

Why We Long for His Return (Because of the Gospel)

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, July 9, 2023
PASSAGES	1 Corinthians 15; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Philippians 1:21-24; Revelation 20:11-15; Luke 16:19-31; Luke 20:34-38; Acts 2:25-31
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:04:58 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

The common assumption — you die, you become a ghost, you are settled — quietly deletes something Paul treats as load-bearing. There is still a day coming: Christ returns, the dead are raised bodily, the grave is emptied and death itself is destroyed. Longing for that day is not a decorative Christian sentiment. It is the thing that makes our labor now make sense.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ The creed the church has confessed for seventeen centuries pairs Christ's return with judgment, and the resurrection of the dead with the life of the world to come. None of the four is optional.
- ◆ The Old Testament speaks of the grave — Sheol — as a real realm that takes everyone, righteous and wicked alike, and it never treats death as a natural part of life. It treats death as an enemy.
- ◆ Christ went into that realm and did not stay. Peter's argument at Pentecost is that David is still in his tomb, so David must have been writing about someone else.
- ◆ If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ was not raised either — Paul ties the two so tightly that deleting ours deletes his, and with it the forgiveness we preach.
- ◆ To be dead in Christ is, in Paul's own word, far better than fruitful ministry here. It is still not the fullness. There is more coming, and it comes at his appearing.
- ◆ Resurrection is not the default setting of being human. It belongs to those who belong to Christ, which is why we cling to him and not to our good record.

- ◆ On that day every costly, foolish-looking thing you ever gave him will finally make sense, because you will see the world as it actually should have been all along.

► 1:04:58

Matt opened with a question instead of an outline. The church is working through 1 Corinthians and has arrived at chapter 15, and chapter 15 does not make much sense without knowing why Christians long for Jesus to come back — and once chapter 15 does make sense, the longing follows. The obstacle is the air we breathe. Broadly, our society believes that when you die you are instantly a ghost in heaven or hell, and that is the end of the story. He wanted to put something older back in front of us.

1. The creed says something stranger

► 1:06:47

From the Nicene Creed, on Christ: he rose on the third day, ascended, is seated at the right hand of the Father, “and he will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.” Then, on the Spirit: “we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.” Two pairs, and Matt noted how tightly each pair binds. *Look for* does not mean searching for a lost object. It means awaiting, expecting.

► 1:08:36

So he put the basic questions on the table. If you simply die and go to heaven, why is Jesus bothering to come back physically at all? Why is there going to be a resurrection of the dead if everything is already fine? And the one people actually carry around: where are people when they die?

2. Sheol — the Old Testament’s word for the grave

► 1:09:44

Jacob, told that Joseph has been killed, says he will go down to Sheol mourning his son ([Genesis 37:35](#)). Hannah’s song pairs it plainly: the LORD kills and brings to life, brings down to Sheol and raises up ([1 Samuel 2:6](#)). The psalmists say things that can sound wrong to us — “in Sheol who will give you praise?” and “the dead do not praise the LORD”. Proverbs makes it the end of the road that looked right ([Proverbs 14:12](#)) and the appetite that is never satisfied, because there are always more people and they always keep coming ([Proverbs 27:20](#)). Hezekiah, sick, says he is consigned to its gates ([Isaiah 38:10–11](#)); Jonah, thrown overboard and swallowed, cries out “out of the

belly of Sheol” (Jonah 2:2). When Greek-speaking Jews translated Sheol, the word they reached for was Hades.

3. Death is not just part of living

► 1:13:20

Death overtakes everyone, but Scripture never shrugs at it the way Forrest Gump’s mother does. It is an enemy. God did not make people in order to kill them. What Adam lost was not God’s presence — God was never confined to the garden — but access to the tree of life (Genesis 3:22–24). And Adam is not merely the first of us; his wife came from him too. “He’s like a Russian nesting doll of all humanity,” Matt said. When he was put out, we all were.

► 1:14:23

Which is why Christ is presented as a rescuer from that realm rather than a teacher about it. Preaching after Pentecost, Peter quotes David —

“you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption” — and then makes the obvious point: David is dead, and his tomb is still here. Open source, as Matt put it. David was a prophet, and he was speaking of the resurrection of the Christ, who went into the realm of the dead and was not held there the way the rest of us would have been. The Greek liturgies pressed the image hard: Christ ransacking Hades, forcing it to give up what it had hoarded. “It’s almost like Christ fired Hades and took over his job.”

4. Two men, both dead, not in the same condition

► 1:16:52

The rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31) shows how Jews of Jesus’ day could speak of one realm of the dead holding two very different experiences. Matt was careful not to over-read a parable, but he pointed out the tells that neither man is in a final state: both are buried and neither is raised, and the rich man is appealing about relatives who are still alive. Above all, he is in Hades — and Hades, in the end, does not stay occupied.

5. Death and Hades are emptied

► 1:18:47

At the great white throne the books are opened, and one of them is the Book of Life — which, Matt said, trumps the others, because mercy triumphs over judgment (Revelation 20:11–12). Then comes the detail he wanted:

“And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire.”

REVELATION 20:13–14 ↗

Emptied, then abolished. Death and Hades appear here almost as figures — a knight and his squire — and they are not merely retired. They are ended.

6. Far better, and still not the end

► 1:22:19

So what is it like to be dead in Christ now? Paul says he is torn:

“my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better” — better than fruitful labor for the churches he loves. Matt believes that, and more than we can picture. But being with Christ in death is not the same thing as the new heavens and new earth after the dead are raised. Dying does not skip steps.

► 1:23:17

Paul says as much to the Thessalonians, comforting people who are grieving (1 Thessalonians 4:13–14). “Fallen asleep” is a euphemism, Matt argued, not a description of a nap — it is chosen because sleepers get up:

“For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.”

1 THESSALONIANS 4:16–17 ↗

The trumpet is the old signal of God making himself known to Israel. And the clouds are not a destination with harps in it — Matt reads it as becoming his entourage as he comes to establish his kingdom. What Paul holds out to the bereaved is a reunion of everyone at once, at a moment that is pivotal rather than incidental.

7. Hold fast — and what is at stake

► 1:26:56

Chapter 15 opens and closes with the same instruction, hold fast, and between them Paul first restates the gospel he delivered as of first importance: Christ died for our sins, was buried, was raised on the third day, and appeared — to Cephas, to the twelve, to more than five hundred at once, most of whom were still alive to be asked (1 Corinthians 15:1–8).

► 1:28:47

Then the argument turns hard.

If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised — and if he has not been raised, the preaching is empty, the faith is empty, and we are misrepresenting God. Paul keeps going: you are still in your sins, those who have fallen asleep have perished, and we are of all people most to be pitied. “We are actually hidden in Christ, mysteriously, like a Trojan horse,” Matt said. “His death and resurrection are ours. But if ours isn’t, then his wasn’t.” That is why quietly settling for ghosts in paradise is not a small edit. Drop that ingredient, and Paul says the faith is in vain.

8. Firstfruits, the last Adam, the last enemy

► 1:31:21

“But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.”

1 CORINTHIANS 15:20–23 ↗

Matt had the verse put back on the screen so the room could sit on four words: *at his coming*. Not each of us privately, on our own schedule. One man in whom we all die, another in whom we are all made alive — and the making alive is dated to his appearing. “We don’t long for his coming just randomly,” he said, “like it’s the good Christian thing to do, like voting.”

► 1:34:47

“For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.”

1 CORINTHIANS 15:24–26 ↗

This is the center of the chapter, and Matt treated it that way — the rulers and authorities being subjected are not mayors and presidents but everything that governs the world we are subject to, with death last in the line. Then the layers run back out the way they came in: the kingdom handed to the Father, the Son subjected to him who put all things under him, “that God may be all in all.” He compared the satisfaction of it to the climax of an action movie and then said the comparison fails: “God’s going to have to give you steroids just to take it in. It’s going to melt your face. I don’t know what that means, sorry.”

9. Sown perishable, raised imperishable

► 1:39:16

What is sown perishable is raised imperishable; sown in dishonor, raised in glory; sown a natural body, raised a spiritual body (1 Corinthians 15:42–44). Matt underlined that Paul is contrasting a body with a body, not a body with a ghost. As we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will bear the image of the man of heaven (1 Corinthians 15:47–49). And because flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom, even those still alive at his coming must be changed — the seed still has to go into the ground (1 Corinthians 15:50–52).

“Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

1 CORINTHIANS 15:54–57 ↗

► 1:42:51

Death held a monopoly on everyone except Enoch and Elijah, so the line reads like a taunt. “But that taunt is a victory cry for our Lord,” Matt said — we will be watching him win, and glad for him. Then the chapter lands where it started:

be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain.

10. Sons of the resurrection

► 1:43:19

Matt's last passage was the Sadducees' trick question about the woman widowed by seven brothers (Luke 20:34–38). Jesus answers about “those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead” — who cannot die anymore, because they are sons of the resurrection. Then he proves the resurrection from the burning bush: God calls himself the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and he is not God of the dead but of the living.

Matt drew the uncomfortable edge of it out plainly. Jesus does not describe attaining that age as automatic. Resurrection into glory is an inheritance, and it belongs to those who belong to Christ. “We don't just get in line like it's Schlitterbahn,” he said. “We go to Christ. He is our life. He is our resurrection.”

11. So why long for it

► 1:48:16

Because it is true, first, and that is reason enough. But Matt gave one more, and it was the pastoral point the whole morning had been building toward. We pour ourselves out, sometimes to the edge of despair, and ask what the point was. On that day, when all rule and authority is made subject to him and his glory is finally visible, the accounting will change.

► 1:48:46

“In that day, when you see his beauty, you will be so grateful for every ounce of anything you ever gave him.” The costly things, the things that made you look foolish, the opportunities you lost — you will see the world the way it should have been all along, and it will make sense of the burden you are carrying right now. Longing for his return, Matt said, is a Christian discipline. He closed the way the church has always closed this prayer: come, Lord Jesus.

FOR FURTHER STUDY**SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- [Genesis 37:35](#)
- [1 Samuel 2:6](#)
- [Psalm 6:5](#)
- [Psalm 115:17](#)
- [Proverbs 14:12](#)
- [Proverbs 27:20](#)
- [Isaiah 38:10–11](#)
- [Jonah 2:2](#)
- [Genesis 3:22–24](#)
- [Acts 2:25–31](#)
- [Luke 16:19–31](#)
- [Revelation 20:11–12](#)
- [Revelation 20:13–14](#)
- [Philippians 1:21–24](#)
- [1 Thessalonians 4:13–14](#)
- [1 Thessalonians 4:16–17](#)
- [1 Corinthians 15:1–8](#)
- [1 Corinthians 15:12–14](#)
- [1 Corinthians 15:17–19](#)
- [1 Corinthians 15:20–23](#)
- [1 Corinthians 15:24–26](#)
- [1 Corinthians 15:28](#)
- [1 Corinthians 15:42–44](#)
- [1 Corinthians 15:47–49](#)
- [1 Corinthians 15:50–52](#)
- [1 Corinthians 15:54–57](#)
- [1 Corinthians 15:58](#)
- [Luke 20:34–38](#)

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. What did you actually picture happening after death before this message, and where did that picture come from?
2. The Old Testament calls death an enemy rather than a natural part of life. How does that change the way you grieve, or the way you sit with someone who is grieving?
3. Paul says that if there is no resurrection of the dead, our faith is in vain. Why is he unwilling to let that one go, when we let it go so easily?
4. Matt said that being with Christ in death is far better and still not the fullness. What is it about a bodily resurrection that we are tempted to think we can do without?
5. If every costly thing you ever gave him will make sense on that day, what are you carrying this week that you would carry differently because of 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=V9LX20gc3_Y&t=3898s

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.