

RED LETTER

Red Letter “Christianity” (Because of the Gospel)

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, July 16, 2023
PASSAGES	1 Corinthians 1:11-17; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4; Mark 4:34; Acts 20:35; John 21:24-25; Acts 9:13-15; James 2:19; John 5:39-40
MESSAGE	Begins at 0:59:04 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

There is a version of Christianity that keeps the words of Jesus and quietly discards the men who wrote them down. Matt called it red letter Christianity, and his objection is not that it is disrespectful to Paul. It is that a Jesus you have isolated is a Jesus you have drawn — which makes you the author. Christ arranged things deliberately so that we have to come to him through the disciples who were with him, on his terms rather than ours.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ You can claim to follow Christ alone in a way that is itself divisive. That was one of the factions in Corinth, and Paul listed it alongside the rest.
- ◆ Jesus explained his parables privately, to one identifiable group. That was not secrecy for its own sake — it built a verifiable record, so that anyone claiming a private revelation could be checked against the twelve.
- ◆ Paul quotes a saying of Jesus that appears in none of the four gospels. The apostles had access to far more than we have, and to the plain meaning of it.
- ◆ The New Testament tells us not only what Jesus did but what it meant. Fact and meaning are both part of the gospel Paul says he received and passed on.

- ◆ Remaining under the authority of Scripture does not compete with being under the authority of Jesus. It is how that authority reaches us.
- ◆ The slow fade rarely begins with something obviously wrong. Isolation, a privatized Jesus, and a purely intellectual faith are the early steps.
- ◆ Deep relationship in the church is a risk, because being known is a risk. Matt thinks it is worth it and has decided to put his own skin in the game.

► 0:59:04

Matt came to the red letters by way of the living room. Before he said a word about Paul, he spent ten minutes on why a person needs other people — and the two halves of the message turn out to be the same point looked at from opposite ends.

1. Transformative community, and the risk it costs

► 0:59:38

New families have joined Hope Chapel over the summer, and returning ones have come back. What Matt said he is after is not attendance but transformative community — and he named the price up front. “The life of Christ that I want to see lived out among us is full and rich and involves risk. One big risk is relational depth. I say that’s a risk because in order to establish deep connection we have to be known, and that is not always easy to do.”

► 1:00:54

He grounded it in how we are made. God places the lonely in families for a reason, and Jesus promised that whoever loses a brother or sister for his sake receives them back a hundredfold. Against that, Matt set the world we actually live in: oddly dehumanizing, and fluent in substitutes. “I have a close relationship with my phone,” he admitted. “It might be satisfying a bit, but is that the relational depth God wants for me?” The sharper charge was that relationship itself has been turned into something to collect. “You are not a product. You are not a commodity. You are a brother or a sister.”

► 1:04:07

He anticipated the reply. People say: I don’t need community, I need Jesus. “True, you need Jesus. But you also need water, food. There are certain ways he made us. Pray all you want, bro, but take a drink of water too.” So he has been praying for the Holy Spirit to work like a telephone operator — mature saints connected to newer believers, people who need a father or mother figure connected to someone willing to mentor. And rather than wait to be pursued, he is starting a small group about leading small groups: an open-source leadership training group that functions as a real group while he narrates why

he does what he does. Stay a year, stay a semester, stay two weeks. "If you want to join and then take everyone with you and start a group without me, that's fine. I will be left with my thoughts that day."

2. What red letter Christianity is

► 1:08:15

Some Bibles print the words of Jesus in red. Red letter Christianity is the movement that treats those words as the whole canon — following Jesus while declining to follow Peter or Paul. Where an apostle's letter cuts against a life, it gets dropped: I am not a disciple of Peter, I am a disciple of Christ. Matt has a neighbor whose front-yard sign reads *we follow the Lord, not Paul*, with the Greek for "another" printed large. "That's the first thing these people want me to know about them." The same move is everywhere online, and not only from believers — Matt noted how readily Jesus gets used as a weapon against Christians.

► 1:13:32

Why is it attractive? It sounds spiritual. The epistles prick, and deleting them is easier than obeying them. And Jesus spoke so often in parables that his words can be molded. That is the real damage: "Essentially at that point you have made a cartoon Jesus, and since we're the creator of that cartoon Jesus, we're actually the ones in charge. And that also feels good."

3. "Is Christ divided?"

► 1:09:10

Hope Chapel has been working through 1 Corinthians, and Matt doubled back to the first chapter, because Corinth had this faction already.

"For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. What I mean is that each one of you says, 'I follow Paul,' or 'I follow Apollos,' or 'I follow Cephas,' or 'I follow Christ.' Is Christ divided?"

1 CORINTHIANS 1:11-13 ↗

Matt pressed on the question. It is not about a Jesus missing an arm. It is asking whether Christ can be had separately from the men he sent. You can be the most quarrelsome person in the room while flying a Christ-only flag. He also enjoyed Paul's very human accounting a few verses later — Crispus, Gaius, then the household of Stephanas, then "beyond that I do not know whether I baptized anyone else".

4. The gospel Paul received

► 1:14:52

If Christianity were a new lifestyle, a twelve-step program or a magnetic personality, the red letters would be enough. So Matt went to the core statement of the faith.

“Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you... For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.”

1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-4 ↗

► 1:16:13

Two words carried the weight. *Received* — from Jesus, who plucked Paul out of his depravity, and from the apostles, who in [Galatians](#) gave him the right hand of fellowship. And the phrase *for our sins*: “Christ died is a fact. For our sins is the meaning.” The letters of Paul, Peter, John, Jude, James and Luke do not merely report what Jesus did; they tell us what it meant. Strip them out and you keep the events and lose the gospel.

5. Why Jesus explained everything in private

► 1:18:20

“He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything.”

MARK 4:34 ↗

► 1:19:40

We are Jesus’ disciples, but we were not in that room, and Matt acknowledged that can sting. Shouldn’t he have rented billboards? Then he argued the opposite: it was the shrewdest possible arrangement. Jesus moved constantly — the disciples sometimes could not find him — so anyone at all could have surfaced later claiming a private word. “People could have said any kind of wacky stuff, and then they would put a Jesus sticker on it to give it some gravitas.” How do you fight that? You make it public that the explanations went to twelve identifiable men, who can then say: no, he did not say that. “The Inner Circle was like a supreme court on what Jesus was actually like or not like. And that Supreme Court

fully endorsed Paul — and then that group wrote the New Testament.” Which yields the test: when a Jesus-only reading will not sit with the rest of the New Testament, we are the ones who are wrong.

6. A saying that is in no gospel

► 1:22:22

“...remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

ACTS 20:35 ↗

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John do not contain that line. Paul had it anyway, because there was a body of everything Jesus said and did, explained plainly, and he had been brought into it.

► 1:22:56

So the familiar objection collapses. Paul teaches on spiritual gifts in the local church; Jesus never mentioned that. How do you know. Paul gets uncomfortably specific about sexual purity; Jesus never said that. How do you know. Paul and Peter both handle judgment and church discipline; Jesus wouldn’t have. How do you know. “If these guys are explaining these things in that level of detail, we know Jesus did teach that. It might be odd to picture Jesus teaching on gifts of the Spirit, and yet that is exactly what we should assume.”

► 1:24:17

“Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.”

JOHN 21:24–25 ↗

Matt’s reading of that: the gospels are a deliberate selection, not an archive. Jesus put a filter in place that he himself designed, so that we come to him on his terms. He added a wry aside — if Jesus had written a gospel in his own hand, we would be kissing the book. “Deep down you might feel like, oh, that’s tough. But we want it that way. Our terms often look good, but they’re dumb. The way he does things may hurt at first, but it’s healing.” Hence the sentence the whole message had been building toward: remaining under the authority of Scripture does not compete with being under the authority of Jesus. It is an essential part of it.

7. The slow fade

► 1:26:08

Here Matt stopped and said he was pausing the sermon. He has watched people close to him do what he calls the slow fade: a life with the fingerprints of the Holy Spirit all over it, and then — not in a day — a cooling, a distance, a little animosity, a drift toward spiritual death. “The first step doesn’t always feel obviously wrong. Maybe it’s just tolerating a little bit of an agreement with the devil.” He named three such first steps. Isolation, which is why faith has to be lived in community: “We don’t want to be the magisterium and the pope and the presbytery all to ourselves.” Red letter Christianity, because an isolated Christ is so easily distorted. And intellectualizing faith — having the right opinions.

► 1:28:19

“You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe — and shudder.”

JAMES 2:19 ↗

Demons can quote Scripture at us; we watched the devil do it to Jesus in the wilderness. Matt’s concern was the believer who can teach the Bible, has memorized a great deal of it, and camps there permanently.

► 1:29:01

“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life, and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.”

JOHN 5:39–40 ↗

“When Jesus pokes us and prods us, it is to give us life. He wants that for us.”

8. Who hired Paul

► 1:30:22

Plenty of men on the internet will tell you what the real Jesus was like. Matt offered a source with better standing. Ananias is told to go to the man who has been destroying the church and arrives holding warrants from the chief priests, and he says so plainly (Acts 9:13–14).

"But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.'"

ACTS 9:15 ↗

Jesus hired him. And if the reply is that this only comes to us from Luke — then we are back to whether we trust the Gospel of Luke, which Luke also wrote. "There's no way at Jesus on our terms. It's just the way he designed it." Every opening looks available and none of them quite works, and that is the point, because he is not a vibe, a product, a steps program or a lifestyle. "He's real. And the relationship he wants with you is real and dynamic and, frankly, out of our control. And you want it that way."

9. Sixty seconds, and an invitation out

► 1:32:58

Matt ended by setting a timer and having the room sit in silence before the Lord — for repentance if that is what came to mind, or comfort, or something to go and do. "Since he's real, I feel like I can take a risk like that." Then he spoke to anyone who recognized themselves in the fade: the invitation back is not a slap on the wrist. "When he invites you to come to him, it's life and healing. Maybe he put something on your heart to do. Find a way to obey it, even if it sounds hard. It's going to be liberating." His yoke is easy and his burden is light; it is our attachment to the world that is heavy and poisonous. And if the timer cut anyone short: "That was sixty seconds. Go back before the Lord. He didn't go anywhere."

FOR FURTHER STUDY**SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- Psalm 68:6
- Mark 10:29–30
- 1 Corinthians 1:11–13
- 1 Corinthians 1:14–17
- 1 Corinthians 15:1–4
- Galatians 2:9
- Mark 4:34
- Acts 20:35
- John 21:24–25
- James 2:19
- Matthew 4:1–11
- John 5:39–40
- Acts 9:13–14
- Acts 9:15
- Matthew 11:30

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Matt called relational depth a risk because being known is a risk. Where has that risk cost you something, and where has it paid?
2. Which parts of the New Testament do you find yourself quietly ranking below the words of Jesus, and what do you suspect is behind that?
3. If the gospels are a deliberate selection rather than a complete archive, how does that change the way you read them?
4. Of the three first steps toward the slow fade — isolation, a privatized Jesus, a purely intellectual faith — which one is nearest to you right now?
5. In the silence Matt called for, what did the Lord bring to mind, and what will obeying it look like this week?

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=qv06H1I71eM&t=3544s>

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.