkable from God and not been changed by it? What was going on underneath?
3. Psalm 115 says we become like what we trust. What have you been trusting lately, and what has it been making you into?
4. Describe your tiki Jesus — the version of God you slip into imagining when you are not paying attention. Where did that picture come from, and where does Scripture contradict it?
5. If God is already speaking and the soil is our part, what is one specific thing you will do this week to till it?

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=TE_S2-bvtCk&t=3420s

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.